

Home Happenings

Number 62 / Winter 2025/26



Clockwise from top: Sarah Goldmann gets a congratulatory smooch from a furry friend at the 5K Walk 'n Roll; Jack Bohannon gets a front-row seat for card tricks from Stories of Courage & Grace™ speaker Jon Dorenbos; James Gray helps lead the Groundbreaking Watch Party at The Virginia Home; Nicole Fini brings Snow White to life at the Boo House; and Frank Smith tries his luck at the annual Fishing Tournament. Four residents enjoyed our first return trip to Disney since the pandemic.

The Power of Us

How Our Community Shapes the Year Ahead

As 2026 begins, we pause to reflect on a remarkable year at The Virginia Home. While the holiday celebrations have passed, the spirit of generosity, compassion, and connection continues—thanks to the extraordinary people who make our community thrive.

It Truly Takes a Village

Our staff is the heartbeat of The Virginia Home, bringing skill, dedication, and genuine compassion to every resident every day. In 2025, we proudly honored twenty team members with service awards, recognizing 5 to 30 years of remarkable commitment—including Belinda Cosby and Jody Young at 25 years, and Sandra Giles at an incredible 30 years. One-third of our staff have served 10 years or more, with nearly half of those devoted for two decades or longer. From hands-on care to leading departments and keeping our facilities running smoothly, these extraordinary individuals go above and beyond—making The Virginia Home a place residents are proud to call home.

But our strength doesn't stop with staff. Our dedicated **Board of Trustees**, passionate **Junior Board**, and countless volunteers, families, and friends are at the heart of life at The Home. Their energy, time, and care bring programs and experiences to life that would not exist without them. Supporting this vibrant community are generous individuals, foundations, and businesses whose gifts power the services that keep our mission moving forward.

And those contributions matter—because they shape the memories our residents will carry with them for years to come. In 2025, that support brought extraordinary moments to life: a visit from magician and former Philadelphia Eagle **Jon Dorenbos** that left residents wide-eyed in wonder; our long-awaited return to Disney for the first time since the pandemic; traditions like the Fall Fest, Boo House, our annual Fishing Tournament, as well as beloved holiday celebrations. Even simple afternoons spent together on the front porch became reminders of how strong and joyful this community is.

In 2025, the involvement of so many—not just a few—made all the difference. Every act of kindness, every volunteer hour, and every gift—large or

small—helped create a community where residents felt secure, supported, and truly valued. Together, our collective commitment filled the year with love and memories that show what's possible when people come together for a shared purpose.

Celebrating a Historic Milestone

In 2025, we also marked one of the most pivotal moments in The Virginia Home's 131-year history: breaking ground on our future home in Hanover County. It was a day filled with anticipation, excitement, and hope. While shovels turned at the new site, residents at 1101 Hampton Street gathered for a watch party—cheering, smiling, and celebrating right alongside us. The joy and pride in our gymnasium reminded everyone why this project matters: it's about creating a home that will support generations to come with the care, dignity, and opportunities they deserve.

This monumental day connected our present home with our future one, symbolizing both the progress we've made and the promise of what's ahead. For a closer look at the celebration, see our full-page insert highlighting photos, reflections, and memories from that historic moment.

This will be the fourth—and we hope final—move for The Virginia Home, and like any big transition, we feel a mix of excitement and a little nervousness. Yet our mission remains steadfast: to provide a rich, meaningful life for our residents, where every day is filled with possibility.

The Road Ahead

As we step into 2026, we look forward to a year of continued growth and achievement. Together, we will create new opportunities, celebrate milestones, and continue nurturing a community where everyone feels truly at home.

From our family at The Virginia Home to yours, thank you. Your care, generosity, and partnership make every step forward possible, and we are grateful to have you with us as we enter this exciting new chapter.

FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

By Laura Stewart, Chair

Dear Friends:

I began my relationship with The Virginia Home as a coffee volunteer in recreation therapy. "Rec Café" takes place six days a week from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. All the therapy departments provide valuable services, and they are all fun, but it seems everyone eventually finds their way to rec therapy. (That's where the coffee is, right?)

A few weeks ago, on a Monday morning, I was visiting with a resident who has been a friend since my earliest days at The Home. He was showing me a robot he was building, recently adding the eyeballs and programming their response to sound. Not being a technical person myself, I was impressed—and curious—about how he was doing it.

That conversation led us to hobbies more generally. We all know about **Andy Stuart's** paintings and **Brian Angle's** DJ skills (look him up on YouTube—the CP DJ!). But there's so much more creativity happening at The Home. Residents are building Lego projects, exploring crafts, and even propagating Thai basil plants. Every week, there's something new to admire.

It's such a fun way to start the weekz good conversation, good company, and a front-row seat to the creativity that fills The Home. Being a Rec Café volunteer is definitely the most fun.

