

# Calvert County Times

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Thursday, January 14, 2016



## Building Bridges

Connecting Disabled People With The Community

### IN COMMUNITY

Collecting History  
at Calvert Libraries

### IN LOCAL

Bi-County Transportation  
Plan Up for Review

### IN COMMUNITY

Diversity, Unity,  
Ambition: MLK Day

OFT

Photo by Frank Marquart



# Building Bridges

## Southern Maryland Community Resources

By Crista Dockray  
Staff Writer

Southern Maryland Community Resources is a new but already vital part of the community.

"Our purpose and our mission is to be able to develop inclusive social and recreational programs for individuals that have developmental differences," said Bonnie Elward the Executive Director of SMCR.

Although there are many events like the Special Olympics and resources such as the Arc of Southern Maryland and Center for Life Enrichment, SMCR adds another source of support.

"It adds something else to the menu, if you will," said Elward.

SMCR, a newly named 501(c)(3), started in Southern Maryland just a short 2.5 years ago on July 17, 2013. Elward wanted to do a white mass at the Saint Aloysius Church in Leonardtown to celebrate equality, but realized they did not have the community of persons with different abilities to celebrate with them. From that, they started a ministry.

Potomac Community Resources in Potomac, Md. has been working with people with disabilities for 20 years. They wanted to grow and spread their work so they asked Elward, who was working with the ministry at the time, to be the executive

director of SMCR and hire a board.

She graciously accepted.

Elward hired board members with impressive backgrounds ranging from a resource specialist from St. Mary's County Public Schools to the president of Bowhead Science and Technology. Some of the board members are parents of disabled individuals, some work with them by profession, and some eagerly learned on the job.

The purpose of SMCR is not only to create programs for individuals with disabilities, of all backgrounds, but also to build a bridge between them and the community.

Many times, after an individual with a disability goes through the school system and they turn 21, programs drop, money drops, and activities drop. SMCR wants to fill that gap and help them connect with the community at that vital time.

"It's like when the kids get out of high school they get dropped off and the programs just kind of stop and that's when they need it more than anything. SMCR gives them a chance to get exercise, to be with their peers and gives them the chance to have a normal life. It has helped me socialize, too," said parent Julie McCarthy whose son Bryan, 23, is an active participant with SMCR.

Currently, SMCR runs a few monthly programs including movie night and

bowling night. These programs don't just involve people with disabilities, but people without. SMCR is building that important bridge they hope will bring a new way of life for the disabled in the future.

"It helps the community get used to people with disabilities," said McCarthy. "It warms my heart to see him interact with people."

Movie night is located at the Knights of Columbus Hall, which includes popcorn, sodas, and sometimes pizza.

Bowling Night takes place at Esperanza Lanes. It was created by Rocco Aiello, Coordinator for Adaptive Physical Education and Corollary Sports for St. Mary's County Public Schools, who has been creating programs and working with people with disabilities for over 20 years. Bowling Night is \$12 for two hours of bowling and shoes are included.

Every other week, St. Mary's Ryken High School holds the Art to Heart program, which has classes in art, music, dance, chorus, and theatre. 15 members of the program are students at the school and 15 are from SMCR.

Dispersed throughout the month are a variety of programs like cooking classes, exercise programs, and workshops. Look to the calendar at [www.somdcr.org](http://www.somdcr.org) to follow their monthly events.

Southern Maryland Community Resources is available to citizens of both Calvert and Saint Mary's County. Although most events do take place in St. Mary's, SMCR will be expanding their programs to Calvert County in April. They will be offering the same type of programs like cooking classes, exercise classes, movie nights, a creative arts program, and bowling nights. Elward has been working closely with members of the community to plan.

They hope to then expand into Charles County in the future.

On Jan. 23 they will be holding their Winter Gathering in Solomons, which will feature a special performance by Ben Connelly, and in April, they will be holding their Disability Awareness Workshop to help the Boy Scouts gain their disability awareness badge.

Coming up in August will be the largest fundraiser and awareness event, a dragon boat festival in Solomons.



Rocco Aiello, a board member, works with participants of SMCR during his aquatic program.



Derrick Vansteinburg, 15, a regular at Bowling Night and Aiello's aquatic program.

Photos by Frank Marquart

If you would like to donate to SMCR, visit their website and look for the "donate now" button on the left hand side of the page.

If you would like to donate time, SMCR needs all types of volunteers. You can donate two to 20 hours of your time, anything that fits your schedule. They would love volunteers to create new programs, help with administration, run different events, or give anything you can offer. To volunteer, contact Elward at 301-997-8143.

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Members of SMCR pose for a picture.



SMCR's Art to Heart Program.



Chef Loic Jaffres at SMCR's cooking class.



Bowling Night with SMCR.

Photos Provided by SMCR