

“Ford Street Project wouldn’t exist today if it weren’t for Mark Roloff,” said retired North Coast Opportunities (NCO) Executive Director Tom Monpere. “It’s as simple as that.”

During his tenure from December 1980 through June 2010, Roloff’s quiet, consistent dedication to those in need of alcohol and drug rehabilitation helped make Ford Street Project a Ukiah institution. When one door closed, Roloff looked for another. Even in the face of repeated disappointments, he didn’t let frustration or discouragement stop him. He thought of the people who needed his help, took a deep breath, and figured out how to make things work.

Ukiah’s Ford Street Project began in early 1974 under the name Mendocino Alcohol Project, referred to as “MAP.” It was a program overseen by North Coast Opportunities, and it started with grant funding from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) that became available in response to the closing of state mental hospitals throughout California.

MAP’s first executive director was Ron Arkin, a brash but eminently lovable man from Southern California who built the program from scratch.

In the early 1970s, Arkin worked for Long Beach General Hospital’s alcohol treatment program, which served 96 patients—a huge program by the standards of the day. He worked for Dr. Vernelle Fox, a doctor ahead of her time in her interdisciplinary approach, which Arkin enjoyed; but he did not enjoy his two-hour commute, and once he and his wife had their first baby, Arkin began to wonder where else he might work.

About this time, Arkin’s friend Dennis Huey moved to Mendocino County. Huey knew Arkin was tired of his commute, so he suggested Arkin apply for a new position at NCO to run an alcohol treatment program. Arkin hopped in his Toyota Corona and drove all the way to Ukiah to check out the opportunity.

“I was interviewed by a panel that included Wayne Honeycut, Cathy Munroe and Tom Brewster,” Arkin said, and they quickly decided Arkin should be MAP’s first director. The program began with a three-year grant consisting of \$163,000 per year. Arkin brought his wife and daughter up and immediately began seeking office space on the coast and inland.

On the coast, the MAP facility included an office and a recovery home east of Mendocino called the Ames Lodge. Originally built to provide shelter for poor, displaced musicians by the Ames Brothers (a quartet made famous by their pop music in the 1950s), the Ames Lodge was leased to MAP to spite neighbor Norman Duvall who had complained about musicians playing music and carousing at all hours of the night. MAP remained there for the better part of a year.

In Ukiah, Arkin leased a house at the top of Standley Street, owned by District Attorney Joe Allen and his wife Vicki publisher of the *Grapevine* newspaper. MAP outgrew the space almost immediately and moved to a house on Perkins Street, between Orchard Avenue and Mason Street (where the Sizzler Restaurant would later reside) owned by Jimmy Chan.

“The house on Perkins was neither plumb nor square. We knew that because the refrigerator would slowly slide across the floor. The place was creaky and cold, too,” Arkin recalled. It wasn’t long before MAP needed to move again, this time it would be to its permanent home on Ford Street.

“The Spencer family, who was in real estate at the time, had a triplex on Ford Street with the most amazing roses out front. And there was a house right next door owned by this great guy,” Arkin said, with a mischievous smile; referring to Monpere, who agreed to lease the property to MAP for use as an office. It was spring 1975.

Once MAP moved to its Ford Street home, the neighborhood was instantly overwhelmed with traffic. MAP had 14 staff members and 50 clients and the quiet neighborhood became a bustling place, attracting the attention of the City Planning Commission.

Arkin admitted, “I didn’t know the first thing about use permits or anything like that. I had to present in front of the Planning Commission and I got taken out behind the woodshed. They put me in my place. Lawyer Jim Luther, who would later become a judge, was there and he said to me afterwards, ‘Can I just say, what they said was fair? Why would you argue?’ I realized I wasn’t in L.A. anymore. I was in a small community, and I started acting accordingly.” Arkin made amends with the Ford Street neighbors, and then continued to define and expand MAP’s services for several years.

During this time, a battle was raging about the best way to treat alcoholism and drug addiction: people either adhered to the medical model or the social model. For decades, doctors had attempted to help “drunks” by using the “lock ‘em up and dry ‘em out” approach, according to Arkin. But Arkin and his colleagues nationwide believed there was a less expensive, more effective way to help people, one that reconditioned people’s responses to challenges, stresses and anxieties and included the use of positive role models who were successfully managing their own addictions.

Arkin argued with respected pillars of the medical community in Mendocino County, people like Dr. Dick Drury, Dr. Harry Hook and Dr. Phranklin Apfel causing some community members to doubt the legitimacy of MAP’s approach. However, the social model was showing promise, both locally and throughout the country, and MAP’s commitment to it attracted \$40,000 worth of additional grant funding.

In 1976, Monpere resigned as North Coast Opportunities’ executive director. Monpere was a thoughtful, open-minded leader who wasn’t afraid to let Arkin push against established norms. His replacement, Dick Green, however, had a very different management style, one that did not mesh well with Arkin, who resigned from MAP shortly thereafter. Arkin was followed by Bruce Alfano, then Roger Rexroth, neither of whom stayed on for more than a couple years. The unstable leadership combined with board members with personal agendas, which undermined the organization’s long-term success, caused MAP’s reputation to decline among community partners—a devastating blow to Arkin who had worked so hard to establish this vital community service.

In 1980, MAP found its footing under Mark Roloff, a humble, thoughtful, intelligent leader whose personal integrity and unwavering commitment led to the rebirth and growth of what would later become the Alcohol Recovery Corporation (ARC), and eventually, the Ford Street Project.

