

# **\$15,000 Donation Aids SPARC Program for Disabled**

by **BRIAN TROMPETER, Staff Writer** | **Posted: Wednesday, December 19, 2012 11:45 am**

Participants in the Specially Adapted Resource Clubs (SPARC) expressed unreserved joy Dec. 14 when the group's officials accepted a \$15,000 donation from Life Circle Alliances at the Old Firehouse Teen Center in McLean.

Rachael Stern of Clifton, who has attended SPARC's activities for five years, cheered and smiled as she held up the check. SPARC's offerings have been educational and entertaining, she said.

"I like the cook-off, going on field trips, the music and the art," Stern said.

The \$15,000 donation will support SPARC's operating costs and payroll. Anything left over will be used to support the group's dog-cookie business, Pawsome, which teaches entrepreneurial skills, said Donna Goldbranson, SPARC's founder and executive director.

Such donations are the lifeblood of nonprofit groups such as SPARC, said Supervisor John Foust (D-Dranesville).

"Nothing works these days, I've found out, without financial support," Foust said. "All the good feelings in the world don't do a thing if you don't have some money."

Life Circle Alliances, a nonprofit that began with Fairfax County's Long-Term Coordinating Council, facilitates partnerships between the public and private sectors, said Michael Behrmann, the organization's president.

The group raised money for SPARC via its Kudos for Caregivers event, said Behrmann, who presented the check with Life Circle Alliances' vice president, Kay Larmer.

SPARC began in 2006 at Southgate Community Center in Reston and opened a branch at the Old Firehouse Teen Center in 2011. Both facilities' hours are from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The Reston site is open Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays; the McLean facility's days of operation are Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

The program caters to adults age 18 and older who were born with physical or intellectual disabilities or autism.

SPARC aims to bridge the gap for people with lifelong disabilities who age out of other county programs, Goldbranson said. The program now has 26 participants – 16 in Reston and 10 in McLean – who are overseen by five part-time staff members and five regular volunteers.

One of SPARC's main goals is building self-sufficiency. The group began its Pawsome dog-cookie business this fall at its Reston site and will bring it to the Old Firehouse Teen Center next spring,

Goldbranson said.

SPARC formerly competed for moneys in the county's Consolidated Funding Pool, but lost its funding last year. Now the program depends upon donations and in-kind contributions, the largest of which are free usage of the two community centers, she said.

SPARC reaches out to young adults and helps families stay united, she said.

"Not only are we leveraging community resources, people are staying in their family homes longer before going to group care," Goldbranson said.

SPARC participant Ryan Cotnoir (which is pronounced "cot-no-are") said he had spent "six wonderful, awesome years" with the organization.

"We have a staff of dedicated volunteers who help us in every way possible," said Cotnoir, 32.

McLean resident Jonathan Goldenberg, who has attended SPARC's Reston programs for five years, said he enjoys the games, cooking and outings.

"It's a really cool way to meet new people," he said.