Dialogue

Volume 20 No. 4 Fall 2006

Spotlight Awards

Celebrating 10 Years of Spotlight Awards

he Spotlight Awards gala that took place on Sept. 8 at the Irvine Marriott Hotel marked the 10th Anniversary of our community coming together to honor the outstanding achievements and extraordinary service of people dedicated to improving the lives of people with developmental disabilities in Orange County.

Established in 1997, the Spotlight Awards were envisioned by RCOC's CEO Bill Bowman and then-Board President Kurt Yeager as a way to recognize excellence among all facets of the community.



Doreen Kay

"This event and these awards give us an opportunity to celebrate those who are doing the best and the most to serve people with developmental disabilities. They reinforce to ourselves and to the community that this is important work that is worthy of recognition," said Kurt Yeager.

REGIONAL CENTER OF ORANGE COUNTY

Α \mathbf{O} Н N Т NUAL Spotlight Awards

This year, 13 Spotlight Award honorees were selected from 78 nominations. They received their honors before a sell-out crowd of

more than 750. The program began with dinner, featuring jazz music by George Gilliam & Friends, followed by the awards presentation led by Master of Ceremonies Derrick Dufresne, and then dancing with special

Minniefield.



Molly Van Norman

William "Larry" De Board

Helping to make the 10th anniversary event extra special were the dozens of honorees from past years who attended and were recognized. A highlight of the evening for many was the photo retrospective of Spotlight events from past years.

Commenting on the Spotlight Award

recipients from 1997 to 2006, RCOC Board Chairman Jud Robert said, "We take pride in their achievements and in our progress as a community. Most of all, though, the Spotlight Award honorees inspire in each of us a determination to do our part to make the coming decade even better."

We honor each of the 2006 Spotlight Award recipients with a profile in this issue of *Dialogue*, beginning on page 3.

live entertainment by Barry C.

Dialogue

Dialogue is published four times per year by the Regional Center of Orange County for people with developmental disabilities, their families and service providers. *Dialogue* can also be read online at RCOC's Web site: **www.rcocdd.com**.

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2006-2007 Board Meetings

January 4 • March 1 • May 3 The public is invited to attend. Meetings begin at 6 p.m. and are held in the Regional Center Board Room at 801 Civic Center Drive West, Santa Ana.

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CEO's Corner

Addressing the Crisis in Affordable Housing

By Bill Bowman, Chief Executive Officer

he high cost of housing in Orange County affects not just people who want to purchase homes, but also those

seeking to rent houses, condos and apartments. The same factors that cause high prices can make rents so high that



people with developmental disabilities cannot participate in supported living unless they also receive housing assistance. Income from paid employment or SSI (Supplemental Security Income) is not enough on its own.

The good news is that the federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) agency has a program to help those with low incomes and disabilities pay housing costs commonly called "Section 8" vouchers. The bad news is that there is a waiting list.

That means that people who might otherwise move out of a group home into supported living have to wait until their name comes up on the list. The already long waiting list will get longer because hundreds of teens with disabilities now living at home with their families, are approaching adulthood. As they complete school and prepare to move out on their own in the community, many envision supported living – rather than a group home situation — will be in their future.

RCOC has taken the position that Lanterman Act rules allow us to bridge the gap for consumers who are held back from supported living, when the only barrier is the lack of a Section 8 voucher. As with all services, there are POS guidelines. For example, a consumer has to be on the Section 8 waiting list and must use HUD-qualified housing. Generally, RCOC pays the portion of rent that the federal government would pay, for as long as the consumer remains on the waiting list.

While we believe the steps we have taken are the right ones to enable more people to live as independently

as possible in the community, we do not think that rental assistance from RCOC is the ultimate answer to our area's housing crisis. The lack of affordable housing affects not just those with disabilities, but virtually everyone in Orange County.

RCOC is actively engaged in this issue, exploring collaborations with others who share our concerns. In future columns, I will continue to share both our perspective on this subject and new developments as they arise.

Spotlight on Consumer: Brian Story

Brian Story is an inspiration – not just to individuals with disabilities, but to everyone who seeks to live a full and meaningful life that has a positive impact on the people around us.

He considers his disability a "gift" that helps him to connect with others.