A major highlight of the year came when work officially broke ground for our future campus in Hanover County. Back at The Home, residents tuned in together for a lively watch party, cheering as the groundbreaking marked the beginning of a new chapter.

As we enter a new year, these moments remind me that The Virginia Home is a place of curiosity, connection, and possibility. Here's to another year of supporting one another and building our future together.



Laura Stewart and Al Allen at the November Groundbreaking Ceremony in Hanover.

Finding Her Voice Again

Joanne's Story

When Joanne arrived at The Virginia Home after a devastating stroke in 2017, her life looked completely different from the one she had built in New York City. Before her stroke, Joanne had been a highly successful publisher, shaping stories, guiding writers, and leading creative teams at several major publications. Words were her world—until aphasia, a language disorder caused by her stroke, made communication one of her greatest challenges.

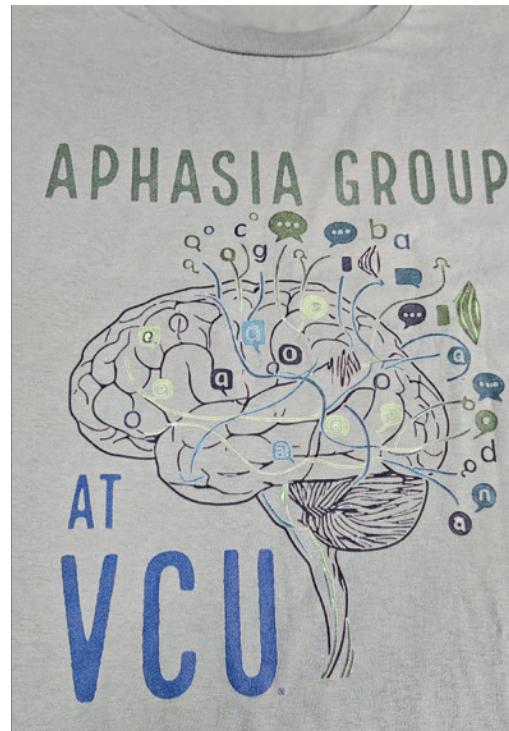
Living with aphasia is not easy. It can affect speaking, understanding, reading, and writing—skills Joanne once mastered with ease. But Joanne's spirit, determination, and creativity remain as strong as ever. Here at The Virginia Home, she has become a beloved member of the community and a source of inspiration for many.

Joanne participates in a monthly Aphasia Support Group, where residents and others living with similar challenges come together to share experiences, frustrations, and triumphs. Recently, the group decided they wanted something special—something that would symbolize their strength and unity. They envisioned a T-shirt that would speak for them when words were hard to find.

Naturally, everyone turned to Joanne. With her background in publishing and design, she was the perfect person to bring the idea to life. Joanne eagerly took on the project, sketching, refining, and creating a design that beautifully captures the heart of the group's message.

When the shirts arrived, the excitement was contagious. The bold, thoughtful design was a hit—every member beamed with pride as they put on their new shirts for the first time. It wasn't just a T-shirt; it was a statement of resilience, creativity, and shared understanding.

Through her design, Joanne reminded everyone that communication takes many forms—and that even when words are hard to find, the human spirit still speaks loud and clear.



The T-shirt designed by Joanne Konstantinakos. The back side reads "Supporting each other, one word at a time."

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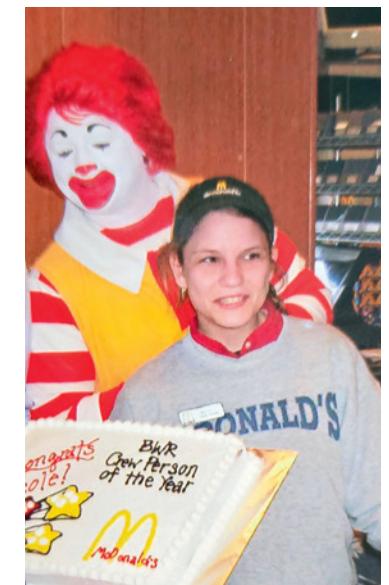
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I'm Lovin' It!

Nicole Martin

Originally from Hopewell, Virginia, **Nicole Martin** has quickly become a bright, stylish presence at The Virginia Home. The oldest of three siblings and daughter of Bonnie and Skip, Nicole brings warmth, humor, and confidence to her daily life here.



Nicole enjoys a routine that suits her well: a late wake-up around 9:30 or 10:00 a.m., Wheel of Fortune, lunch, and an afternoon devoted to her favorite soaps—"The Bold and the Beautiful" and "The Young and the Restless." She looks forward to physical therapy, where she stands with support, works the pulleys, and rides the bike. "It makes me tired, but I work hard!" she says proudly. On weekends, she relaxes with movies and reruns, and her room is already glowing with holiday lights.

