

Home Happenings

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Twice the Bond

Residents and their twins navigate life together

For many residents at The Virginia Home, sibling relationships are among the deepest bonds in their lives. But for twins, that connection often feels even more extraordinary—shaped not only by shared experiences, but by a bond that began before memory itself. Across the community are a dozen sets of twins, each with stories of loyalty, humor, caregiving, advocacy, and lifelong companionship.

Brothers, Caregivers, Best Friends

For Darryl and David, being twins has meant navigating both brotherhood and responsibility. Growing up, life did not always allow them to simply be brothers. “If



things had been different for us as children,” David says with a laugh, “we would have been terrors.” Like many siblings, they developed their own language of teasing and “talking smack,” while deeper emotions often went unspoken. But in a quiet moment, Darryl describes David more simply: his “best friend, forever.”

After their mother died in 2016, Darryl moved in with David, and their relationship shifted from brothers to brother and caregiver—not always an easy balance. But after Darryl moved to The Virginia Home, pieces of their old dynamic slowly returned. During this year’s Walk ‘n Roll 5K, David watched as Darryl waved him off with a grin and rolled away with two volunteers, confidently declaring, “I got this.” For a moment, David was not a caregiver or advocate—just a proud brother watching his twin move forward independently.

Growing Up Side by Side

Nicole and Kelly’s story also began side by side. As little girls, they shared a crib, played dress-up, and took tap dance lessons together. At four years old, Nicole performed in a recital using her walker to “keep right up” with Kelly on stage.

As they grew older, the sisters celebrated birthdays together, participated in 4-H, and performed in talent shows. Watching Nicole navigate therapy and medical care also shaped Kelly’s future career as a physical therapist. Nicole later stood beside Kelly as a bridesmaid and became godmother to Kelly’s daughter. When the time came to find a residential community for Nicole, Kelly wanted a place where her sister would feel supported and included. She found that community at The Virginia Home.



For identical twins Kaleigh Cravens and Erica Cravens Ferguson, twinhood feels inseparable from identity itself. Born prematurely, the sisters spent months together in the NICU before finally going home. During that time, they experienced something that amazed their doctors: while sleeping in separate rooms, both girls would simultaneously display the Harlequin Reflex for the exact same length of time.



As children, the sisters’ shared medical challenges sometimes created tension between them. But maturity brought a deeper understanding. “I like our unique bond,” Erica says. “I feel like this is special—I’ve never been alone.”

For Kaleigh, moving to The Virginia Home unexpectedly strengthened their relationship. “Moving here gave me independence,” she says. “It changed our relationship for the better.”

Humor, Loss, and a Lifelong Presence

Other twins describe lives shaped by humor and resilience. Jason remembers growing up

with his twin brother Danny as a life full of laughter and unpredictability. Family members recall Jason proudly introducing Danny to strangers by blurting out, “He’s my twin—he’s handicapped!”

“Growing up with Danny as my twin, you learn pretty fast that life is more fun when you stop worrying about what everyone else thinks,” Jason says. “He has a gift of pure, uncomplicated joy, and it spreads to everyone around him.”

Peter and Andrew were inseparable. Most people could not tell them apart. Their father jokingly called them “Pete and Repeat.” If you knew them, you couldn’t mistake them though, because Andrew would talk your ear off, and would often answer before Peter could get a word in edgewise! Sister Grace remembers, “They got along well, and Andrew would always look out for Peter’s well-being.”



Barbara describes her twin brother Bruce even more simply: “My brother was born a gentleman—he even let me be born first, three minutes ahead of him!” As she shared photographs of them together through the years, her affection for



him was unmistakable. In every image, Bruce’s gentle spirit and steady presence seemed to shine through.

Stories like these reveal how disability can shape sibling relationships through caregiving, protectiveness, advocacy, humor, and sacrifice. But they also reflect something more enduring: two lives beginning together, growing into their own people, yet never fully apart. Some relationships are formed over time. For twins, some begin before either person even takes their first breath.

Left column from top to bottom: Darryl and David—then and now; Kelly and Nicole—then and now; Kaleigh and Erica—then and now. Right column from top to bottom: Jason and Danny; Andrew and Peter; Barbara and Bruce.

FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

By Laura Stewart, Chair

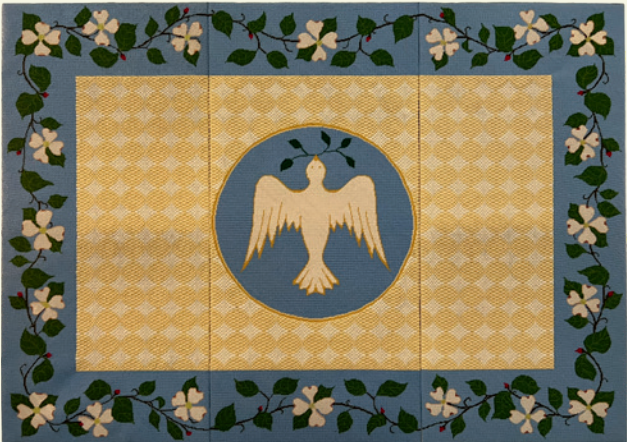
Dear Friends:

For about ten years before I joined the **Board of Trustees**, I volunteered regularly in **Rec Cafe**, serving coffee to the residents for a few hours on alternate Monday mornings. I loved getting to know the residents and hearing people’s life stories. I still do—now I love that many of my friendships have “history,” and it’s fun to meet new folks as they move into The Home.

One unexpected benefit of serving on the board is meeting a wider range of members of The Home’s community and hearing even more stories. I recently had lunch with an Honorary Board member who has been involved with The Home for decades. She shared wonderful stories of a former board member who kept a sewing machine at The Home so she could sew aprons for volunteers, and another who scraped down and refinished furniture after one of the renovations. She remembers the women who needlepointed the beautiful wall hanging in the chapel that sometimes plays a role in memorial services.

About a week later, Doug and I had the chance to visit with a lovely lady whose brother lives at The Home. Her brother is a gentle man with an infectious grin who is beloved by many people in and out of The Home. I loved hearing his story and getting to know the dear sister who cares for him so well. I found her very inspirational, but she credits her parents and their faith as the reason her brother is the remarkable person he is today.

If you are reading this message, you may have a Virginia Home story, and I’d love to hear it. Or maybe you’d like to come for a visit and create some connections of your own? We’d love to see you either way!



This beautiful needlepoint dove and olive branch was created by board members years ago. It matches a pall, which our Chaplain keeps in a box in the chapel.

Take Two

Jack Bohannon’s second play

As part of The Virginia Home’s community integration program, residents regularly attend plays and musicals—outings that are always met with excitement. But for one resident, the magic of theater doesn’t stop when the curtain closes. He brings it home and creates it himself. In fact, he’s now done it twice.

Jack Bohannon, a resident of The Virginia Home since 2005, recently premiered his second original production, “O’Sullivan’s Castle: The Mystery of the Missing Holy Sword.” The April performance marked another milestone for Jack, whose love of theater has become a true creative passion.

Jack credits his Irish heritage, his parents’ encouragement of the arts, and childhood visits to Busch Gardens’ “Ireland” with inspiring the play. He has loved theater since he was young, especially set design and special effects. During the pandemic, he began writing his first play, “The Circus That Went Wrong,” inspired by trips to the circus in his youth. With support from staff, Jack produced and starred in the play as the ringmaster last November.

“Performing is in my blood,” Jack said, adding that writing plays is “especially rewarding and a self-esteem builder.” Now, with two productions behind him, Jack is already hard at work on take three: “The Phantom of The Virginia Home.”



Jack Bohannon and his production crew (left to right): Cassy Harper, Molly Fisher, Mark Conyard, Jackie Baylor, Mike Hamilton, Jody Young, Stacey Thomas and Amanda Romano

A Gift Inspired by Love and Legacy

A generous lead gift from Board Member **Leigh Sewell** is helping bring a vibrant new gathering space to life at The Virginia Home—one inspired by the remarkable life and spirit of her daughter, **Taylor Bernard**.

Named **Tay’s Place**, the new **Recreation Lounge and Adaptive Gaming Space** at The Virginia Home’s new home in Hanover will create opportunities for residents, families, and friends to connect, relax, and enjoy time together. The space will feature cozy areas for reading, conversation, and Bible study, along with games such as billiards, foosball, and Rummikub. An adjoining adaptive gaming area will offer interactive experiences and virtual reality activities designed for people of all abilities.



Leigh Sewell and Pia Scott participated in the photo shoot in support of the Alivia clothing line featuring Taylor Bernard’s art work.

Earlier this year, Leigh Sewell found another meaningful way to celebrate Taylor’s creativity and support the project. She partnered with New York fashion designer, **Jovanna Mullins**, whose work features artwork created by people with disabilities, to develop a special collection inspired by Taylor’s original art.

Several Virginia Home residents participated in a joyful photo shoot modeling the collection. With salon styling, music, dancing, and laughter throughout the day, the event became a celebration not only of fashion and creativity, but also of Taylor’s life and enduring impact on others.

This spring, Leigh also hosted a special trunk show in her home to benefit Tay’s Place. Guests gathered to view the collection, meet Jovanna, and learn more about the vision for the new space and its impact on future residents of The Virginia Home.

