

Home Happenings

Number 59 / Spring 2025



Color-full Connections

Opening Minds through Art: Creativity, Connection, and Community

This January, The Virginia Home's Occupational Therapy department launched a transformative new program—**Opening Minds through Art (OMA)**. This initiative, made possible by OT Aide **Stephanie Lyttle**, who recently became a certified OMA facilitator, is bringing exciting opportunities for creative expression to residents. Stephanie shared, "I was excited about the opportunities and benefits it would bring to The Virginia Home because we are a unique facility."

What is OMA?

OMA is an award-winning, evidence-based, intergenerational art-making program designed for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and other neurocognitive disorders. Founded in 2007 at the Scripps Gerontology Center at Miami University, OMA shifts the focus from limitations to capabilities, enabling participants to express themselves creatively. The program is built on person-centered ethics, celebrating what people can do rather than what they have lost.

At The Virginia Home, the OMA program fosters genuine friendships between participants, volunteers and staff, providing not only creative self-expression but also companionship.

The Goals of OMA

The OMA program at The Virginia Home is designed to:

- Promote social engagement, autonomy, and dignity through creative self-expression
- Foster meaningful relationships between residents, volunteers and staff members
- Educate the public about the artistic potential of individuals with neurological and physical disabilities through art exhibitions

The OMA Experience at The Virginia Home

The first OMA cohort has been a resounding success, with residents creating unique, multi-layered abstract paintings using adapted tools and the support of their care partners. The excitement in the sessions is palpable, as residents discover new forms of artistic expression. Their artwork will be proudly displayed in the OT department windows and a dedicated bulletin board, celebrating their creativity.

In addition to the biweekly closed group sessions, The Virginia Home offers monthly OMA "Playtime" sessions, giving all residents the opportunity to experience the joy of artistic exploration.

Why OMA Matters

OMA has earned international recognition, receiving the Gen2Gen Innovation Fellowship Award for excellence in fostering social engagement and creative self-expression. No prior art experience is required—each resident is empowered to create freely with the encouragement of trained volunteers and staff.



Kayleigh Cravens (top) partnered with Occupational Therapy staffer Shenna Urquhart; GLITTER is exactly what Liz's (left) creation needed! Stephanie Crosby and Director of Volunteers Annie Kennedy teamed up during the first cohort earlier this year.

Research has shown that, compared to other activities, individuals with neurological disorders and physical disabilities participating in OMA demonstrate several positive results including:

- Increased overall enjoyment of activities
- Higher levels of engagement
- Improved overall well-being

Students and volunteers and staff who assist in OMA experience:

- Greater empathy and positive attitudes toward individuals with neurological and physical disabilities
- Higher comfort levels interacting with those affected
- Stronger connections and a deeper sense of kinship

Get Involved!

With the first cohort wrapping up, the OT department is now seeking volunteers for the next phase of the program. This is a rewarding opportunity to connect with residents, foster creativity, and make a meaningful impact.

For more information on volunteering, contact Stephanie Lyttle at Stephanie.Lyttle@thevirginiahome.org or call the OT department at 804-359-4093 ext. 2021.

Join us in Opening Minds through Art, where creativity knows no boundaries, and every brushstroke tells a story.



FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

By Laura Stewart, Chair

Dear Friends:

If you’re reading this message, there’s a good chance you’ve been part of something amazing at The Virginia Home recently.

On January 30, we welcomed members of the press to The Home as we announced our plans to build a \$128 million, state-of-the-art facility on a 70-acre site in Hanover County. Designed with input from healthcare experts, it features advanced technology, larger private rooms, and improved accessibility—all on a single floor. The new space will also support a long-awaited day program for 55–60 participants.

On March 27, former pro football player—and now magician—**Jon Dorenbos** lit up The Home with his visit and then brought the house down at The Jefferson during our 13th **Stories of Courage & Grace™** event.

Just a week and a half later, on a gorgeous Saturday morning, 116 of our residents rolled out for the annual **Walk n’ Roll 5k!** Our Virginia Home community is truly extraordinary. It took more than 175 staff members and an army of volunteers to help get our 116 residents ready to roll on April 5. Among them was a spirited group stationed at the finish line, ready to cheer every participant across. They celebrated with high fives, hugs, medals—and a lot of happy tears. One guest athlete, especially thrilled to complete her laps, was met with a wave of pure joy from volunteers who had never met her before but instantly shared in her triumph.