Fashion is one of Nicole's great passions. She picks all her outfits herself and never shies away from bright colors or bold shoes. When asked what has surprised her most about life at The Home, she shared, "They're so good to me." She's grown especially close to staff members Peggy, Shawn, and Roe, and hopes they'll continue caring for her after the upcoming move.

Before coming to The Virginia Home, Nicole spent 20 years building a remarkable career at McDonald's in Hopewell. She started at 16 to help pay for gas and insurance on the car her dad bought her, eventually earning the region's Crew Person of the Year award out of 30,000 employees. She even received a surprise visit from Ronald McDonald and a \$500 prize. Loved by customers and co-workers, she became a true fixture in her community.

Today, Nicole has made The Virginia Home her home—and we are grateful for the joy and spirit she brings every day.

REIMAGINING OUR REACH

VCU Robertson School students share bold marketing ideas

As The Virginia Home prepares for its 2027 expansion—including increased residential capacity and a new day program—we are taking meaningful steps to strengthen how we share our mission with the wider community. This fall, we partnered with students from the VCU Robertson School of Communications to help reimagine how we tell our story.

The class took on an important opportunity: helping more people learn about the impact of The Virginia Home. Working in two agency-style teams, students conducted audience research, explored community perceptions, and identified what makes The Home stand out within disability support services. From there, they developed recommendations to raise visibility and deepen understanding of who we are and whom we serve.

Their ideas ranged from updated brand messaging to creative social media concepts that highlight resident stories and spark engagement. We are now reviewing their proposals and expect to launch a refreshed social media campaign on Instagram and Facebook in the coming months. Make sure to follow us!



HOME TEAM HIGHLIGHTS

Behind the Scenes

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY: We wrapped up the year on a high note! Leading into the holidays, residents made ornaments and seasonal crafts in **Crafty Crew**, while **Creations with Shelley** focused on heartfelt gifts like birdseed wreaths, poured-paint flowerpots with succulents, and resin bird and star suncatchers. OT and PT teamed up for December's **Move It Groove It Arcade**—where residents enjoyed festive games and a lively **Santa Pants Snowball Fight**.

OT also closed out the year with the third annual **Holiday Lip Sync Battle**, featuring staff from across The Home competing for the top spot. A perennial favorite, **Fine Motor Fun** continued weekly, using tabletop activities like knocking down foam cans, tossing squishy balls, using tongs for color-matching, and building PVC pipe patterns to strengthen hands and arms and support greater independence.

PHYSICAL THERAPY: We kept the holiday spirit going with a food drive for **Feed More**, with staff and residents rallying together to support families in need. We also added some festive fun by running a lighthearted poll: just how many times will Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas Is You" was played during one week in December!

RECREATION THERAPY/COMMUNITY

INTEGRATION: We kicked off last fall October with a great **Fall Festival**, where everyone enjoyed a crisp morning with coffee, cider, donuts, live music, games, clowns from **Clown Alley #3**, face painting by **Honey**, a **Pumpkin Decorating Contest**, and cuddles with animals from **Flat Creek Farm Petting Zoo**.

At month's end, our **Halloween Boo House Social** brought a Jaws theme, DJ Jason Paige, Bruster's ice cream, and a giant octopus balloon filling the gym.

In November, we celebrated our **Community Integration Team** during **National Patient Transport Week** and enjoyed **Kimberly Akimbo** at the Altria. Recreation Therapy also transformed into a **Holiday Workshop** to help residents create gifts and spread cheer as we head into the New Year.



Chris Shepperd, MSW, joins our Social Services Team

SOCIAL SERVICES: Last fall, we held our annual **TVH Day at the Polls** and assisted more than sixty residents with absentee ballots. We continued supporting residents through daily emotional and behavioral care, completing annual Medicaid renewals, and leading monthly educational groups on **Cerebral Palsy and Residents' Rights**.

We're also excited to welcome **Chris Shepperd, MSW**, to the Social Services Department! Chris brings more than a decade of experience across human services, health, education, and mental health. His background includes supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, working with young adults with serious mental illness, and serving two years

in the Peace Corps in Nicaragua, where he led youth programs and health education initiatives. We're grateful for the expertise and calm, thoughtful presence he brings. Please join us in welcoming Chris!

SPEECH THERAPY: Exciting developments are on the horizon for our speech therapy programs! Our new facility will offer larger, purpose-designed spaces, enabling more 1:1 sessions, expanded group programs, and additional speech therapy options—helping residents grow in communication, cognition, and independence.

Our Lead Speech-Language Pathologist recently attended the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association Conference, exploring emerging technologies and AI in clinical practice. A standout moment: seeing a wheelchair controlled entirely by eye movements—a glimpse of the inspiring possibilities for assistive technology! We can't wait to bring these innovations into daily therapy at TVH.



