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Robert Joy, who is among some 40 PARC consumers who are employed by such public companies as A&P, Applebee's and ShopRite.

Self-esteem, pride gained through work

Community benefits as well as people with disabilities

Marcela Rojas
The Journal News

SOMERS — On one of his recent shifts at the Goodwill store, Robert Joy carefully hung men's shirts and women's pants in the right places, only turning once to his job coach to determine whether a black garment was a top or a bottom.

The item was a short dress, and Joy — with some coaxing — figured that out on his own and quickly shuffled to the appropriate rack.

The 37-year-old has been working at Goodwill since mid-December, sorting and organizing the secondhand apparel three days a week. He has now gotten to the point where he doesn't need constant supervision, said his PARC job coach, Emilie Shipman, who will now stop by once a week to check on his progress.

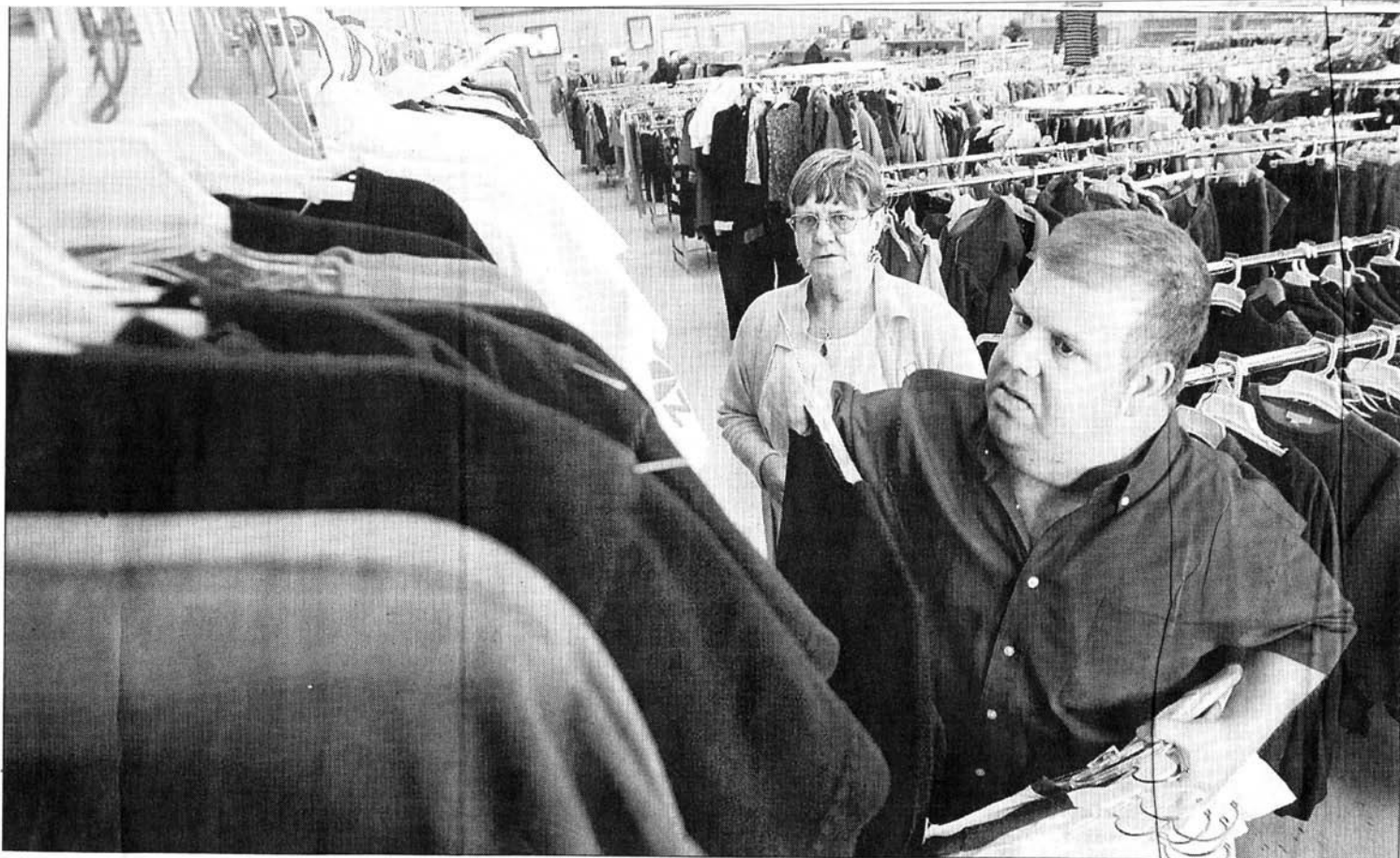
"He picked it right up," said Shipman, adding that the goal is to get him to man the cash register.

For Joy, who spent several years pushing shopping carts outdoors, the new part-time job is a welcome addition to a daily routine that also includes working at PARC's Putnam Industries — a light assembly workshop — twice a week.

"I saw other people had jobs and I thought it would be nice to have one," said Joy, who lives in a Lake Carmel-based group home. "It's boring when there is no work."

Joy is developmentally disabled and is among some 40 PARC consumers who are employed by a variety of public companies, including the A&P, Applebee's and ShopRite.

"It gives them self-esteem and pride," said Shipman, a job coach for about 11 PARC consumers. "They are in the community. Peo-



Job coach Emilie Shipman checks on Robert Joy as he stocks clothing at the Goodwill store in Somers.

Joe Larese/The Journal News

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ple don't run away from them anymore."

The agency has about 100 people who work in different capacities, from mobile work crews to individual placement, said Michael Miller, PARC's director of vocational rehabilitation. Generally, they start at Putnam Industries, a protected environment at PARC Center that involves collation and

packaging for 15 to 25 companies throughout Putnam, Westchester and Rockland counties.

"What we are really looking to do is introduce the person to a work environment," Miller said. "We want to address any problems there so that they won't be an impediment in the continuum of their employment."

Miller, who has been with

PARC for 23 years, said the emphasis years ago was to create the sheltered workshop and enable clients, coming out of institutions, to develop work skills. The objectives now are for clients to achieve integrated employment at the levels they are capable of, he said.

"It helps the individual have a sense of community belonging and to be contributing members

of society," Miller said. "It also helps to educate on what it is to be disabled and to understand the capabilities that people with developmental disabilities have."

Joy, who takes two buses to get to Goodwill, pondered what it meant to work out in the community as he ate a peanut butter sandwich he prepared on his 15-minute lunch break. He listed

meeting new people and making money to take care of his cat, Finnegan, as important reasons for holding employment.

"At the end of the day I feel good, because I know I did a good job," he said.

Reach Marcela Rojas at mrojas@thejournalnews.com or 845-228-2271.