



Photos by **DON BOOMER** / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Mountain Shadows Community Homes residents **Brittany Barnson**, front, and **Sheri McKinney**, make their way from their bedroom to the living room in a home they share with another resident.

Mountain Shadows a bright spot for disabled

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FOR THE NORTH COUNTY TIMES

ESCONDIDO — For more than 100 people in North County with severe developmental disabilities, Mountain Shadows Community Homes gives them and their family members a new lease on life.

Composed of 18 houses scattered

around a large compound in Escondido, plus two homes in San Marcos, Mountain Shadows has been operating since the mid-1980s. Residents as young as 11 and as old as 79 live in the three-bedroom homes.

Each house runs as an independent state-licensed facility, staffed 24 hours a day by trained caregivers and providing a home for six individuals. All of

the residents — 70 percent of whom are in wheelchairs — go to school, work or volunteer in the community.

“Our residents are big contributors to the community,” said Doug Cook, executive director of the Mountain Shadows Foundation, which raises funds for the facility. “They love their independence, and they love to work in the community. It’s just a great place.”

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Cook knows Mountain Shadows well; his son Brian has lived there since 1986. When the original owners ran into licensing problems in 1989, Cook organized a group of parents to form the for-profit Mountain Shadows Inc. to operate the homes.

In 2002, the corporation reorganized, becoming the nonprofit Mountain Shadows Support Group. Cook stepped down as executive director to launch the fund-raising foundation. Wade Wild is now executive director of the homes, after previously working as financial manager.



Mountain Shadows Foundation Executive Director **Doug Cook** talks with his son **Brian** and **Brittany Barnson**, who are residents of the Escondido-based facility for severely developmentally disabled children and adults.

"I've been associated with Mountain Shadows since 1994," Wild said. "It started out as a job, but pretty quickly, the residents became part of my life."

During the day, residents are not much in evidence in the houses or on the grassy grounds of the Escondido facility. Many are busy at local Boys & Girls Clubs, working in consignment shops, at skilled nursing facilities or at nonprofit agencies. Others learn basic living skills such as riding the bus and shopping, residential program administrator Fred Lindahl said.

"For the folks here, if they could go to work and school every day, they would," Lindahl said. "They like the everyday routine of getting into a car and going to work or school. It gives them a sense of purpose and a variety of different environments."

Residents go on regular outings to church, the movies, restaurants and shopping, choosing their own activities and how they want to spend their money.

"We help them manage their money and teach them the concept and value of money, but it's like any other type of home," Lindahl said. "If you have six individuals residing in a home, you have a variety of activities all the time."

Not only do residents get a crack at a regular life, but their family members are also

HOW TO HELP

Mountain Shadows Foundation golf tournament June 14, Oaks North Golf Course, Rancho Bernardo. Contact Doug Cook at (619) 302-2825.

getting a chance for normalcy.

"Stacy and I chose this together," said Portia Bibb, referring to her 29-year-old son, who has lived in Mountain Shadows since 1986. "I was a single mom, and we decided that we are both equally important, and neither one of us will sacrifice our dreams for the other."

Stacy Bibb has severe cerebral palsy that prevents him from speaking. When he was 17, he received one of the first touch keypads in the country that allows him to type messages with his tongue. Portia Bibb laughs and said she waited 17 years for her son's first words and, when he finally did communicate, it was to request a pillow for his sore hips.

Portia Bibb insists that her son would not be the independent, happy person he is without Mountain Shadows.

"If Mommy and Daddy had protected him, he would have been afraid because he

would only know us and depend on us," said Portia Bibb, a director of special events and alumni relations at UC San Diego. "There is nothing poor about that boy. He is happier than most people I know."

The cost of living in the home is \$5,000 per month, which is generally covered by Medi-Cal, Cook said.

The homes usually have a waiting list, and new residents are chosen based on their likelihood to fit in with people already living in each house.

"We are looking for the right people for the right houses," Cook said. "We are picky, but it's to everyone's advantage. We really want to meet their needs."

Comfortably furnished, with televisions and stereos in the living rooms and posters, stuffed animals and other decorations brightening the bedrooms, the houses are completely wheelchair-accessible. The bathrooms and beds are equipped to accommodate those with physical limitations.

While clean and cheerfully decorated, the older homes are beginning to need a little TLC, Wild said during a recent tour. Mountain Shadows is in the process of renovating the bathrooms with new tiles and other upgrades.

To raise funds for the homes, Mountain Shadows Foundation is sponsoring a golf tournament at Oaks North Golf Course in Rancho Bernardo on June 14, with the goal of raising \$50,000. For information, contact Cook at (619) 302-2825.

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