It brought back something Jon Dorenbos said just days earlier: he thanked everyone for showing up—and for supporting people they may never even meet. That’s the magic of The Virginia Home community. Whether it’s at the Walk n’ Roll, at Stories of Courage & Grace, or throughout the year, our friends lift up The Home in ways big and small—even when they may only know one or two residents.

Thank you for being part of this extraordinary community. Thank you for believing in The Virginia Home.



Larry Watson is all smiles as he reviews the resident room schematics for our new facility

Resident Rockstar

Cristi Harris

Christi has called The Virginia Home her home since July 2014, and she’s made every moment count.

“We get to participate in so many activities here, and I love being able to come and go as I please,” she shares. She especially appreciates the open therapy schedule—PT and OT five days a week, Recreation Therapy six days a week—and starting her mornings at Rec Café.

Soon after moving in, Christi traveled to Universal Studios in Orlando thanks to TVH’s Travel Scholarship program.

She’s a huge fan of adventure, but her passion really shines through in her involvement with the Special Olympics. Christi proudly carried the torch once, a memory she still talks about, and plans to attend a Special Olympics camp at the University of Richmond this year.

Choosing a favorite TVH event is tough, but the 5k Walk ‘n Roll and Halloween Boo House top her list. “Other nursing homes don’t have the opportunities we do here,” she says.

Christi is also excited about TVH’s upcoming new building and the new opportunities it will bring. In the meantime, she stays busy doing her own laundry, swimming, surfing, playing with visiting dogs, and lending a helping hand to fellow residents whenever she can. Christi’s energy, independence, and positive attitude make her a true cornerstone of the TVH community..



Christi Harris proudly crosses the Finish Line at the 2025 Walk n’ Roll 5k

Enduring Stories

Stories of Courage & Grace was first envisioned, organized, and brought to life in 2011 by our Board and dedicated staff. It has always been a labor of love—and just as we hoped, it’s become far more than just an event for The Virginia Home. It became a critical source of financial support that helped us sustain some of our residents’ most beloved programs and uphold the high standard of professional care they deserve. Today, the event continues to provide a powerful way to connect with longtime friends, welcome new supporters, and share the mission of The Home with the broader community.

This year, we were honored to welcome Jon Dorenbos as our guest speaker. Known both as an NFL All-Pro and a finalist on America’s Got Talent, Jon shared his powerful story of resilience, love, and forgiveness. After experiencing a heartbreaking tragedy as a child, he found solace in magic and football. Drawing from his book *Life is Magic*, Jon spoke about transforming pain into purpose—and how he’s devoted his life to helping others find light in life’s darkest moments. Many thanks to our Presenting Sponsor, NewMarket Corporation for their incredible support of this event.



Before the “main event” at The Jefferson Hotel, Jon spent the afternoon visiting with our residents, signing autographs, amazing us with magic tricks, sharing stories and passing around his Super Bowl ring, which was nearly as big as his heart!

Said attendee **Ginny Little**:

“Jon was phenomenal. He was honest, shared his hard reality, showed some vulnerability and yet brought laughter. There were moments that brought tears of empathy, but he countered with the reality of the ability he found to overcome. What an incredible story of true courage and amazing grace. He was an inspiration on so many levels—thank you for bringing him to Richmond. The Virginia Home has always been a place where I witness courage and grace—courage in the residents facing their lives with positivity and perseverance, and grace in the way the staff interacts with each one of them. I had a sister who lived (now passed) there, and a brother who calls TVH his home today—my family has truly been blessed by this amazing ‘treasure’ of RVA.”



Top: Greg Kelso looks pleased with his autographed football.

Bottom: Stories of Courage & Grace co-chairs, Trish McClendon and Jean Benson, Jon Dorenbos, Director of Development Belinda Falconer and President and CEO, Doug Vaughan.

Left: Staff member Monique Rogers models Jon’s Super Bowl ring.

Through this event, we hope our guests have been inspired to strengthen their connection with The Virginia Home, or take their first steps to get involved. With your support, there’s no limit to what The Home and its residents can achieve.

HOME TEAM HIGHLIGHTS

Behind the Scenes

OCCUPATONAL THERAPY: This spring, residents will once again watch painted lady caterpillars grow into butterflies—our third year experiencing this transformation, with a special garden release in May. **Crafty Crew** will focus on spring-themed projects to brighten up rooms and wheelchairs, and we'll debut a new switch-adapted football thrower in **Move It Groove It Arcade**, letting residents launch footballs with the push of a button!

