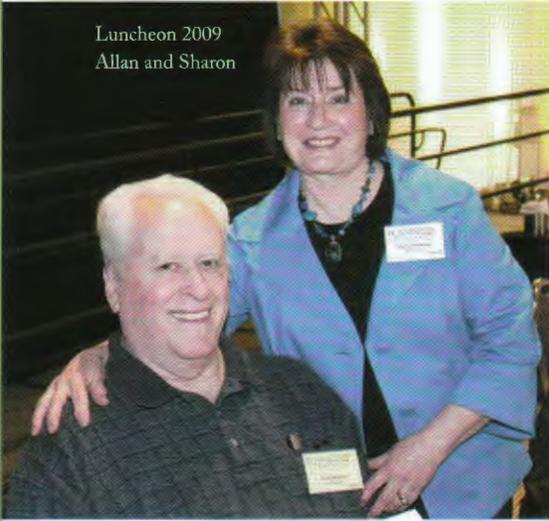


# PUSHING BOUNDARIES PUSHES *Hope*

By Joshua Johnson

Luncheon 2009  
Allan and Sharon



*“Without hope, we have nothing,” Christopher Reeve once spoke. The quadriplegic understood the importance of sustaining hope and never giving up, allowing him to rehabilitate daily at a rate which his doctor had never even seen before. His words are true, for the moment one gives up hope, despair sets in.*

This is an idea that Pushing Boundaries embodies. This Redmond-based non-profit offers intensive exercise therapy for those left paralyzed by illness or injury. When asked what goal she would like to accomplish with the center, founder Sharon Northrup responded, “To let anyone know that there’s hope; that they’re not alone in their struggle for rehabilitation; that we are here.”

Sharon has a twenty-eight-year connection to Yarrow Point, beginning when she and her late husband Allan moved to the community as newlyweds. Anyone who meets her quickly ascertains that she is a woman with a deep heart to see rehabilitation from paralysis realized as much as possible. The Northrups were motivated to found Pushing Boundaries after Allan’s own injury. Allan passed away in November 2011 after living with his own spinal cord injury for ten years.

While crossing Snoqualmie Pass in November 2001, the Northrups had a car accident when they hit a patch of ice. Allan’s injury was located at C7-T1, instantly leaving him with no feeling or movement from the chest down. He was rushed to Harborview, where he stayed for two months recovering and learning how to move in and out of his bed and wheelchair. After being discharged, the Northrup family had to undergo a complete life change.

What was once taken for granted was now a great challenge...or even an impossibility: climbing stairs, showering, getting in and out of bed. In fact, they had to make the decision to sell their two-story Yarrow Point home in late 2002, which also had a steep driveway, because it was too difficult for Allan

to get around in his wheelchair. The Northrups realized that a life of transferring Allan in and out of his wheelchair shouldn’t be all that the future held. They discovered that there were no programs available in the Northwest that could help Allan regain additional function. So in 2003, they decided to move the two thousand miles to San Diego, then the location of the only spinal cord injury, “exercise-based” program around. Allan worked out at three different facilities three hours a day, five days a week—he was determined to regain muscle use. His regime—which included exercise therapy, water therapy, and electro-stimulus biking—allowed Allan to regain core strength but not movement.

In 2004, the Northrups moved back to Seattle and, having learned the skills to rehabilitate at home, converted one of their spare rooms into an exercise room. Then, in March 2005, they founded NextStepsNW, a non-profit specialized in regaining muscle use especially for those who have suffered a spinal injury. After receiving a diverse array of clients and conditions, they changed their name to Pushing Boundaries in 2007 to meet the needs of all neuro-paralyzing injuries and illnesses, including traumatic brain injuries, stroke, MS, Devic’s, and Parkinson’s.

Six to eight weeks of sedentary life for the recovery of an acute injury in a hospital will atrophy anyone’s muscles, and degenerative illnesses lead to the onset of paralysis. Pushing Boundaries gives people the opportunity to regain function through aggressive repetitive exercise based therapy. In short, this organization wants to push the boundaries of what clients think they can do...within a safe consideration. Sharon says, “What’s next





after an injury or illness? Well, we sure don't believe the answer is 'Get used to it.' Even though neural pathways have been traumatized, explains Executive Director Tricia Lazzar, Pushing Boundaries believes that it is possible to re-teach and regain these pathways.

Pushing Boundaries is Washington State's only intensive exercise therapy center focused on regaining function in those paralyzed due to injury or illness. It serves clients from the greater PNW region and beyond and utilizes equipment that is not available to the public anywhere else on the west coast. Depending on each individual's case and goals, clients work out either two, three, or four days a week for two hours at a time. The five-thousand-square foot facility has several rooms with an array of equipment to meet each client's individualized needs: electro-stimulation bikes, parallel bars, standing frames, steps, mats, balls, bands, free weights, and, best of

all, a comprehensive gait training program that includes the Lokomat Robotic Gait Training System. This Switzerland-based walking machine, which looks like RoboCop when the client is situated, allows the client to walk normally on the treadmill (machine assisted) and can receive bio-feedback on output, calculating each step, and providing consistent repetition that is the basis for exercise therapy. In addition to the therapy programs, Pushing Boundaries also provides a support center for families, friends, and caregivers. Resource information for transportation, equipment, caregivers, home adaptability, and more is available to client families as well as the general public.

Pushing Boundaries exists so that people with paralysis can know that there is hope...and act upon it. They are not destined to a life confined to a wheelchair. "We want to encourage the body to stay healthy," Sharon says. "We can't guarantee anything, but we can hope." For without hope, we have nothing.

Even though she has moved off the Point, Sharon continues to maintain her strong ties to the Yarrow Point community. She has stayed an active member with the Yarrow Point Circle of Bellevue

LifeSpring. Bellevue LifeSpring's Yarrow Point Circle meets monthly September-June to raise funds for those in need living within the Bellevue School District, to host the annual community social event "Yarrowfest," and to staff the snow cone booth and walk in the parade at the 4th of July parade and festivities. A deep heart indeed.



As a local non-profit, Pushing Boundaries welcomes the community to visit the Redmond facility to learn more about their programs. They

also organized a few annual fundraisers, including a fall luncheon and a July walk-athon called Walk a Mile in My Shoes, a month-long celebration of movement to help raise awareness about paralysis and financial support for Pushing Boundaries. For more information about Pushing Boundaries, visit [pushing-boundaries.org](http://pushing-boundaries.org) or contact them at 425-869-9506.

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