

The Wheels of Change

The Evolution of Wheelchair Technology

For millions of people with physical disabilities, the wheelchair is more than a mode of transportation—it's a symbol of independence, dignity, and connection to the world. Over the years, wheelchair technology has evolved from simple wheeled seats into sophisticated, personalized tools that empower users to live life on their terms.

And here at The Virginia Home, we've been a part of that evolution for 131 years!

From Wheeled Furniture to High-Tech

The history of the wheelchair is one of both necessity and innovation. The earliest examples were simply modified furniture built to move those who could not walk. By the 20th century, most wheelchairs were bulky, made of heavy steel, and difficult to self-propel. Comfort was minimal. Customization? Practically nonexistent. That all began to change in the 1970s and 1980s. New materials like aluminum and titanium revolutionized the design, making wheelchairs lighter and easier to maneuver. Manufacturers started paying attention to ergonomics, adjustability, and the lived experience of the people in the chairs.

Powering Forward

Power wheelchairs entered the scene in the post-World War II era but were largely confined to hospitals due to size and cost. As battery life, motor efficiency, and electronic controls improved, power chairs became more practical—and far more versatile.

Today, modern power wheelchairs are marvels of engineering. They offer features like tilt, recline, elevating legs and seat elevation functions to help with pressure relief and positioning. These functions allow for more independence in their home and in the community. Others even include Bluetooth connectivity and smart joystick controls.

Assistive controls have advanced, too. For people with very limited mobility, options like using your head with a switch-activated head array, driving with a chin control, or using eye-gaze technology allow for fully independent movement. In research labs, brain-computer interfaces (BCIs) are even being tested—enabling people to steer a chair with thought alone.

And it's not just about movement—it's about identity. Wheelchairs reflect the personality of their users, turning a clinical tool into a point of pride. From bright titanium frames with personalized color choices to built-in lighting, the modern wheelchair is as much about expression as it is about function.

Policy Changes Close to Home

In 2024, a long-anticipated change finally arrived: Medicaid began covering wheelchairs for individuals living in nursing facilities. It's a major win for access, affordability, and autonomy. However, the gap remains: Medicare Part B still does not cover wheelchairs for people in nursing homes, leaving many residents to depend on Medicaid or other funding sources.

At The Virginia Home, these policies aren't abstract—they're personal. We serve 127 residents who rely on wheelchairs as their primary means of mobility. Every chair matters. Every adjustment matters. Every hour of uptime (or downtime) affects real lives.

That's where ingenuity—and community—step in. At The Virginia Home, we partner with **National Seating and Mobility**, a leading provider of custom mobility equipment. Our assigned Assistive Technology Professional (ATP), JJ Waldrop,



Clockwise from top: Mary Tinsley Greenhow in her seated chair, circa 1915; Richmond radio personality Harvey Hudson with resident Carrie Lee Griffin in a lightweight manual chair produced in the 1970s; a resident is able to golf thanks to innovative wheelchair technology; resident Kaleigh Cravens after receiving a new wheelchair with improved seating and alignment.

works directly with each resident alongside our own team—Occupational Therapist **Shelley Jewell** and Physical Therapist **Stacey Thomas**—to ensure each wheelchair is precisely fitted and functional.

Additionally, we are proud to be one of the only facilities of our kind in the country with a full-time wheelchair technician on staff—**Tommy Coleman**. Tommy Coleman is not only a technician, but also a lifeline. Whether he's assembling a new chair, modifying a donated power model, or replacing a worn-out part, he's ensuring that residents stay mobile, comfortable, and safe. He also cleans and maintains every chair, which significantly extends its usable life—something especially valuable in a system where insurance often dictates what's "covered" versus what's "needed."

Together, this team conducts in-depth seating and positioning evaluations—carefully considering posture, pressure relief, daily routines, and long-term needs. The goal is to ensure each resident receives a mobility device that supports their body and enhances their independence.

Kristy Rogers, mother of resident **Kaleigh Cravens**, shared, "Kaleigh's new wheelchair has made a huge difference in how she presents herself, how she participates in activities, and how much she enjoys life. It's given her a big boost in confidence. Shout out to everyone on the team who made it happen!"

Looking Ahead

Wheelchair technology will keep advancing. We expect smarter systems, lighter materials, and even more adaptive controls in the years ahead. But no matter how advanced the equipment gets, it still takes people—therapists, technicians, caregivers, and the residents themselves—to make it work well, day in and day out.

At The Virginia Home, we're ready. We're committed. And with an expert care team, and 130 residents with determination at their core, we're not only keeping up—we're leading the way.

FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

By Laura Stewart, Chair

Dear Friends:

As you all know, our residents are rather wonderful! They're an interesting group—in an average Monday morning Rec Cafe you'll find a scientist, an architect and a DJ. There are also sports fans and musical theater buffs. Our community is fun and vibrant.

