

# SHARE Notes

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## UMass Dartmouth Students Hold Crucial Roles at Center

For many years, UMass Dartmouth students have played key roles in the success of the Center for Rehabilitation Engineering. This year is no different.

"We have been extremely fortunate to have outstanding students serve as interns, work-study employees, and regular staff members. They make valuable contributions to the operations of the various divisions at the Center," said Professor Lester W. Cory, SHARE president. "Not only are they helping us, but at the same time, they are learning important skills that will serve them well in their future careers."

Juniors Jared Montrowl and Jeff Paulson both work in the rehabilitation laboratory, where they repair and custom build computers to meet the unique needs of clients. Jared, an electrical engineering major from West Tisbury, has worked at the Center for two years and has spent summers and intersession periods on the job.



*Students Jeff Paulson, Jeff Richard, and Jared Montrowl (left to right) tackle one of the many work orders waiting to be filled at the Center's rehabilitation laboratory.*

"I love it," said Jared of his position. "I've learned a lot about different types of software that will be a great help if that's the area I decide to pursue."

Jeff, a computer engineering major from Acushnet, began his association with the Center four years ago. He started as an unpaid intern who learned about the organization as one of Professor Cory's students. Cory recognized Jeff's tremendous technical abilities and hired him following his completion of a successful internship.

"My job is to fulfill work orders for clients," Jeff explained. "That involves taking a system and putting it into working condition...doing the testing and software installation necessary to address the needs of the clients." Jeff said that a few years ago, he experienced direct interac-

tion with clients while delivering and setting up equipment at rehabilitation centers in New Bedford. "It was a positive experience to actually watch the clients use the equipment and see them 'talk' by typing on the computer," Jeff said.

Rehabilitation Technician Scott McGarty noted that students relieve a "large burden" of the Center's heavy workload. "It comes in handy having those extra pairs of hands helping when we get inundated with work orders," he said.

Justin Meninno, a junior electrical engineering major from North Easton, works next door in the design division, primarily "building circuits to solve real-life problems" for people with disabilities. Justin's career aspirations in the engineering field lean toward design/conceptual  
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# Helping Clients with ALS

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), more commonly known as Lou Gehrig's Disease, is a degenerative disease affecting about 30,000 Americans today. ALS usually proves fatal within three to five years of diagnosis. There is no known cause or cure.

Early symptoms include weakness in the hand, foot, arm or leg, and difficulty walking, swallowing or talking. Often, individuals with ALS lose the ability to walk, use their hands, speak, or even to breathe on their own.

Last year, the Center for Rehabilitation Engineering assisted clients with this disease 179 times. Since its inception, our organization has worked with nearly 400 people with ALS. According to the Center's client services coordinator, the number of people with ALS seeking our help continues to grow.

"José," "John," and "Richard" all have received equipment and services as they battle the disease.

The Center provided José with a laptop computer, specially designed software, and switches modified to accommodate his declining abilities. He is unable to speak or use his hands, so the computer that sits on a table over his bed serves as his voice and his fingers. He used to control the computer with a sensor located between his toes. Today, he uses a switch operated by the movement of his forehead and by blinking his eyes. A variable event filter switch, designed in our lab, can differentiate between intentional and involuntary eye blinks. José uses his computer for a range of activities including e-mail, communication, downloading music, and playing educational games with his son.

Communication software called Speaking Dynamically Pro, a scanning TV controller, and a laptop with a switch-adapted mouse are among the Center items used by John, another non-speaking client with ALS. John is able to control his TV and chime call system or his computer and chime call system thanks to a special dual control switch designed at the Center. He uses his equipment to communicate with his wife and young children.

Richard still has the ability to speak but has lost the use of his fingers, so he operates his TV control and chime call system via a sensor on his forehead. The Center also gave him a voice amplifier and an eye gaze communication board.

ALS is one of more than 30 disabling conditions that bring clients to the Center each year. ■

## SHARE Foundation Issues a Matching Grant Challenge

The SHARE Foundation received the good news in March that the Carl and Ruth Shapiro Family Foundation in Boston will award a \$15,000 grant to support the expansion of its off-site training and evaluation program. The program sends a trainer to see clients in their homes or living facilities to help them learn how to use their custom-made systems most effectively.

However, SHARE must come up with \$10,000 in matching funds from a new fundraising source in order to be granted the award. As many of you know, SHARE benefits from two fundraisers during the summer—the Ben Boyle Golf Classic sponsored by the Pawtuxet Valley Rotary Club and the Sunday Morning Golfers, and the Classic Auto Show and Fun Day sponsored by the Bristol County Street Rod Association.