Brian has a physical disability due to spina bifada. He grew up in foster homes and has faced many health challenges, but his faith, optimism and enthusiasm for life have never faltered. He is paraplegic and uses a wheelchair, but still lives independently in his own apartment. In fact, he considers his disability a "gift" that helps him to connect with others. And connect he does!



Brian Story

At Eastside Christian Church, where he is a member, he helps others with disabilities feel welcomed into his church family. At Fullerton Junior College, where he has taken various courses, he helps others understand how to access services for students



The first Consumer Spotlight Award recipient Gregg Brown (left) and Bill Bowman (center) presented the 2006 award to Brian Story (right).

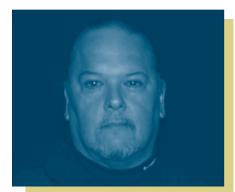
with disabilities. His work and volunteer activities also revolve around helping others. For the past four years, he has worked for Regional Center of Orange County as a consumer advocate. He also advocates for the medical rights of people with disabilities as a volunteer on CalOptima's member advisory committee.

Brian Story is an inspiration – not just to individuals with disabilities, but to everyone who seeks to live a full and meaningful life that has a positive impact on the people around us.

The two people who co-nominated Brian were 2004 Consumer Spotlight Award recipient Kyle Minnis and RCOC's Leah Saitz. They say: "If you really want to know about Brian, look at his arm. He wears five trendy rubber bracelets." Each of those bracelets has a specific meaning.

His work and volunteer activities also revolve around helping others.

The light blue one says "imagine" and was part of campaign to raise money for expansion of Brian's church - he wears this to remind himself of his church family. Another with camouflage markings reads "prayer warrior" and is a reminder to Brian that he has the power to help others. A red one that says "promise keepers" memorializes his commitment to a life of service. Brian got the yellow one that reads "freedom celebration" at a fourth of July celebration and wears it to remind himself to have fun. A thick black bracelet says "live for Him" and is a statement of Brian's Christian faith.



Lou Pena

hen asked what words most describe Lou Pena, the people who nominated him for the Lifetime Achievement Award answered without hesitation: reliable, dependable and lifesaver.

Learning just a little bit about what he does for the Orange County

Spotlight on Lifetime Achievement: Lou Pena

community, those who attended the Spotlight Awards event would probably suggest another word: amazing!

That is because Lou has a special gift for working with people that most others will not, and he has been doing so for more than 30 years. Lou and his company, which is called No Ordinary Moments, have been Orange County's answer to crisis situations for many years now. With the work that Lou does, there truly are <u>No</u> Ordinary Moments. At all hours, day and night, weekends or holidays, Lou and his team answer the call to step in to any crisis situation at a moment's notice. His experience, calm demeanor and quiet strength bring stability to volatile situations. In most cases, he and his team are able to resolve the crisis in a family home. When psychiatric admission cannot be avoided, he and his team are there to help both the consumer and the family through this very difficult time.

In addition to crisis intervention, Lou and his team provide supported living services for more than 50 people. Here again, his specialty is working with consumers whose severe challenges make them difficult to serve in the community.

Spotlight on Volunteer: Loren Druz

oren Druz, the recipient of the Volunteer Spotlight Award, is a busy executive who works for a major corporation. Every Saturday during the summer, though, he changes his business suit for a swimsuit – and welcomes a group of children with developmental disabilities into his home, giving them free swimming lessons in his backyard pool.

His program, Aqua Angels, fulfills a long-time dream for Loren, who was an All-American swimmer in high school and captain of the University of Missouri swim team. As a youth, he taught a swim class for children with special needs. "The children were so genuine and receptive to teaching and coaching," he said, noting that he got as much out of the experience as his students.

He decided then and there that he wanted to help more children with disabilities learn to swim and enjoy the water. Aqua Angels has been running for seven years, and Loren cites as his personal role model a little girl who has severe cerebral palsy. The child, who has been swimming with his program since the first season, is now able to swim 20 laps.

Sylvia Shattuck, the mother who nominated him, says that Loren's guidance, intuitiveness and patient



Jud Robert (left) and Loren Druz (right)

kindness toward her children has made swimming a positive and fun experience for them.

In her nomination, she wrote: "He is helping them stroke-by-stroke to succeed in swimming, which helps to build the foundation for them to step-by-step succeed in life."