I'm sure you also know about our extraordinary staff. Years ago I was attending a memorial service at The Home, and I was seated at the back of the gym with several staff members and guests. Tommy Coleman, our wheelchair technician, quietly left his spot on the wall, and walked up to a resident a few rows ahead of us. I watched as he and the resident spoke softly, then he carefully adjusted something on the resident's chair that brought him up a little higher. I don't know exactly what transpired, but from what I saw, I think he made the resident more comfortable and put him in a better position to see and hear the service. I have also seen Tommy fix the chair of a person who was touring The Home but who did not yet live there.

Another time, I was in attendance at the **Clothes Closet**, a semi-annual event hosted by our Junior Board, where residents come and "shop" for new clothes. A group of three or four Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) came into the room to find new clothes for their residents. One CNA said she thought a particular person needed new shirts, and another said that she was looking for something that one of her residents really liked. It may have been UVA t-shirts, or it might have been gym shorts. I don't remember what she was looking for, but I remember that she was demonstrating the same level of care and concern that I did when I was shopping for one of my daughters.

These are just two small examples of how our staff serves our Virginia Home community in a way that exceeds a regular job description. I am touched and thankful every time I see one of these acts of service—I am touched and thankful a lot!

Thank you for being a part of our community!



Junior Board Vice President Chris Brown with Mary Nolte at the spring Clothes Closet.

Fueling the Dream

New Leadership Joins The Home Team



The Home welcomes Karen Kardian, Advancement Associate, and David Huffine, Chief Philanthropy Officer.

Please join us in welcoming David Huffine and Karen Kardian to The Virginia Home.

This spring, David Huffine and Karen Kardian joined Belinda Falconer and Mickey Dowdy in The Virginia Home's Office of Philanthropic Advancement. Together, the team drives awareness, donor engagement, and volunteer leadership to support the Home's mission—especially as we look ahead to The New Virginia Home.

David Huffine, a Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE), joined as Chief Philanthropy Officer in February. With nearly 40 years of experience, he has led campaigns that raised more than \$800 million in support of education and human services. His work at St. Joseph's Villa in Richmond helped redevelop the campus and create a state-of-the-art Center for Autism.

David was drawn to The Home's deep compassion and bold vision. "The Virginia Home has an audacious dream to transform lives—I want to help make that dream a reality," he says. His philanthropic journey began at age 10 with a backyard carnival to support the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

Joining the team alongside David is Karen Kardian, Advancement Coordinator. A seasoned marketing and project management leader with a background in startups, Fortune 100 companies, and small business. A certified Project Management Professional (PMP), Karen is known for turning strategy into action and building strong collaborative teams.

Karen says she knew she belonged at The Virginia Home from the start. "My interview ended with chicks and bunnies—I knew I was home," she shares. "The Virginia Home is full of joy and purpose. I'm proud to support its mission."

Outside of work, Karen enjoys running, visiting local coffee shops, and spending time with her husband, their three young adult children, and their yellow lab, Penny.

With David and Karen now on board, the Advancement team is energized for the road ahead—working to grow awareness, deepen relationships, and build the future of The Virginia Home.

Pink, Poodles and Joy

Meet Nicole Fini

Nicole joined The Virginia Home in February 2025 and has quickly settled into life here. With her signature flower clip, sparkling smile, and love for all things Disney and pink, she brings a cheerful spirit wherever she goes.



One of Nicole's favorite parts of living at TVH is having her own room—and the independence that comes with it. She's also enjoyed her first big event: the 5K Walk 'n Roll, where she had a great time surrounded by family and new friends.

Nicole's beloved poodle, Lily, visits often thanks to her parents, spreading joy to everyone who stops by. She lights up talking about her niece and nephew, who love to ride on her lap in her wheelchair. "The Home makes me happy," she says. "I love spending time in Rec Therapy." Just last week, she and a new friend at The Virginia Home made matching friendship bracelets during a crafting session.

"Our daughter Nicole moved into The Virginia Home in February 2025. From the first day, we have been so pleased with the exceptional staff and the fun activities. It is truly a wonderful place," said Beth Fini.

Nicole may be new, but she's already left a lasting impression. We're so glad to welcome her to our TVH family, and we can't wait to share all that's still to come.

Tooney's First Year



Tooney Baird loves chilling at Virginia Beach with the Travel Scholarship Program.

Last summer, we introduced you to DeQuan "Tooney" Baird—a joyful new face at The Virginia Home. When he moved in, his family sent handwritten thank-you notes to every department, grateful for the warm welcome and the support that helped Tooney settle in so quickly.