PHYSICAL THERAPY: Each year, the PT Department hosts an “Exercise Extravaganza” in March to boost resident participation in the 5k Walk n’ Roll. Every time a resident joins in—stretching, exercising, walking—they earn an entry into a prize drawing for a \$25 gift card, rewarded at the Pep Rally. If PT hits over 1,000 visits for the month, another drawing rewards one resident with their own personal 5K. This year, we crushed our goal with 1,082 visits—a 16% jump from last year!



Junior Board members, Emily Keith (left) and Carrie Leone (right) with Carrie’s niece, Kelsey Weeks, at the Junior Board’s Cupcake Party

RECREATION THERAPY/COMMUNITY INTEGRATION: We closed out the winter with the **Junior Board’s Cupcake Party** and participation in Friendship Circle’s first **Adaptive Fashion Show**. We also welcomed Alex Avery, a Recreation Therapy intern from UNC-Wilmington. This spring, we introduced the “Glow Your Own Way” Talent Show, featuring singing, storytelling, and TVH’s improv group debut. Staff attended the **Southeast Recreation Therapy Symposium** to bring back fresh programming ideas.



Sonny Miller performed at our “Glow Your Own Way” Talent show—a new program created by our Music Therapist, Amanda Romano.

Residents enjoyed Broadway in Richmond shows like *MJ: The Musical* and *Moulin Rouge*, bingo luncheons, and celebrated **Football Pool** and March Madness winners. We also escorted a group of residents to the **2025 Adult Wheelchair Basketball National Championship Games**.

Summer will include a host of resident favorites as well as a **Travel Scholarship Trip** to Disneyworld (we have not been to Disney since February 2020). And, we’re welcoming a new program, “**Midweek Music in the Garden—live**” concerts the last Wednesday of each month, May through August, 6:30–8 p.m.

RESIDENT SERVICES: Resident Services hosts **Family Council Meetings** twice a year, typically in March and October, timed with favorite events like the **Ball** and **Halloween Boo House**. Topics range from resident rights and behavioral services to departmental updates, new policies, and life at The Home.

The March 2025 meeting was packed with excitement, featuring highlights of the new building. Families also toured a full mock-up of the new resident bedroom and bathroom, built right in our dining room here at TVH!

SOCIAL SERVICES: The Social Services team is gearing up for camp season! as several residents will head to **Camp Bruce McCoy**, **Camp Easterseals** and **SOAR 365’s Camp Baker**. Along the way, we continue supporting residents with emotional check-ins, Medicaid renewals, advance care planning, online shopping, and leading monthly groups like Residents’ Rights and Cerebral Palsy University.

SPEECH THERAPY: May is **National Speech-Language-Hearing Month!** Communication is a basic right, and the Speech Therapy team is here to support residents who need help expressing themselves. Many use **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)**, which can be low-tech—like picture boards, letter boards, or written message—or high-tech, using speech-generating devices. These devices can be activated by touch, special switches, or even eye gaze technology that selects words with just a look. For those who can’t use touch or eye gaze, new tools like the **NeuroNode** sensor allow communication through small muscle movements. Our team helps evaluate the best AAC options and provides training, ensuring residents stay connected with friends, family, and caregivers.



Dylan Milhollin created a card for our military troops with a visiting group of VCU students this spring.

VOLUNTEER SERVICES: This spring has been packed with meaningful moments and new connections, thanks to our incredible volunteers and community friends! We teamed up with **Congregation Beth Ahabah** to package activity kits, made cards for the troops with **VCU students**, and faced off in a lively **BINGO** match with **Duke Alumni’s Richmond Chapter**. We rocked with **White Oak Canyon**, sang with **St. James**, jammed with folk legend **Pam Jester**, and belted out favorites with **Madeline Laine**. We welcomed the **Delaware County Christian High School** choir and celebrated the return of our **Heart Strings** big band. **St. Bridget students** brought extra fun with music **BINGO**, bowling, and table games.

We were also blessed to continue hosting Catholic Mass and Holy Communion with the **Cathedral of the Sacred Heart**. **Bridge Club** kept spirits high, **Caring Canines** brought plenty of tail wags, and our **Fiction to Film** group had a blast with **Matilda**.

And of course—our 14th Annual 5K Walk ‘n Roll was a huge hit, with more than 281 volunteers, friends, and family joining the fun!



