

THE PALS PROGRAM

Offering Personal Assistant Loving Support

The Virginia Home's mission is rooted in compassionate care for adult Virginians with physical disabilities. The Home has always gone far above and beyond standardized custodial care by intentionally focusing on improving the physical, social, and emotional lives of those living with severe physical disabilities and helping them lead meaningful active lives no matter the challenges they face.

Taking travel trips to desirable destinations, swimming in our on-site therapy pool, and offering a menu of customized programming are just a few of the examples of what sets The Virginia Home apart and sets the bar high for the standard of care and improving the quality of life for our residents.

HOW COMPANION CARE WORKS

It is important to recognize that our residents present in ways that have considerable variation in ability and communication. Some can operate motorized wheelchairs, feed themselves and verbalize their requests. Others require much more assistance and individualized care to meet their needs and pursue their interests.

Companion care is a form of home care offering non-medical services to older adults or people with disabilities. The goal of companion care is primarily emotional support and socialization which can include accompanying residents to activities, assisting with games and crafts, and taking residents out in the community or outside for fresh air. Companions make regular visits, which may vary in frequency depending on the resident's unique needs. It's a valuable benefit for our residents who may be at risk for social isolation. Providing companion care to residents of The Virginia Home with limited ability is a caring and supportive measure that is congruent with our mission and our approach to providing an excellent quality of life.



Recognizing the benefits of companion care for our population, the PALS Program was developed in the fall of 2023. PALS was championed by Board of Trustees member **Susan Gooden, Ph.D.**, while Director of Resident Services Jody Young developed the framework.

MEET OUR NEW PALS!

PALS stands for Personal Assistant Loving Support and is a perfect description of the two women that have brought the program to life through their full-time roles at The Virginia Home.

Cassandra "Cassy" Harper and Jessica White bring a wealth of



Above: Jessica White with Jeanne Marie Schwartz in the Occupational Therapy department. Below left: Cassy Harper and John Holmes share some one-on-one time in the TVH gymnasium.

activities experience in long-term care and aging with disabilities. The mission of the PALS Program is to activate human potential through enhanced socialization and building community. A good friend or a "PAL" can lighten your mood, enhance your happiness, give you purpose, promote belonging, support brain health, and reduce stress. At The Virginia Home, a PAL aims to help our most vulnerable residents cultivate a meaningful life through daily interaction and companionship.

It didn't take long for Cassy and Jessica to develop rapport with their PALS caseloads ranging from 10–15 residents each. Residents seen by Cassy and Jessica may have difficulty engaging in activities without assistance, expressing their needs, experience behavioral barriers, or require special attention as they are receiving comfort care. Cassy and Jessica map out their day by identifying resident preferences and promoting active involvement in programs and therapies on the calendar. Some residents prefer bedside activities such as writing cards, playing UNO or a watching their favorite YouTube videos. You can't miss Cassy and Jessica with their bright blue decorated activity carts full of everything a resident might need to have some fun on the go!

We've already seen the beneficial evidence of these newly added positions with increased program attendance, 1:1 personalized activity, and community integration. When Cassy and Jessica were interviewed on their initial success in the position, they both felt that their presence had lifted spirits and made an impact on the residents' abilities to make friends with other residents. A quote they've embraced since the initiation of PALS is 'the most important thing in life is just being there'.

The Virginia Home management team and Board of Trustees recognize that a good quality of life might look different for each of our 130 residents, but the goal is the same – to strive for highest potential while enjoying life to the fullest. We can all agree that having a good PAL can make life richer. We look forward to the growth of this unique program and the sweet life it provides our residents.



RECOGNIZING SERVICE TO THE VIRGINIA HOME

To further expand the culture of philanthropy at The Virginia Home, The Virginia Home Philanthropic Service Award was established in 2019 to recognize volunteer leadership and service to The Home's fundraising operation. This year the Award was presented to Jane and Bradley Nott. The Notts were very active members of the Campaign Steering Committee for our campaign to address facility deferred maintenance and our endowment, which was paused in 2022. Working together, they invited and joined prospective supporters for tours of The Virginia Home. Their interest, follow-up and success rate were simply outstanding. Jane Nott is an Associate Board member following more than a decade of service on the Board of Trustees. The Notts are members of both the 1894 Legacy Society and the Mary Tinsley Greenhow Society. Previous winners are Addie Asbury and the TVH Dental Clinic Volunteers and Staff.

Vice President for Advancement Mickey Dowdy and Board Chair Laura Stewart with Bradley and Jane Nott.

FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

By Laura Stewart, Chair

Dear Friends:

More than twenty years ago, I received my first Virginia Home newsletter. It was addressed to the previous owner of my house, but I read it with great interest! I received a couple more issues before my young daughters were old enough for kindergarten and preschool, and then I could finally make a visit to The Home.

