

# SPARC celebrates opening of new site in Providence District



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Officials from Specially Adapted Resource Clubs (SPARC) cut the ribbon Feb. 13 for the organization's new site at the Providence Community Center in the Vienna area. (Photo by Brian Trompeter)

by BRIAN TROMPETER, Staff Writer | Posted 1 week ago

Surrounded by clients and their caretakers, officials from Specially Adapted Resource Clubs (SPARC) on Feb. 13 cut the ribbon for the organization's newest location at Providence Community Center.

In addition to a large, open classroom at the community center, SPARC clients can make use of the site's gymnasium, computer lab and workout room, said executive director Donna Goldbranson.

"We have full use of the facility here, especially the state-of-the-art sensory room," she said.

That last facility features visual and tactile elements that heighten visitors' sensory perceptions. Bean-bag chairs abound and an interactive computer projector lets participants play games on the floor. In one corner, three tall, clear tubes with colorfully lighted, ascending bubbles delight the eyes and calm one's nerves.

Goldbranson lightened the mood at the ceremony when the audio equipment proved limited.

"We have the coldest day of the year and the shortest microphone cord," she said, stooping slightly.

Following some short speeches, officials dedicated the SPARC site and then clients and other audience members helped themselves to cake, snacks and fruit-infused water.

Providence Community Center itself is brand-new, having been dedicated Jan. 17. The facility

was among proffers agreed to by developers of the MetroWest mixed-use community, which rapidly is taking shape off of Vaden Drive, located just south of the Vienna Metrorail station.

Begun in Reston in 2006, SPARC caters to post-high-school adults age 18 or older who have lifelong physical or intellectual disabilities or are on the autism spectrum. Many of the SPARC clients who attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony used wheelchairs and were tended to by aides.

Using a clubhouse environment, SPARC engages its clients with art and music therapy, entrepreneurial and community-service projects, and life-skill programs.

SPARC, which serves a total of 24 clients, also operates sites at the Southgate Community Center in Reston and the Old Firehouse Teen Center in McLean.

The sites are open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. three days per week. Participants are charged monthly fees, based on the number of programs they attend, but scholarships are available, Goldbranson said.

The three facilities have been located so as to be reasonable accessible by clients throughout Fairfax County, but the organization's leaders hope to open sites in all nine of the county's magisterial districts, Goldbranson said. The group next will focus on opening a site in the South County area.

"We have plenty of room for new members," she said.

The organization also has teamed up with the Jewish Social Services Agency (JSSA) to offer SPARC Connects, which provides clients with social- and life-skills training, peer mentoring and basic vocational-skills education.

"The beauty of this relationship is that the people can go to the club and immediately practice those skills," said M.E. Elliott, a social worker with JSSA.

SPARC Connects will begin offering a new round of courses within the next few weeks, said Leigh Ann Caulkins, the program's director.

For more information about SPARC and its programs, visit [www.sparcsolutions.org](http://www.sparcsolutions.org).