

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONTACT: Kathryn Sampson, Community Options Inc.
(609) 352.5280 | Kathryn.Sampson@comop.org

Community Options Celebrates Major Anniversary

PRINCETON, NJ - In 1989, when Robert Stack sat at his home in Bordentown New Jersey he knew that so many parents of children with very serious developmental disabilities like autism, intellectual disabilities and cerebral palsy had no other alternatives other than going to an institution or prematurely to a nursing home. Stack left state government witnessing the largest waiting lists for people with disabilities in the history of the United States. With over a half a million children and adults nationwide and over 8,000 in New Jersey alone, he knew that something had to be done and that government could not do it alone.

He called several college friends, families he had known and solicited help from governmental officials. He told them he was going to take a second mortgage on his house, take all of his savings and start a nonprofit.

With a check for \$362 dollars and written bylaws and other corporate papers, he went to Trenton and filed for nonprofit status for the newly formed “Community Options”.

“It took about a year to get people to really believe me, but I went into places and took adults that no other agency at the time felt inclined to help,” Stack recalls. “People who were blind, autistic, nonverbal many using wheel chairs, all with serious issues. The most daunting part was cash flow and literally using every dollar I had and credit cards to make payroll for the direct care staff salaries and basically to keep the lights on.”

Now 27 years later on their anniversary, Stack, who just turned 60, manages Community Options with operations in 10 states supporting thousands of people with disabilities and a staff approaching 4,000.

“We have offices in Santa Fe, the Empire State Building, Charleston, Pittsburgh, and even Nashville. The cultures are different, but the mission and the philosophy are the same.”

The crown achievement is not only housing and supports, but what Stack emphasizes is “meaningful lives.”

“We don’t have people in large institutions. We have hundreds of small homes housing an average of three people per home with 24-7 care, but this still isn’t enough. People need to have meaning in what they do.”

Stack and his board created entrepreneurial businesses where people make minimum wage or better. Community Options operates a thriving gift store in Mt. Olive; a flower store (Vaseful) in Edison and the Daily Plan It (shared offices with copy conference centers).

On Tuesday, February 9, Elizabeth Connolly, Chris Christie’s cabinet officer, the Commissioner of Human Services is visiting the Daily Plan It in Princeton with 25 offices occupied by private businesses, employing over 15 people with significant disabilities who provide the infrastructure.

“This is more than a pay check. This is my career. This is my life. This is why I get up in the morning,” said Katie, one of the employees awaiting Velez’s arrival.

###

About Community Options, Inc.:

For over 25 years, Community Options has developed housing and employment programs for people with disabilities – serving thousands of people through 38 offices across 10 states. Community Options provides advocacy assistance to empower people with disabilities because all people – regardless of ability level – should live and work in the community with dignity, choice and self-determination.

For more information please visit our website: www.comop.org and to follow along with the ComOpCares campaign, search #ComOpCares on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.