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**Tribune**  
EAST VALLEY • SCOTTSDALE

August 15, 2009

## Firefighters ease budget cuts at Marc Center

By Kay Moore  
Commentary

When we think of firefighters, what comes to mind? Saving a house, saving a life, hero, first responder, courageous, brave. Most do not think about firefighters as donors; yet they are among the most charitable individuals in our communities, albeit quietly behind the scenes. These men and women are unheralded heroes who give of their time every day, helping to make our communities safe.

Recently, I contacted the United Mesa Firefighters association on behalf of Marc Center of Mesa asking for assistance to obtain equipment, and sensory, tactile and activity materials for some of the most challenging and severely disabled individuals who participate in our day program.

Not yet ready to work and earn wages, the people at Marc Center face each day with optimism despite their multiple challenges. Structured days are necessary, with a high level of activity to stimulate their minds and senses. However, due to severe state funding cuts, more than 10 percent across all developmental disability programs, day programs were largely affected. These programs have very little room for adjustment in expenses because the funding rates of reimbursement are based on the staff-to-consumer ratios established by the state.

Facing funding reductions, Marc Center responded with adjustments to balance expenses with revenues in all programs. One adjustment was to change the community outings schedule, a cornerstone of all-day programs. This requires more on-site activities, increasing the cost of supplies - hence the call to the East Valley firefighters.

The response from this group to Marc Center's call was remarkable. Within hours of returning my call, Steve Schureman, executive director of the East Valley Firefighters Charities, was backing up his truck to deliver new Nintendo Wii systems with games and fitness packages, plus 46-inch flat-screen televisions. The people who are served in our day programs have been overjoyed with the new games and fitness/dance packages. When people bring in movies for their Friday popcorn movie events, everyone can see the screen easily and therefore enjoy the movie more than ever before.

The employees who work in the day program were close to tears as the truck was being unloaded. "This is absolutely awesome," responded Lynnette Seeger, site manager for one of the recipient day programs. "The exercise and camaraderie we all will receive will come back to us many times over."

The firefighters also are sponsoring 40 clients of the Marc Center to attend a picnic hosted by the Arizona Diamondbacks on Aug. 22. The clients will visit Chase Field and watch the Diamondbacks play an away game on the stadium's giant viewing screens. They will enjoy lunch and take part in a variety of activities on the baseball

field.

Grateful does not adequately describe how Marc Center's day programs feel about the East Valley firefighters and their response in a time of need. We do not think of our firefighters as givers, but as givers they bring more meaning to the word "hero."

*Kay S. Moore is the chief operations officer for Marc Center and has more than 33 years of experience working with people who have disabilities.*



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