I met with the volunteer coordinator, and we thought I might try serving coffee at Rec Cafe to see if that would be a good fit. It certainly was! I enjoyed the fun conversations, the sweet residents I have come to love, and the wonderful staff.



Here I am at my first 5k Walk n' Roll in 2011 with my daughter, Emily (who is in college now!) and Al Allen, leaving us in his dust!

Since then, I have had the enormous privilege of participating in many different aspects of life at The Virginia Home. There have been big events like the Walk n' Roll 5K, the Fall Fest, and Stories of Courage & Grace, to name a few. But some of the most enjoyable moments have been hearing about a resident's family, their life before The Home and what interests them. It's been so fun to learn who has a gentle sense of humor (and whose is wicked!), who is a college sports fan, and who likes professional teams. I have yet to learn (or at least remember) how everyone likes their coffee. Fortunately, the amazing staff remember it all!

I never could have imagined that I would go from reading this newsletter to writing a small part of it. If you read something in here that interests you, please reach out to us—come for a visit. We would love to show off The Home!

Recognizing Staff Excellence



Neachelle Hawkins, CNA

Nominated by resident family members and her peers, Neachelle richly deserves this recognition. Her commitment to her profession and the residents under her care shines through the testimonials provided by both colleagues and family members. Her ability to connect with each person on a personal level and tailor her care accordingly speaks volumes about her character and professionalism.

"My daughter Kimberly was born with cerebral palsy and cannot walk, talk, feed herself or take care of her other daily living skills. We have been blessed with Neachelle as her primary CNA since arriving at The Home over twenty years ago. She is one of the most caring, helpful and skilled care providers I have ever met. Neachelle always has a smile, and a kind word for everyone. A veteran caregiver, she is patient and works very well with both new and seasoned nursing staff. Neachelle considers her position to be much more than a job; she is very proud to be a member of the nursing profession. She is an honor to her profession." – Barbara Anzelmo

"Neachelle is not just a caretaker, but someone who treats my sister, Tricia, like everyone else wants to be treated. She is kind, calm and so very nice! Neachelle has learned Tricia's likes and dislikes and knows how to work with her better than anyone! Trisha always looks and feels good in Neachelle's care. Our family is so happy to have her work acknowledged." – Connie Pemberton

Neachelle sets a very high standard for providing quality care to our residents. Recognition through programs like the Ceca Awards not only acknowledges the outstanding work of caregivers like Neachelle, but also serves to inspire and motivate others in the healthcare community to strive for excellence in their own practice. We are so fortunate to have Neachelle as a member of "The Home Team." Congratulations Neachelle!

Last fall, we announced that The Virginia Home planned to partner with the **Ceca Foundation**, whose mission is to improve the human experience in healthcare communities by honoring the work of exceptional caregivers.

By recognizing and rewarding the work of stand-out caregivers in healthcare communities, the Foundation's vision is to drive not only an enjoyable patient experience, but better quality of care for patients, residents, and families. The Ceca Award Program serves as a network for healthcare communities to demonstrate their commitment to core caregiving values, while ensuring staff are engaged and feel appreciated. Research shows these critical elements lead to higher safety and security, better staff retention, and improved care delivery.

At The Virginia Home, we are proud to announce our very first Virginia Home Ceca Award recipient—**Neachelle Hawkins, C.N.A.**

Resident Spotlight

Cynthia Carter

Born and raised in Richmond, Cynthia graduated from Armstrong High School in 1968. Always drawn to The Civil Service, she was hired on her 18th birthday. A bright career in Washington D.C. at the Agency for International Development was cut short by a family death back home. Cynthia stayed in Richmond, working full-time while simultaneously pursuing a Legal Secretary associate degree at VCU. Before she finished her degree, the U.S. Court of Appeals offered her a position! Cynthia seemed to have it all—including marriage to husband Charles at age thirty, followed by the birth of their son, Derek, in 1987. She raised her family and dedicated twenty-eight years to the Court system before retiring.



Cynthia, above with Brooke Shields, attended Stories of Courage & Grace this year and was profiled in our event program.

It started with a strange numbness in her right hand and foot, but it wasn't until her late forties that an attack on her spine sent her to the emergency room. The diagnosis was Multiple Sclerosis. While the diagnosis was hard to accept, she held her head high and continued with her typical determination and grace. Cynthia maintained her independence for as long as she could, and it saddened her to ultimately realize that she needed help. Today Cynthia is happy to call The Virginia Home 'home' and feels that we have been able to provide her with opportunities to be as independent as she can.

We can all use a little inspiration from Cynthia to remind ourselves to take each day as it comes. Life can change in a second, but you can still live a rich, full life with the right resources and a positive attitude.