Roloff completed his undergraduate studies at UCLA, then attended Princeton University’s Theological Seminary program. After working in the alcohol treatment field for a couple years, he became the director of an alcohol treatment program for the elderly in San Francisco’s Tenderloin district. “It was a wild place to be,” he said. “Clients lived in hotels with names like Marlboro Manner.” Although he wanted to continue to help people, the consistent lack of progress in San Francisco wore on him. “It was tough because people rarely recovered and sometimes they died,” he said. So when a job

came open in Ukiah, he and his girlfriend Stephanie (who later became his wife) decided to explore the opportunity. Roloff came to Ukiah as an outsider without any connection to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), making him an unlikely person to be chosen as MAP's executive director but he received a job offer, nonetheless.

The organization was in dire financial straits, so his first order of business was to identify funding sources. MAP's relationship with the county and other potential supporters like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) had soured in recent years.

Roloff began rebuilding relationships while working with, grant writer, Sharon Kichili to acquire grant money. The organization received funding for transitional housing under Section 811, the Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities program, and other grant sources. Roloff credited Kichili with "great vision," explaining how she collected data and built reports that laid the foundation for future grants.

In addition to grant funding, members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church approached Roloff to see if he would be interested in their help. Church member, Mel Branch wanted to use the Ford Street facility as a place to bring younger church members to provide community service, while teaching them practical construction skills. "They brought in materials and labor. They did it all," Roloff said. And before he knew it, Ford Street Project had a new office building.

After a few years, Roloff had proven himself to be a sincere and trustworthy leader, and his personal credibility lent credibility to the organization, enabling people to recognize and appreciate Ford Street Project for the valuable resource it was.

In 1984, Monpere returned to NCO as its executive director, and he served as a mentor for Roloff.

Monpere praised Roloff's ability to build quality relationships with people from organizations with differing philosophies, especially with AA and NA. Roloff was able to connect with them "because he based the relationships on mutual respect," Monpere said, an especially difficult task when people fiercely believe their way is the right way.

Roloff was of the opinion that to be successful, it was important to reach out to people and focus on common ground and mutual goals. "At AA, they were after good recovery. So were we," he said, ever the master of understatement and humility.

In addition to building relationships, Roloff built up the infrastructure of the organization and began more clearly defining Ford Street's short-term and long-term goals. He also recruited people as board members and employees, who passionately supported the organization's mission, people with local constituencies of their own, strengthening Ford Street's connection to the community.

One such employee was Buddy Eller, a beloved community member who had a huge capacity for compassion. Roloff said, "He was a great listener who had his finger on the pulse of the homeless. He understood the plight of the homeless better than anybody." A homeless shelter was later named in Eller's honor.

Roloff often hired people with what he called "home-grown brilliance," employees who were former clients and really understood what it took to get clean.

He also recruited board members connected with law enforcement who could help build bridges between Ford Street and the criminal justice system. Ukiah Police Captain Trent Taylor and retired State Prison Parole Officer Jerry Cardoza spent countless hours providing compassionate and practical leadership for the organization. In addition, Roloff recruited Arkin and Monpere (after Monpere retired from NCO) to serve as board members, bringing institutional knowledge back to the organization.

Essentially, Roloff wanted to create a pathway from treatment through recovery to stability and self-reliance. He helped establish several important pieces of this process, including treatment services, temporary housing and some permanent housing. He continually tried to connect all these pieces for Ford Street's clients, either by providing the services through Ford Street Project, or by partnering with other organizations.

The housing piece was complicated because, according to Arkin, people in recovery can be emotionally fragile and easily triggered. "While people are detoxing, it's hard to have drunks coming in with alcohol. It can set them back," he said. And yet, a huge percentage of those who needed shelter struggled with drug and alcohol use disorders, and the Buddy Eller Center provided that shelter.

Roloff not only expanded housing, he also made other infrastructure improvements. He purchased and remodeled the Spencer family's triplex on the Ford Street property, which allowed him to add six apartments and a community room. He then purchased property to build emergency housing. With support from Annie Raitt (of the musical Raitt family), Roloff expanded even more, creating a separate building for transitional housing. Finally, Roloff was able to purchase property from Tom Sadowski to provide space for additional services.

Roloff said, "We just had to keep your eyes open, and good things came our way."

Throughout his tenure, Roloff dealt with local power struggles and political agendas that had the potential to threaten Ford Street Project's long-term viability. In the 1990s, Mendocino County Alcohol and Other Drug Program (AODP) Director Ned Walsh was responsible for allocating state and federal alcohol treatment funding throughout the county, and when Roloff did not fall in step with Walsh's wishes funding would sometimes suffer. This led Roloff to think creatively about potentially new funding sources, one of which was the California Department of Corrections that paid Ford Street to work with parolees, helping them become and remain sober.

Eventually, Ford Street separated from North Coast Opportunities and became an independent organization and at the very end of his time with Ford Street, he oversaw the blending of Ford Street Project with the Ukiah Community Center, an organization responsible for the local food bank and other services for the poor.

Each time Roloff faced a setback, he just kept going. Arkin referred to Roloff's work as street ministry, which seems an apt description. Roloff retired in 2010, and now, he and his wife Stephanie enjoy spending time with friends and playing an active role in their community at St. Peter Eastern Catholic Church.

Roloff's successor, Jacque Williams, was brought in to help complete the agency unification project. The Board of Directors for both Ford Street Project and Ukiah Community Center unified and created one Board of Directors to oversee both organizations. As a former Hewlett Packard executive, Williams has blended her corporate know-how with a no-nonsense approach to sustaining services in

the face of brutal state and federal budget cuts. In the sense that she creatively stitches together funding and adjusts to an ever-changing political landscape, Williams is certainly following in Roloff's footsteps.