COMPASSION IN ACTION

Sanskriti Basnyat

Over the past few years, we have had the privilege of getting to know a wonderful volunteer, full of energy, excitement, and a heart full of kindness. Sans came to us through our partnership with the University of Richmond and their Bonner Scholars Program. She has a remarkable ability to make everyone she works with feel comfortable and valued. Sans takes the time to truly get to know each individual, learning about their hobbies, family, and personal preferences, and uses this insight to connect with them on a deeper level. Her genuine care and attention to the needs of others shine through in everything she does. Whether she’s assisting her friends in their rooms, taking them for a stroll in the park, playing a game, or simply listening, Sans makes everyone feel heard and appreciated. We know she’s destined to make a huge impact as a future doctor, but for now, we’re grateful to have her as part of our TVH Family!



ABOVE & BEYOND

Jody Young

That’s Jody Young—M.S., CTRS and now, LNHA!
Jody’s journey at The Virginia Home began in 2000 as a Recreation Therapist. Her dedication was evident from the start, and within a year, she was promoted to Director of Recreation Therapy. In that role, she led with compassion and precision—managing a team, overseeing vital programs, and playing an integral part in resident care and quality initiatives.

In 2021, Jody stepped into the role of Director of Resident Services, taking on the supervisory and leadership role of Physical, Occupational, and Speech Therapy, Recreation Therapy, and Social Services. Her commitment to person-centered care and her belief in each resident’s potential have helped shape a nurturing, therapeutic environment where our residents have thrived.

Today, we are thrilled to announce Jody’s promotion to Senior Director of Resident Services, following her successful licensing as a Licensed Nursing Home Administrator. In addition to her current responsibilities, she will lead the development and daily operations of our Adult Day Center, opening with our new facility in Fall 2027.

Jody leads with HEART. She gives generously of her time, energy, and spirit—always going above and beyond. We are so proud of all she’s accomplished and grateful for the impact she continues to make every day. Please join us in celebrating this well-earned milestone.



Residents Janet Dinkle and Mandy Mallory with Recreation Therapy Intern Alex Avery. Alex took the ladies to the Cheesecake Factory for lunch for winning a drawing at the 5K pep Rally!

Coming Attractions

Travel Scholarship Trips

May 13–17 Virginia Beach
Sept 2–6 Disney

Midweek Music in the Garden

May 28 Fetherstone, Tiller & Holmes
June 25 Karleigh Gooding
July 30 Triple Crossing Jazz Project Quartet
August 27 Vertigo

TVH Annual Fishing Tournament

June 4–5 Byrd Park Lake

TVH Annual Fall Festival

October 10 Plenty of fun activities!

Junior Board Cupcake Party

December 11 Lots of Yum!

Christmas Eve Open House

December 24 All invited!

Please visit thevirginiahome.org for our weekly calendar!

New Look, Same Mission

Our website is evolving

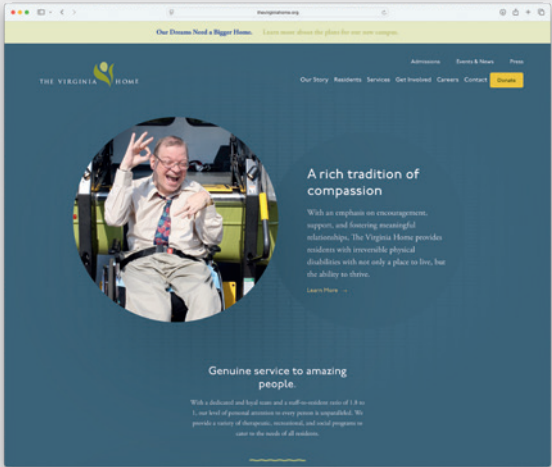
Newsletters are great for keeping our close-knit community informed, but our website and social media platforms are what connect us to the wider world. They are often the first place people go to learn about who we are, what we do, and how they can get involved. That’s why we’re especially excited to share that our website is getting a much-needed refresh—its first since 2018!

This update isn’t just about a new look. We’re moving to a more user-friendly platform that will make it easier for everyone—families, volunteers, donors, and job seekers—to find the information they need and stay connected with The Virginia Home. Whether it’s discovering upcoming events, reading resident stories, or making a donation, our goal is to make every visit to our website a smooth and engaging experience.

Over the coming weeks, we’ll be refining the site further, and we’d love to hear your thoughts along the way. If you have feedback or ideas, don’t hesitate to reach out—this space is for all of us.



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