Brooke Shields snaps a selfie with Pia Scott and GeNienne Samuels

12th Annual Stories of Courage & Grace

That's a wrap! This year we welcomed entertainment industry icon **Brooke Shields** to the stage, in a delightful exchange moderated by WTVR/6 Anchor **GeNienne Samuels**. Tickets for the event sold out, and we were so happy to meet many new friends (who we hope will be old friends down the road!)

Many thanks to everyone who made this event possible, with a special shout-out must to our Presenting Sponsors: **NewMarket Corporation, April and Joe Niamtu** and Media Sponsor **WTVR-CBS6**.

Stories of Courage & Grace is more than just a special event for The Home. It provides a way to help underwrite many of our residents' most beloved programs. From community integration and travel to the maintenance of our chaplaincy service, proceeds from this event have wide-reaching benefits.

We are already making plans for our next Stories of Courage & Grace event for the spring of 2025! We welcome your feedback as we move forward. Please don't hesitate to contact Belinda Falconer in the Development Office with questions or suggestions at belinda.falconer@thevirginiahome.org or call 804-254-8825.

WORKING FROM "HOME" Behind the Scenes

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY: The Occupational Therapy Department is excited to announce that we have hired two new Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants (COTAs), **Shenna Urquhart** and **Benita Dralle**. They have jumped right in to embracing our Virginia Home values along with bringing their occupational therapy expertise and enthusiasm for our residents to the department.



New OT COTAs, Shenna Urquhart and Benita Dralle

Our busy schedule has continued with some changes. We have merged our OT Arcade with the PT department and upgraded our name to "**Move and Meditate Arcade**." We continue to offer different adapted activities each month that residents can play to earn tickets and turn them in for a prize! We are gearing up to welcome another group of caterpillars and will eagerly watch as they become butterflies in May. We have also expanded our **Fine Motor Fun** group with new therapeutic exercises, including a shoulder arc, PVC pipe activities, and puzzles to keep residents engaged. **Crafty Crew** continues to be a resident favorite, where residents make decorations for their wheelchairs and rooms. We continue to explore new projects in **Creations with Shelley**, including making our own sparkle hair gel paint, popcorn balls for squirrels and birds, and even made our own paper pulp clay to spin on a pottery wheel! Finally, residents have been thoroughly enjoying **Move and Meditate**, where our talented OT Aide **Stephanie Lyttle**, selects tunes that get the residents singing and dancing every Monday and Wednesday morning. We are looking forward to continuing the fun over the spring and summer!

RECREATION THERAPY/COMMUNITY

INTEGRATION: The Ball returned in March after a long hiatus. The "sock hop" theme had residents and



Kelsey Weeks enjoyed her first "Biennial Ball"! For 2024, the theme was a 50s Sock Hop, and Kelsey dressed for the occasion!

staff wearing their best 50's outfits including poodle skirts and letterman jackets. The band "**Vertigo**" played tunes from all the eras and were a big hit. As soon as the party ended, we rock and rolled right into the **5k Pep Rally** and the **5k Walk 'n Roll**. After that we attended "**Annie the Musical**", "**To Kill a Mockingbird**" and "**Tina Turner**" at the Altria for the Broadway in Richmond series.

In between the special events, socials, and musicals, we also had time for outdoor movie nights, Bingo luncheons, and celebrated the winners of the Football Pool and delved into the March Madness and celebrated tournament bracket winners.

Four of our recreation therapists, **Megan Portelos**, **Krista Killelea**, **Sara Jarrett** and **Stacy Jones**, ventured to Myrtle Beach, SC, for a few days at the end of March to participate in the Southeast Recreation Therapy Symposium. This continuing education opportunity allowed RT staff to gain continued education credits, learn about new programs and ideas, network with other Recreation Therapists, and have some fun.

SPEECH THERAPY: The Speech Therapy Department has paired with nursing to begin a monthly ear irrigation/wax removal clinic. The buildup of too much cerumen (ear wax) can lead to ear pain, tinnitus, itchiness, hearing loss or other issues. Clinics are held the third Thursdays of each month.

The Dental Clinic welcomed two new dentists to our staff. Drs. **Roger Wood**, DDS and **Richard Bates**, DDS joined our team this semester, serving as Dental Supervisors for our **VCU School of Dentistry** collaboration. Each of them has over forty years of dental experience. We couldn't be more thrilled to have these wonderful, esteemed professionals join our dental family.



Donna Hansen and our former Director of Recreation Therapy (1995-2001), Allison Wilder, at the chilly but beautiful 5k Walk n' Roll. It was great to see you again, Allison!

