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MEMBER PROFILE - AUGUST 2001

Karen Modell

Karen Modell, who has been both an entrepreneur and an attorney, is now involved in a challenging new career. Karen is founding a nonprofit center for people with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). The Montgomery Multiple Sclerosis Center, Inc. has already been incorporated. It has its nonprofit IRS status, as well as its Board of Directors; however, the Center does not yet have a location. Karen, who has been working for a year on this project, has raised more than \$30,000; she needs at least an additional \$130,000 so the Center can open.

How did Karen get involved in a project of such magnitude? Graduating from American University's School of Law in 1987, Karen had second thoughts about being an attorney. Instead, she opened a china and gift shop in Bethesda in 1988 but closed the store in 1994 when her attorney husband went into private practice and requested her help. Then, in April 1997, Karen was hit "rather severely" with Multiple Sclerosis. "This chronic, progressive neurological disease of the immune system affects the nerves and the myelin sheaths surrounding them, so that body parts work but brain messages do not get where they need to go," says Karen.

The mother of two young children, Karen spent a great deal of time trying to understand her disease and its symptoms. While researching treatment options, she learned that Montgomery County had few resources and services for MS patients and their families. Eventually, Karen sought the help of the Heuga Center, a nonprofit organization based in Edwards, Colorado that works to help people with MS and their families. Karen did a five day program with this "phenomenal" group, "learning how to live my life." She learned about the specific needs of MS patients, understood the latest medical research, and changed her attitude about life with MS.

Wanting to help other "MS-ers" in similar situations, Karen later conceived the idea of starting the Montgomery Multiple Sclerosis Center, Inc. to help those affected by MS adjust to the disease, learn to live life to the fullest, and realize that there is much that people can do within the limits of their illness.

The Center will have an Exercise Physiology/Therapy Division staffed by trained physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, yoga and tai chi instructors, etc. A Psycho-Social Therapy Division will sponsor individual and family therapy sessions, as well as support groups for different types of MS patients, caregivers, and children of MS patients. An Education Division will provide a resource center for printed materials and lectures. Finally, a Recreation Division will take MSers on field trips "to places they think they can't go" and bring the family together so that everyone can participate.

Karen's task is huge. For someone with MS, it's overwhelming. However, her "can do" attitude is amazing and that's an excellent start