Spotlight on Parent: Maria Luisa Montenegro

Aria Luisa Montenegro, the Spotlight honoree in the Parent/Family Member category, is a mother whose devotion to her daughter's needs and advocacy on behalf of her own daughter has also led her to make a big difference on behalf of many other Spanishspeaking families in Orange County.

Maria's dedication to helping other RCOC families is so remarkable that RCOC Service Coordinator Beatriz Giraldo nominated her as much for the work she does for other families as what she does for her own. Maria's is not among the families in Beatriz' caseload. Instead, the two have gotten to know one another over the past five years or so because Maria has been such a strong and ever-present advocate for several families with whom Beatriz works.

"She is very active in the community," said Beatriz, citing Maria's involvement with a range of family support programs, including Fiesta Educativa. She also organizes a variety of support groups to bring parents together. For example, Fiesta Familiar is a parent group that Maria started that meets monthly in different families' homes for speakers and discussion of issues concerning parents of children with special needs. She also started a support group for mothers who get together once a



Bill Bowman (left) and Maria Luisa Montenegro

month to talk while they get some exercise walking.

"The families really need the help she provides," said Beatriz, noting that Maria's efforts are focused primarily on helping families learn how to participate more effectively in the various processes involving RCOC and school districts.

Spotlight on Frontline: Jason Martinez

he Frontline category recognizes a person who provides direct services to people with disabilities. This year's honoree, Jason Martinez, was nominated by the mother of a teenage boy who has autism. She wrote that

Moments, came into the picture about a year ago.

"Jason has been meticulous in his work with my son," she wrote in the nomination. "He has taught my son how to cooperate and how to listen. Jason has gone above and beyond

> the call of duty to help teach my son behaviors which others have been unable to do!"

According to the appreciative mom, Jason's dedication, careful attention, and patient teaching has enabled her son to receive therapy and to participate in sports and social activities outside of the home that were never possible before. She said he has made it possible for her son to function without hospitalization.

"Jason has made a world of difference in the life of my son," wrote the mother in her nomination of Jason for the award. "Most important, he has made it possible for my son to live at home with his family."

Among those on hand at the Spotlight Awards to offer congratulations to Jason was City Councilman Gary Monahan of Jason's hometown of Costa Mesa.

her son's behaviors had become so severe that he had been hospitalized several times. That is where Jason, who works for No Ordinary



Jason Martinez (left) and Costa Mesa Councilman Gary Monahan (right)

Spotlight on Support Services Vendor: United Cerebral Palsy of Orange County

D nited Cerebral Palsy of Orange County (UCP-OC) is helping open the doors to enriching after-school activities for children previously excluded from them. For that very important work, UCP-OC was honored with the Spotlight Award in the Support Services Vendor category. Director of Family Support Services Kathleen McFarlin is in charge of the program, and accepted the award.

The program is part of an innovative collaboration that is broadening access to inclusive child care and after-school programs. *Dialogue*

readers may remember the story on the collaboration in the Summer 2006 issue (see *RCOC Expands Family Support Resources* online at www.rcocdd.com).

UCP-OC's role has two parts. First, McFarlin performs assessments of children referred to her, identifying supports that are necessary for a youngster to be successful in a child care setting. When a child needs an aide to be successful, UCP-OC is responsible for recruiting, training and supervising staff who support children in fully-integrated, mainstream settings.



Kathleen McFarlin (left) and Jud Robert (right)

"It was very rewarding to have the work acknowledged," she said, noting that the program was several years in the making and involved the work of many committed individuals.

"It says a lot about the commitment of UCP's board to inclusive child care," she continued. "And it was satisfying to see it come to the forefront."

Brian's Fund Helps in Emergencies and During Holidays

any of the individuals and families served by RCOC live on modest incomes, often month-tomonth, with little or no savings. So, when they are faced with an unexpected emergency expense or special need, there may be no extra money in the bank or anyone to whom they can turn to help pay the bill. That is where the Regional Center of Orange County's *Brian's Fund* can help.

Brian's Fund is named for Brian Flotho, a young man with a developmental disability who spent his 28-year life advocating for the rights of his peers. The *Fund* continues Brian's personal commitment to friends in need by paying for things such as special equipment, dental care, emergency rent, food, clothing or household necessities that cannot be funded by any other source.