Coming from a small group home with limited opportunities, Tooney couldn't be happier. "I love it here," he told us. "The people are nice, the place is nice—what more could you ask for? And I moved in at the right time too, 'cause they're building a new building!"

Since arriving, Tooney has experienced a long list of firsts—his first Fall Festival, first Boo House, first holiday parties, his first time in a swimming pool in his entire life—but none quite as special as his first-ever glimpse of the ocean. Thanks to the Travel Scholarship Program, he joined a group trip to Virginia Beach this spring. His joy was unmistakable.

"The Virginia Home has brought me so much joy and independence," Tooney says.

And we're just getting started.

HOME TEAM HIGHLIGHTS

Behind the Scenes

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY: We’ve been in full swing this summer! In May, we wrapped up our first **Opening Minds through Art (OMA)** cohort with eight residents and welcomed new volunteers for our second group, **Dudes Do Art**, which kicked off in June.

We also released five painted butterflies—**Boogie, Stitch, Iceman, Carter, and Reba**—after raising them from caterpillars in our garden.



Victor Anderson at the butterfly release celebration.

In June, we said goodbye to a student from South University who completed her final OT internship with us. We’re also excited to introduce the **Saebomas** mobile arm support, funded by **The Regirer Foundation**, which helps residents with limited mobility regain arm movement.

In **Creations with Shelley**, residents have been making staff thank-you gifts for the upcoming Health Fair, including bath bombs, kindness rocks, and handmade cards.

Programs remain lively with seasonal crafts, video games on our new **Nex Playground**, colorful nail painting, and upbeat movement in our **Move and Meditate** group.

PHYSICAL THERAPY: In June our Physical Therapist, **Stacey Thomas** passed the certification exam to become an Assistive Technology Professional. The four-hour exam covered topics including wheelchair seating/positioning, computer access, communication devices, and other technology to help people with visual or hearing impairments. This is a two-year certificate that requires specialized continuing education in the field of technology.

RECREATION THERAPY/COMMUNITY INTEGRATION: Summer means vacation—and our residents are no exception! In May, a group enjoyed a **Travel Scholarship Trip** to Virginia Beach filled with laughter, great food, shopping, dolphin cruises, and beach wheelchairs for fun in the surf and sand. We kicked off **Summer Sports** with a successful **Fishing Tournament** in early June, followed by bowling in the gym. July brings baseball, and we’ll wrap up the season with kickball in August.

We also welcomed **Raegan Miller**, our new Recreation Therapy intern from Longwood University, who will be with us through August. This spring, **Sara Jarrett** and **Jessi Young** represented The Virginia Home at **Mobility Works’ Disability Resource Fair**, sharing our mission and connecting with the community.

Our **Midweek Concert Series**, now called **Jammin’ in the Gym**, is heating up! May featured **Fetherston, Tiller & Holmes**—whose band member is related to resident **Patricia Tiller**. In June, **Karleigh Gooding** performed, with a fun connection—her mom Rachel worked in our Recreation Therapy department in the early 2000s!

Thanks to a grant awarded to the **Center for Creative Healing**, we’re now offering **Art Therapy** twice a month, led by certified art therapist **Kara Wilson**. Music therapy visits have also been added to support residents’ emotional well-being.

Outings included **Broadway shows** at the Altria, boat rides with **Beyond Boundaries**, the **Special Olympics State Games**, **Flying Squirrels** games, movies, and more as summer continues.

SPEECH THERAPY: Good oral hygiene is essential for adults—it supports clear speech, safe swallowing, and overall health. A clean mouth reduces infection risk, supports saliva production, and helps maintain the strength and flexibility of the lips and tongue for chewing and speaking.

Because oral health is so closely tied to speech and swallowing, our speech therapy team oversees the **dental clinic** at The Home—ensuring every resident has the care needed for healthy, functional dentition.

VOLUNTEER SERVICES: Summer is in full swing—and so is the incredible energy from our volunteers!

We’re grateful to **Cathedral of the Sacred Heart** for a generous collection of care items and supplies, and to **Windsor Farms Garden Club** for brightening our garden beds. Chef **Rosa Boshier** and guest chef **Kaytee Hadley** treated us to tasty vegetarian dishes and nutrition tips, while **Jordyn Eviez**, our summer intern, has quickly become a valued member of our team.



Johnny Holmes with Flying Squirrels’ mascots, Nutzy and Nutasha

Music lifted our spirits thanks to **Pam Jester, Madeline Laine**, and singalongs with our friends from **St. James’s Episcopal Church**. **Redeemer Anglican Church** hosted a joyful bowling day, **Caring Canines** continued their beloved **Puppy Parades**, and our **Junior Board Ice Cream Socials** brought the perfect scoop of summer joy. **Befriend** also warmed our hearts with flowers and handwritten notes.

