

CONNECTION

Bringing a SPARC to McLean

Specially Adapted Resource Club comes to Old Firehouse Teen Center.

By Alex McVeigh

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The Old Firehouse Teen Center in McLean is the site of Northern Virginia's newest Specially Adapted Resource Club (SPARC), which provides recreation and learning opportunities for adults with life-long disabilities.

"SPARC takes people with special needs and embraces them, gives them opportunities they couldn't get anywhere else," said David Sanders, treasurer of the McLean Community Center board.

The participants of SPARC have been coming to the Old Firehouse Teen Center for the past few weeks, but the organization officially cut the ribbon Wednesday, Oct. 26 at the teen center.

"They come here three days a week, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and do activities here, or use the center as a jumping off point before going to another place," said Ryan Brookes, Intergenerational Programs director at McLean Community Center.

The MCC was first approached about participating in SPARC by president and executive director Donna Goldbranson.

"We have challenges, but also great solutions, and having SPARC here in McLean is a solution," she said. "This launch in McLean is very exciting for us."

Sanders said that Goldbranson's presentation to the board had "everyone's rapt attention" and that it was an easy decision to participate.

"Donna came to the MCC staff and governing board with the concept and the SPARC mission, and we thought right away that their mission is what this community is all about," Sanders said. "We feel we're now serving a part of this community that has been under-served."

The Old Firehouse Teen Center SPARC is the second in the area, the first one opened in December 2006 at the Southgate Community Center in Reston. The Southgate SPARC now serves 14 adults and has a waiting list.

Supervisor John Foust (D-Dranesville) said caring for disabled adults has become a county priority.

"The Board of Supervisors has long recognized the role nonprofits like SPARC play in times of need," he said. "As a county, we're starting to realize that many young adults with life-long disabilities graduate high school without opportunities, they essentially 'graduate to their couch.' SPARC has a solution to that, they ensure they these adults can keep busy."

More information on SPARC services can be found at www.sparcsolutions.org.



Photo by Alex McVeigh/The Connection

The ribbon is cut at the Specially Adapted Resource Club at the Old Firehouse Teen Center in McLean Wednesday Oct. 26. The club provides resources and opportunities for adults with life-long disabilities.



Photo by Alex McVeigh/The Connection

Donna Goldbranson, president and executive director of Specially Adapted Resource Clubs (SPARC), speaks at the ribbon cutting.



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