For some consumers, this might mean help with the expenses required to get into an apartment, such as a security deposit or the first and last months' rent. *Brian's Fund* is also utilized for short-term emergency rent assistance so that a consumer can stay in his or her own apartment rather than having to be placed in a more restrictive residential setting. The *Fund* also has been used to help purchase such essential items as kitchen supplies,

beds and bedding and groceries, when there are no other monies available to meet these needs.

In addition to helping with special needs and emergencies that service coordinators learn about and share with the *Fund's* decision-makers, contributions to *Brian's Fund* help make the holiday season brighter for low-income consumers and families. For example, *Fund* dollars are used to purchase holiday meals and grocery store gift certificates that enable families to enjoy a more festive holiday meal. In addition, while RCOC's Wish Tree program has many loyal supporters who fulfill the holiday wishes of consumers in need, there are always more wishes than the program on its own can fulfill. *Brian's Fund* helps ensure that no consumers go without during the holiday season, as left-over wishes are provided for with *Fund* dollars.

RCOC covers all costs associated with administering *Brian's Fund*, so contributions go directly to meeting needs. And, because RCOC is a non-profit organization, contributions can be tax-deductible.

In order to continue to help those who have a need that cannot be met in any other way, RCOC is requesting help replenishing *Brian's Fund*. See the letter inserted in this issue of *Dialogue*.

Spotlight on E. Kurt Yeager Servant Leadership Award: Steve Sherman

he E. Kurt Yeager Servant Leadership Award is a very special honor that is not presented every year. Given to an individual who has served in a volunteer leadership position in an organization that serves people with developmental disabilities, the 2006 honor was bestowed on Steve Sherman.

The level of his commitment leads most people to assume that he must have a child who receives regional center services.

For six years, Steve served on RCOC's board of directors – the last two years as board chairman and ARCA delegate. The level of his commitment leads most people to assume that he must have a child who receives regional center services. However, Steve does not have a family member served by regional center,

nor does he work in the field. He does, though, believe deeply in the principles of stewardship and service.

"Steve's dedication is nothing short of remarkable," said Bill Bowman, RCOC's Chief Executive Officer. "Like Kurt Yeager, the person for whom this award was named, Steve is not a parent of a child with a disability. Yet even without that connection, he still stepped up and



Kurt Yeager (left), Steve Sherman (center) and Bill Bowman (right)

gave so much of himself, his time and his talents."

When Steve joined the Board, he committed himself to learning as much as he could about people with developmental disabilities and their families, spending countless hours getting to know people that RCOC serves, and listening to them. Then he went about finding ways that he could work to make things better. His sincere appreciation for the value and potential of every life has made Steve a powerful advocate on behalf of people with disabilities.

"I am grateful for the opportunity I have had to be part of such a dynamic organization."

"His perspective about people, and the way he has gone about his role as a volunteer on the board and in board leadership, is the definition of servant leadership," Bill said.

Taking many days away from his own business and his family, Steve has traveled to Sacramento to meet with elected officials and others in government to share our concerns and to hold the state accountable for keeping the promises of the Lanterman Act.

Steve's dedication is nothing short of remarkable.

"Steve has been fearless," said Bill. "He has been willing to meet with anybody and everybody in Sacramento to represent the interests of consumers and their families."

He also extended his commitment to people with disabilities beyond his role as a board member. For example, earlier this year he helped to secure a \$25,000 grant from the Allstate Foundation that is being used by RCOC to pay for important emergency preparedness activities not funded by the State of California.

In accepting the award, Steve was typically humble. "I am grateful for the opportunity I have had to be part of such a dynamic organization," he remarked, also expressing gratitude to his wife, Lynda, for her support of his work on behalf of RCOC.

Spotlight on Healthcare: Karin Stanley

he 2006 Healthcare Professional recipient was chosen from a field of 20 nominees, the largest number of entries in any of the Spotlight Award categories. The judges selected Karin Stanley, MA, SLP-CCC, of Rainbow Kids Achievement Center – someone whose amazing skills as a therapist are matched only by her natural ability as a teacher.

Karin works with both children and adults, but her supportive nature and non-threatening approach are particularly well-suited to building children's confidence and inspiring them to succeed. Her approach also respects the key role of parents with therapy, offering creative ideas for



Jud Robert (left) and Karen Carr (right)

he Spotlight Award honoree in the Living Options Vendor category is a small home, but one that is very familiar to *Dialogue* readers. The Winter 2006 issue featured a front page profile of the home and its five residents (see *Abraham House: A Real Home* online at www.rcocdd.com). them to support their child's speech development in the home.