We’re thankful to all who make these moments possible!

spirit night at
gelati celesti!

Join us for The Virginia Home’s Spirit Night at Gelati Celesti

Monday, August 11th
3:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Stony Point Shopping Center
3004 Stony Point Road
Richmond, VA 23235

A photograph of three small cups of Gelati Celesti ice cream. The cups are pink and white, with the brand name "gelati celesti" written on them. They are filled with various flavors of ice cream, including what looks like chocolate, vanilla, and fruit. The background is a light blue and white geometric pattern.



GAME NIGHT HERO

Cameron Bonsell

If you visit The Virginia Home on a Tuesday evening, you’ll likely find a circle of friends gathered in laughter, conversation, and friendly competition. At the center of it all is Cameron. After a full day of work, he chooses to spend his evening with his second family—our residents.

Cameron is one of our most generous, consistent, and kind-hearted volunteers. He’s built a close-knit group of game-night regulars, yet always makes room for new faces. His warmth and inclusivity are felt not just by residents, but by staff as well.

As a dedicated liaison to Redeemer Anglican Church, he’s helped bring in enthusiastic volunteers who call out BINGO, play table games, bowl, wrap gifts, make cards, and support our special events. His leadership also shines through in organizing collection drives, securing donations through grants, and sharing our mission with everyone he meets.

We are so grateful for Cameron’s time, his heart, and dedication to this community.



MAN BEHIND THE WHEELS

Tommy Coleman

As mentioned in our cover story, The Virginia Home is proud to be one of the only facilities of our kind in the country with a full-time wheelchair technician on staff—Tommy Coleman.

Tommy’s role complements clinical expertise with real-time, on-site responsiveness. When a joystick breaks or a part stops working, he’s not across town—he’s just down the hall. That speed of service matters. Because a small mechanical issue isn’t small when it stops someone from joining a social event, enjoying the outdoors, or safely getting to dinner.

More than that, Tommy personalizes each chair to reflect the resident’s life. He helps apply custom features, adaptive supports, and even aesthetic touches—because we believe mobility devices should fit the person, not just their body, but their identity.

We believe mobility is more than movement—it’s access to community, confidence, and joy. Whether our residents are taking in a show at Altria, cheering on a 5K, or simply rolling back to Rec Café, their wheelchair is their foundation. Tommy helps to keep those wheels turning—smoothly, safely, and with purpose. We are grateful to have Tommy, a nineteen-year veteran of The Virginia Home as a vital member of our care team.



Junior Board members Kirkland Hagerty and Colleen Duffy with resident Tyler Bowers, along with future TVH volunteers, MK Duffy and Ruffin Hagerty at the Junior Board Ice Cream Social.

Coming Attractions

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|---------|--|--------|--|
| Jul 23 | Guest Speaker, Matthew Shapiro | Dec 10 | Junior Board Cupcake Party |
| Aug 8 | Life Rolls On Adaptive Surfing: Virginia Beach | Dec 24 | Christmas Eve Open House. All invited! |
| Sep 2–6 | Disney Travel Trip: Orlando | | |
| Oct 10 | Fall Festival at TVH | | |
| Oct 11 | Hanover Concert Band | | |
| Oct 16 | Junior Board Clothes Closet | | |
| Oct 30 | Halloween Boo House & Social | | |

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|-----------------------------|--|--------|--------------------------------------|
| Midweek Music in the Garden | | | |
| | | Jul 30 | Triple Crossing Jazz Project Quartet |
| | | Aug 27 | Vertigo |

Please visit thevirginiahome.org for our weekly calendar!

Disability Pride Month

A Visit from Matthew Shapiro

The Virginia Home celebrated Disability Pride Month on Wednesday, July 23rd with **Matthew Shapiro of 6 Wheels Consulting**. Residents attended his workshop, “How to Become the Ultimate Determinator: Activating your Life Skills to Maximize the Most out of Every Day.”

As a person with a disability, Matthew has spent most of his life motivated to teach those he has met how to better understand the disability community and inclusion. Through this work it has become his life’s mission to educate others regarding disability related issues. With this thought in mind, in December of 2014, he created 6 Wheels Consulting. Working with those in both the private and public sectors he hopes to expand their understanding of disabilities and inclusion to give them the tools they can use in any environment. Matthew has had the privilege of sitting on numerous disability boards and speaking at a variety of conferences both locally and nationally. **For more information: www.6wheelsconsulting.com**



Disability Pride Month, is an annual observance in July that celebrates people with disabilities, commemorates the signing of the American Disabilities Act and promotes disability culture and visibility.



Help support these and other programs: Make your donation online by scanning the code or by visiting thevirginiahome.org/get-involved/donate

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