VOLUNTEER SERVICES: Spring brings us a burst of life, bright colors, and cheerful melodies hinting at the fun to come! We have already begun to embrace the beauty of the outdoors with strolls in the park and our 13th Annual 5K Walk 'n Roll. We have met lots of new friends while playing games with **St. Bridget**, **Redeemer Anglican**, **Orchard House**, and the **Duke Alumni Richmond Chapter**. Music from **McKesson**, **St. James**, and **VCU Notes of Kindness** have filled our ears with sweet songs! Interactive dance sessions, puppy visits with **Atticus** and the **Caring Canines** have brought us joy. Our competitive weekly bridge club games and Bible Study session are keeping us busy. And the Junior Board's Spring Clothes Closet has us dressed for warmer weather. We can't wait to see what the summer brings, so don't forget to keep up with us on Facebook and Instagram!



VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR Bryn Davis

This year's Volunteer of the Year hasn't been here long—just over two years, but in that time, she has touched so many hearts, made so many friends, and has been such a welcome, regular visitor that she feels like an old friend.

Bryn can be found playing a game with **Chris**, helping **Larry** send emails, opening letters with **Kathy**, reading to **Sue**, straightening up **Ray's** room, picking out outfits for **Tash**, talking smack about some sports team with the guys, or simply sitting on the front porch talking about life with everyone. She loves participating in our events. From Bingo to the Fall Fest—Bryn is there, and she has even gotten her family involved with our 5K Walk 'n Roll!

This sports fanatic, grandmother and retired special ed teacher has the biggest heart and most caring spirit. She remembers birthdays, sends postcards when on vacation, and even visits residents at their job sites.

In two short years, Bryn has become more than a volunteer—she is a strong advocate for the independence and happiness of our residents. We are so grateful that she found her way to The Virginia Home. Sometimes miracles are just good people with kind hearts.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT Caring Canines

Animals bring a sense of calmness, comfort, and joy. They make us feel loved, safe, and like we are the only one in the room that matters. We get to feel this way every month with visits from our favorite furry friends. You could say, we are "**MUTTS**" about Caring Canines! They come dressed up for every holiday, bring sweet hugs, wet noses, special tricks, and they touch our hearts without ever saying a word. Their unconditional love and gentle nature have a profound impact on our well-being, creating moments of happiness as well as healing. They truly enrich our lives, just one tail wag at a time.

We feel honored that Caring Canines has been bringing us smiles for years. We look forward to many, many more!

SPRING 2024

EVERY WEEKDAY

9:00 am Rec Cafe
6 pm RT Program (varies — Games, Karaoke, Trivia Night, Movie Night, etc.)

BEAUTY SALON

10 am – 5 pm Wednesday for cuts, color, beard trims
9 am – 4 pm Friday for hair styling

MONDAY

10:30 am Move & Meditate in OT
10:30 am Speech Jeopardy Club
2 pm Ican Ipad Group in OT
2 pm BAM
2 pm Attitude of Gratitude
3 pm Caring Canines (4th Monday)

TUESDAY

10:30 am MS Support Group
11 am Bible Study with Mollie
1:30 pm Hobby Stop
2 pm Group TV Games in OT
3 pm Soul Food
4 pm Prayers for the World

WEDNESDAY

10:30 am Move & Meditate in OT
11 am Chat with the Chaplain
2 pm Menu Selection
2 pm Yoga & Exercise with Irene
2 pm Basic Nail Care in OT
3 pm President's Forum (last Wed/monthly)
3 pm BINGO!
3:30 pm Resident Council (1st Wed/monthly)

THURSDAY

10:00 am Crafty Crew with OT
1:30 pm Hobby Stop
2 pm Manicures in OT
2 pm Menu Selection
2 pm Bridge Club



Occupational Therapist Shelley Jewel offers a fuzzy bunny to Rick Thomas on the front porch during "Chicks and Bunnies" Day.

FRIDAY

10:15 am Creations with Shelly in OT
11:15 am Cerebral Palsy University (2nd Friday)
2 pm WWE or Board Games in OT
2 pm "PAL"ing Around
2 pm Free Friday
2 pm TV Talk or Board Games in OT
3 pm Calm Coloring in OT

SATURDAY

9:30 am Rec Cafe
2 pm Games or Volunteer Programs

SUNDAY

11 am Swan Lake Bible Study
3 pm TVH Worship Service

SPECIAL EVENTS

June 14 Annual TVH Fishing Tournament
June 27 Live Out Loud Concert

Please visit our website & Facebook !



THE VIRGINIA HOME

Produced by the Office of Development
Director: Belinda Falconer
Printing: Worth Higgins Associates

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The Virginia Home is a loving, lifetime residential care facility for people with physical disabilities. Since its founding in 1894, it has been committed to service with honor, dedication and compassion for the 130 Virginians who live here at our home on the lake at Byrd Park.



Save the Date! Our third annual Live Out Loud Fest will be held on the grounds of The Virginia Home from 6–8:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 27th. The event is open to our volunteers, families and friends. A sign-up form will be available on our website this week.

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