Herself the mother of a child who had a speech delay and benefited from early intervention services, Karin understands the frustration that families experience when a child has difficulty communicating.

"Communication affects all aspects of life, from learning to family relationships," she said.

Not surprisingly, it was the mother of two children with whom Karin has worked who nominated her for the Spotlight Award.

"I'm very appreciative of Carolyn that she would take the time to nominate



Karin Stanley

me," Karin said of the mother who also attended the event and helped her to celebrate the honor.

"I was extremely honored and very proud to be nominated," said Karin, a humble professional who says that many of those who have won the award in the past, and who were nominated this year, are professionals she knows and respects.

Spotlight on Living Options: Abraham House

The three residents with developmental disabilities are called "core members" because they serve as the heart of the home. The two without disabilities are called assistants because they assist the core members. All five share in the responsibilities of living in the home. Most importantly, they share life. As friends and equals, the residents enjoy a way of life that is rich in cultural, educational, social and spiritual activities.

Accepting the Spotlight Award on behalf of Abraham House was Administrator Karen Carr, who is also executive director of Wavecrest, the nonprofit organization that founded Abraham House in 2004. According to Karen Taylor, the former RCOC employee who nominated the home, "Karen Carr provided the focus, direction and leadership that made Abraham House a reality."

Since the home was profiled this past winter, there have been some changes. When the landlord decided to sell the Fullerton residence that Abraham House had been renting, Karen Carr and the Wavecrest board began the search for a new location. With the help of many supporters who contributed toward a down payment, they recently purchased a home in Orange that will be a permanent home for Abraham House.

Spotlight on Employer: Albertsons Market

t the Albertsons Market on Chapman Avenue in Orange, the managers go out of their way both to recruit people with disabilities, and to provide them with the support they need to be successful in their jobs. It was this leadership in expanding integrated employment

opportunities that led Lori Spear to nominate the store for a Spotlight Award in the Employer category.

"The managers have given behind-thescenes tours of the store to my son's transition program and encouraged the students to apply for a job," she wrote in the nomination. "This is how my son Adam began working for Albertsons 18 months ago."

The store currently employs eight adults with special needs who work side by side with the other store employees. They are included in all



Bill Wuertz

store ded in all store events, from charity fundraisers to staff parties. Most are in customer service positions, though some have been promoted to stocking positions in the store.

"They are treated like anyone else, and do a good job," said Store Director Bill Wuertz, who accepted the Spotlight Award on behalf of the store.

Wuertz said that employing people with developmental disabilities is something he has done in all of his stores, and that he will continue to do so. He credits the support of his whole management staff, as well as the work of supported employment agency Elwyn California: "They play a pivotal role, with training and teaching and encouraging the employees."

Spotlight on Professional Achievement: Bob Boettiger

ob Boettiger, the 2006 Professional Achievement Spotlight Award recipient, was honored for work that reflects best practices in transitioning adults with developmental disabilities from the Orange County school system into the Regional Center's adult programs. A special education teacher for 19 years, Bob's commitment to improving the life of each and every student was cited by both of the two RCOC employees who nominated him - Training and Standards Coordinator Pam Martinez and Service Coordinator Jeff Johnson.

Many students find their way to

Bob's class because others have been unable to meet their needs, often due to behavioral challenges or difficult family situations. "Yes, they have a lot of challenges," said Pam. "But he gives so much time and attention to each individual and each situation. It helps everyone in the system make that transition as smooth and successful as possible."

A caring and gentle person, Bob works hard to discover each student's individual talents, identify good matches for that person, and then carefully prepare that student to be successful. At graduation, he even puts together a video of each student



Bill Bowman (left) and Bob Boettiger (right)

that highlights their strengths and accomplishments. Families of his students are especially grateful for his excellent work.

"Bob Boettiger has taken people who have many challenges and barriers, and gotten them involved in paid jobs that are beyond the families' wildest dreams and hopes," wrote Jeff Johnson in his nomination.

