



Bruce Hough, Co-Founder



Promoting Self-Sufficiency

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"Do you know the difference between a boat and a yacht?" asks Jacksonville resident Bruce Hough (pronounced "huff"). Hough sits surrounded by model ships that he's built, George Lee seascapes, and a light that's a replica of an oil lamp on the Titanic. "A yacht has an ice-maker," he deadpans.

The sailing memorabilia are mementoes of Hough's initial career. After graduating from the University of California, Berkeley, with a degree in political science, Hough signed on as Vice President of Sales for a Bay Area yacht company, then went on to found Beacon Yachts. Hough was on the press boat when Ted Turner won the Americas Cup.

Now Hough sails in a different way. The founder of ComNet Marketing Group, Hough is also the founder of Mobility Unlimited. He currently commands both organizations from the deck of a power wheelchair.

Thirty-one years ago, Hough was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. "A neurosurgeon finally diagnosed it," Hough recalls. "He said that there was nothing that could be done. He said that he expected we would be seeing a lot of each other. I asked, if there was nothing to be done, then why should we see each other at all? That was the last I saw of him."

Hough continues, "I went to the library and read everything I could get my hands on about MS. I concluded that if you have to get a disease after which they've named a society, it's better to get one that goes into occasional remission. I also concluded that people who say 'Oh, no!' and sit in a corner don't do too well, but people who say 'I'm going to have a life,' do."

Hough has had quite a life. In 1993, he started ComNet Marketing Group, a marketing and professional fundraising company that focuses on the "member-driven" non-profit community. "There was a definite need out there for something we could do and do very well. I had contact with public broadcasting stations, and I knew that what their telemarketing firms were doing was dismal. So I revamped the whole program."

He wanted a direct marketing approach that he would find acceptable if someone called his own home. Hough developed what ComNet calls its "RespectCall" system. The company uses only experienced telemarketers who are required to familiarize themselves with clients' objectives, needs and services prior to any contact on their behalf. This approach has been so successful, that ComNet's client list now includes not only a long list of public broadcasting stations, but also museums, zoos and aquariums, professional and trade associations, conservation groups, health advocacy organizations, and performing arts organizations.

Hough credits ComNet's success to the employees. "We hire the best people we can find. We treat them like adults. We provide the training and tools they need. Then we get out of their way and let them do the job. The people with ComNet are unbelievable. I go away for a month, and it runs better than when I'm here. The same with Mobility

Unlimited!”

Hough founded Mobility Unlimited in 2001 with his wife, Nancy Saum Hough. “About eight years ago, I had to get into a wheelchair. It was a seven to eight month process with all these hoops. My wife and I decided that there must be a lot of people out there who need assistance, but who don’t qualify financially. So we founded Mobility Unlimited.”

This 501(c)(3) non-profit provides mobility equipment to uninsured and underinsured adults who are residents of Oregon. Recipients must be working or in a job training program with guaranteed employment and have exhausted other means of financial assistance.

“Unfortunately, many durable medical goods such as wheelchair lifts, scooters, and grab bars are not covered by conventional private insurance policies like the Oregon Health Plan, Medicaid, or Medicare. For a person who is physically disabled, this mobility equipment is a pillar to self-sufficiency. Mobility Unlimited provides access for them to meet their own basic needs for food, shelter, and clothing.”

Since its focus is independence, Mobility Unlimited receives no government funding. Salaries are paid by ComNet and other corporate sponsors so that 100% of individual donations go directly to Mobility to Employment projects.

“We’re a funding vehicle not a vendor. We’re also a resource center. Currently we’re working primarily in Oregon,” states Hough, who serves as President of Mobility’s Board of Directors, “but my dream is to see a chapter in every state. We promote self-sufficiency by helping people who have an interest in creating a productive life for themselves and those around them. We want to turn everyone into a contributor.”