Darrell Chew enjoyed a visit from Ron Jones, sax player with the ever popular Hanover Concert Band.

VOLUNTEER SERVICES: The holiday spirit shone bright at The Home! Danny's Ladies transformed our hallways into a holly-jolly wonderland, the Windsor Farms Garden Club decorated every Christmas tree, and the Ashberry Crew braved the cold to bring festive cheer to the garden.

Gifts of the season came in many forms—homemade cards from Maggie L. Walker Governor's School, arcade fun with CarMax, and singing and sweets at our Junior Board Holiday Party. We shared laughs with **Clown Alley #3** and loved seeing **Caring Canines** in their holiday best. Music filled the halls with visits from **Common Table Church**, **Pam Jester**, a **Christmas Quintet**, and **Betsy Lynn & the Boys**.

Thanks to **Redeemer Anglican Church**, **McKesson**, and our **Junior Board**, we were wrapped and ready for the big day. We're grateful to all who helped make the season special.

Members of the **Windsor Farms Garden Club** decorated The Home for the holiday season.



THE POWER OF MUSIC

Pam Jester

If you've ever passed our Rec Room on a day when Pam Jester is here, you've likely heard the sound of music, laughter, and pure enjoyment filling the room.

Pam is a gifted folk singer who generously shares her talents with us each month, and every visit feels like a mini concert! Her performances offer more than melodies. Residents sing along to familiar favorites, discover new tunes, make requests, and enjoy the thoughtful stories and music history Pam incorporates into each program. With her soothing voice and genuine love of the craft, she turns a simple Saturday afternoon into something truly special. Her presence lifts spirits, sparks conversations, and brings people together in a way only music can. We can't thank Pam enough for sharing her gift with us. Her visits have become a treasured part of our month, reminding us all of the joy, connection, and healing that music brings into our lives.



BRIGHTENING EVERY DAY

Lillian Hayes

If you've spent even a few minutes around Lillian, you know exactly why she's such a valued part of our **Environmental Services** team. She brings a cheerful spirit to every corner of The Virginia Home, greeting residents and staff with the same warmth and positivity each day.

Lillian is known not only for her reliability and hard work, but for her heart. She crochets hats and other handmade items for anyone who asks—an expression of care that has more than a few people convinced she's channeling Mary Tinsley Greenhow herself. Her thoughtfulness is matched by her commitment to our **CORE** values, which she upholds effortlessly in her interactions and her work.

Even on the busiest days, Lillian's attitude never wavers. If she ever has a bad moment, you'd never know it. Her affectionate, caring nature shines through in everything she does, and her genuine love for TVH is felt by everyone around her.

Her supervisor, **Mark Conyard**, shared it best: "Lillian's kindness and generosity goes unnoticed by NO ONE. She always tells me what a great supervisor I am, but I want her to know she makes my job easier every day. She's a joy to work with, and always brings a smile to my face."

If we could clone her, we absolutely would. Until then, we're grateful to have the one and only Lillian—brightening our halls, lifting spirits, and showing what excellence looks like, day after day.

Help Us Say "Yes"

Your gift transforms real lives

Brooks used to spend most of his time alone, watching parades on his iPad and imagining worlds just out of reach. Visitors were welcome, but others were often met with a firm "No."

At The Virginia Home, we don't give up that easily. With patience, kindness, and trusted staff by his side, Brooks began saying "yes."

Brooks' true metamorphosis began when he was paired with Dianna through our Personal Assistant Loving Support (PALS) Program—a daily companionship initiative built on trust and consistency. Dianna showed up every day, and over time, Brooks let her in. He began attending community events, smiling, exploring, and engaging with the world—not just watching parades, but becoming part of the celebration. This September, he went to Disney World with his Virginia Home family, experiencing the lights, music, and magic firsthand.

Your gift today ensures that more residents like Brooks receive the care, support, and opportunities they need to thrive. Every donation opens doors, builds confidence, and makes dreams come true.



Help us keep saying "yes." Make your donation online by scanning the code or by visiting thevirginiahome.org/giving



Brooks meets Minnie Mouse during our first Travel Scholarship back to Disney since the pandemic.



Happy New Year from Larry Watson and everyone at The Virginia Home!

Coming Attractions

Jan 19 MLK Service Project
Feb 11 Junior Board Valentine's Party
Mar 5 The Biennial Ball
Mar 26 Stories of Courage & Grace
Apr 11 Annual 5k Walk n' Roll

Please visit thevirginiahome.org for our weekly calendar and follow us on social for up-to-the-minute news:



thevirginiahome.org



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US POSTAGE PAID

Richmond, VA 23220

1101 Hampton Street



Produced by the Office for Philanthropic Advancement
Editor: Belinda Falconer
Printing: Worth Higgins Associates

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