Spotlight on RCOC Achievement: Sandra Soto

he 2006 honoree in the RCOC Achievement category embodies dedication and commitment to service. A Regional

Center employee for more than 12 years, Sandra Soto has a remarkable work ethic and is the first to volunteer for any task. She has devoted countless evenings and weekends to visiting residential facilities, ensuring that the people with disabilities who live there are safe. According to Melinda Champlin, who works with Sandra in the Outcomes Work Group and nominated her for the award, "Sandra is one of those

employees

who comes

into work

every day,

heart and

work at

soul to her

does her job

and gives her



Sandra Soto

RCOC." "When she's at work, it's all about the work," said Melinda, noting that Sandra has held several positions with RCOC and that each new position has been a promotion. "It's an indication of the quality of the work she does, and the quality of employee she is."

Melinda also commented on how proactive Sandra is with service providers: "She spends a lot of time training so issues don't come up again, and she's thorough with follow-up, and making sure there is closure with cases."

A humble person, Sandra also gets high marks from parents who have been in training programs with her.

Spotlight on Community Partnership: For OC Kids

F or OC Kids, the recipient of the Spotlight Award in the Community Partnership category, is itself a community partnership. The organization is involved with many outstanding programs and leadership activities, but one in particular stands out for many parents – a program called SEEPAC.

SEEPAC is short for Support, Education and Empowerment for Parents of Autistic Children, and it is an educational series designed primarily for parents of young children newly diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders. It provides a complete introduction to autism that also equips parents with the tools to advocate on behalf of children.

The series includes guest speakers and enables parents to connect with one another, while covering topics ranging from parenting, behavior and family dynamics, to understanding school based services. Editor's Note: A last-minute emergency prevented a representative from For OC Kids from accepting the award at the Spotlight Awards event, so we regret there is no photo to accompany this story.

Consumer Advisory Team Update

Tips for Managing Your Benefits

By Jay Connor, CAT Chairman

lot of people who receive regional center services also receive assistance, or

benefits, from government agencies like Social Security, Medi-Cal, and Medicare. So, at our September CAT meeting,



we asked RCOC Insurance and Benefits Specialist Suzanne Butler to speak to us. Her information was so helpful that I wanted to share some of her tips in this column.

Suzanne says that the most important thing for consumers to remember is to **keep any letters you receive from Social Security or other agencies**. Also, if you are not sure you understand what the letter says, contact a family member or your service coordinator and ask them to explain it to you.

Also be sure to **keep medical** and insurance cards that come in the mail. Keep them in your wallet or other safe place, so you always know where they are. And, bring your medical cards with you to every medical

appointment. This is important because if you do not have your card with you when you go to the doctor's office or hospital, they will not take your word for it that you have medical coverage. If you cannot

prove that you have coverage, they might not treat you and, if they do, they might charge you for the care you receive.

Finally, Suzanne says that consumers should take the time to understand which specific benefits they receive. Social Security, for example, has several eligibility categories and each has different rules. If you have questions about your benefits, contact your service coordinator.

Upcoming 2006/2007 CAT Meeting Dates

November 15 December 20

January 17

February 21

CAT meetings are from 10 a.m. to noon at RCOC's Santa Ana office, 801 Civic Center Drive West. Call Betty Bath at (714) 796-5263 ahead of time to let her know you will be there.

The Consumer Advisory Team (CAT) is a group of consumers that meets once a month. The group discusses issues that are important to RCOC consumers, like advocacy and independence. The CAT chairman advises the RCOC board of directors about the group's concerns.



Regional Center of Orange County P.O. Box 22010 Santa Ana, CA 92702-2010

Dialogue Newsletter

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Pictured in the front row (left to right) are: Wendel Starkey, Jay Connor (Secretary) and Cheryl Day. Pictured in the back row (left to right) are: Jud Robert (Chairman), Christian Dubia, Jr., Thomasina Parker, Tresa Oliveri (Vice Chairman), Alan Martin, C. Terrence Fletke (Treasurer), Lore Flavel and Clare Bonn. Not pictured are board members Nguyen Luu-Trong, Martha Patarroyo, Steve Tanner and Kim Vuong.

Regional Center of Orange County Locations



The 2006-2007 RCOC Board of Directors has been elected to provide policy leadership and oversight of RCOC on behalf of the community for the coming year. The full board meets for several hours every other month, and the public is invited to attend. Information about upcoming board meetings appears on Page 2.

Introducing the 2006-2007 Board of Directors