We also hold a walk-a-thon, the major fundraising event of the year. Those activities will continue in 2008. But we're looking for ideas—your ideas—about a new fundraiser that is likely to generate \$2,000 or more in proceeds. We don't want to let this grant opportunity pass us by. Please let us know what type of event you would enjoy organizing for SHARE, and we will work with you to make it happen. *Cocktail party, wine tasting, raffle, motorcycle run, auction, game night, mystery ride, concert/performance, something else?*

Please send any ideas and suggestions to S1Gonsalves@umassd.edu. (Note that the second character is the number one). Or call (508) 999-8482 and let us know how you can help. Thank you in advance for your assistance. SHARE really needs your help with this one! ■

### SHARE Needs Laptop Computers

Have you recently upgraded your laptop computer, or do you have one sitting in a drawer that you rarely use? If you answered yes, the SHARE Foundation could use your help.

The compact size of laptop computers makes them ideal for our clients because they fit well on bed tables at hospitals, nursing homes and rehabilitation centers where many clients live and where space is very limited.

Before you forget where you stashed your former laptop, please consider donating it to an organization that helps people with disabilities to communicate, many for the first time in their lives.

To donate, all you have to do is call SHARE at (508) 999-8482 and we'll take care of the rest, including deleting your files and photos. Thank you!

## Students Hold Crucial Role

*Continued from page 1*

theory, and his three years on the job have given him “hands-on” experience.

Justin assists Mark Whittaker, the Center’s rehabilitation engineer/designer. “Justin builds devices that act as solutions for clients,” said Mark. “Having his help frees me to do more in-depth research and design work to come up with better products than what the industry has to offer. Our goal is to more fully enhance the solutions to our clients’ unique problems.”

When you phone the SHARE office, located across campus in a modular building, chances are you will hear a pleasant young woman’s voice greeting you. That voice belongs to Kristen Jordan, a junior electrical engineering major from Voorhees, New Jersey, who has worked as a receptionist for nearly two years.



*Kristen Jordan receives calls at the Center as part of her duties.*

Kristen’s duties include answering the phone, compiling and writing client reports for the database, greeting visitors, and assisting with mailings and fundraisers. Occasionally, she has assisted Mr. Whittaker in the laboratory by helping to test computer programs. Her future career plans involve project design in the engineering field.

“I learn a little every day about disabilities and people in general,” said Kristen. “One of the benefits of working here is that it makes me



*Sophia Barros helps the Center’s office with data entry and mailings.*

more humble and grateful about what I have and what I can do. It’s been eye-opening.”

Senior Sophia Barros from Norton also has worked in the office for nearly two years. Her duties include filing, copying, data entry, mailings, and answering the phone. Sophia is majoring in psychology and has a minor in sociology. She hopes for a career helping people with mental or physical disabilities.

“This job has given me experience in dealing with individuals with disabilities and trying to help them to the best of my ability,” Sophia said. “From working at SHARE, I’ve learned that we can definitely make a difference in people’s lives, whether it be providing them with things such as software, computers or communication devices to make their lives easier, or even by letting others help us by donating equipment or money to our organization.”

She added, “Working here has been a good experience because I like feeling like I have made someone’s day or even bettered their lives in some way.”

Other students currently working at the Center include Steven Harnois of Hyannis, Nhien Ly of Brockton, Jeff Richard of Uxbridge, and Kelly Ouellette of Fall River.

For the past five years, SHARE has been fortunate to receive grants from several agencies to help fund the student engineers. These sources include the Christopher Reeve

Foundation, Verizon Foundation, the Robert F. Stoico/FIRSTFED Charitable Foundation, Bristol County Savings Charitable Foundation, Boston Bruins Foundation, the David Roderick Fellowship Fund, and the Lucie and Lorraine Goulet Memorial Fellowship Fund. ■

## FY 2007: A Busy Year

Last year, the Center for Rehabilitation Engineering reached a milestone by providing 1,043 service transactions, the first year to exceed the 1,000 mark!

In 2007, we provided help for 264 different clients—that’s one for nearly every workday in the year! To date, we have worked with 2,652 clients in 38 different states and eight countries, including the Azores, Nigeria, England, Panama, Sri Lanka, and Poland.

The majority of our work involves providing alternative means of communication for non-speaking people with disabilities, enabling them to live more independent lives. Last year, 19 percent of the clients we worked with had ALS or Lou Gehrig’s Disease. The Center provided services more than 100 times each for people with multiple sclerosis and cerebral palsy. Other common conditions included blindness, Parkinson’s Disease, stroke, muscular dystrophy, traumatic brain injury, and more.

Our successful year would not have been possible without the generosity of our donors. Thank you for making it possible for SHARE and the Center to improve the quality of life for those who turn to us for help!

# WITH OUR THANKS

*We extend our gratitude to the many supporters who have donated to SHARE over the past few months. Your generous gifts are making it possible for us to provide the opportunity for independent communication to more children and adults with disabilities.*

*The following donations were received from September 1, 2007 through March 31, 2008.*

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