We are deeply grateful to Leigh Sewell for her generosity, creativity, and commitment to helping create a place where residents will experience connection, inclusion, and joy for years to come



Taylor Bernard

The Life and Spirit of Taylor Bernard — Always Rising
Taylor Bernard never allowed Cerebral Palsy to define her. Independent, creative, and determined, she approached life with energy and optimism that inspired everyone around her.

An accomplished artist, equestrian, advocate, and graduate of **Virginia Commonwealth University**, Taylor lived boldly and embraced every opportunity. At just 13 years old, she became the youngest certified primary handler for a service dog—one of many examples of her determination and perseverance.

To family and friends, Taylor was known for being resilient, compassionate, and endlessly resourceful. She especially loved hot air balloons, which became a fitting symbol of the way she lived—always rising, always reaching higher.

Although Taylor passed away in July 2024, her spirit continues to inspire those who knew and loved her. Through Tay’s Place, her legacy will live on in a space designed to encourage friendship, recreation, independence, and possibility for every resident who gathers there.

HOME TEAM HIGHLIGHTS

Behind the Scenes

OCCUPATONAL THERAPY: Our Occupational Therapy department has had an exciting spring. Residents and staff recently watched 13 butterflies emerge from their chrysalises, followed by a butterfly release celebration. We are also pleased to welcome **Amanda Bourne**, an occupational therapy assistant student from South University, whose May fieldwork visits—along with her volunteer support at our **Walk n’ Roll 5K** and **Move It Groove It Arcade** events—have made her a wonderful addition to the community. In April, our team shared its expertise at a Hampton conference sponsored by the **Training and Technical Assistance Center** at Old Dominion University, presenting on adapting interactive group activities using switches. Looking ahead, we are excited to host five South University students on June 1 for a presentation on assistive technology.



During a stop in Richmond on their cross-country “Walk for Peace” pilgrimage, a Buddhist monk shared a moment of kindness with resident Tracy Fryar, who received a bracelet. The silent walking meditation journey promotes compassion, mindfulness, and peace across the country.

RECREATION THERAPY/COMMUNITY INTEGRATION: Spring has been a busy season in Recreation Therapy. Residents enjoyed a Hollywood-themed ball in March, followed by another successful Walk n’ Roll 5K. Outings this spring included **Broadway in Richmond** productions, **Flying Squirrels** games at CarMax Park, and the **Banana Ball Tour**.

In May, four residents traveled to Sandbridge for a **Travel Scholarship Trip** featuring beach time, shopping, dining, and a visit to the Aquarium. A catered cookout with live music also brought together residents, families, and staff for a special celebration.

We also welcomed summer intern **Kara Thackston**, a recreation therapy student from East Carolina University. Looking ahead, residents can enjoy



Krista Killelea and Maeve Kravitz during our May Travel Scholarship trip to Virginia Beach. These meaningful experiences are made possible by dedicated staff who go above and beyond and generous donors who help turn our residents’ travel dreams into treasured memories.

more baseball outings, the **Annual Fishing Tournament**, **Special Olympics State Games**, **Summer Sports**, and the return of the popular “Jammin’ in the Gym” music series.

SOCIAL SERVICES: The Social Services team has remained active this spring, supporting residents through meaningful programs and engagement opportunities. Staff recently presented at **Family Council** to share updates on services and resident support initiatives, and also assisted residents in participating in the special election.

As camp season begins, 11 residents are preparing to attend three different camps focused on recreation, friendship, and new experiences. Social Services also continues to lead several resident favorites, including **Cerebral Palsy University**, the **Residents’ Rights Group**, and weekly **Dungeons & Dragons** gatherings.

SPEECH THERAPY: As summer begins, we continue to recognize the importance of communication, connection, and compassionate care. For individuals recovering from stroke or living with conditions such as aphasia or Parkinson’s disease, communication can become challenging and isolating. Speech therapy is about more than exercises—it is about restoring confidence, independence, and connection. Whether it is ordering a coffee, calling a friend, or sharing a story, each milestone matters.

We celebrate the resilience of the individuals we serve and the meaningful progress they make every day.



Our 14th Annual Stories of Courage & Grace event with Team Agar was a hit! Stay tuned for exciting news about our plans for 2027!

VOLUNTEER SERVICES: This year has already been filled with kindness and connection. We welcomed back **Congregation Beth Ahabah** for our **MLK Day Service Project** and **BINGO** with **Duke Alumni’s Richmond Chapter**, along with musical visits from **Betsy Lynne and the Boys**, **Pam Jester**, and **St. James**. Our Junior Board continued to brighten residents’ days with shopping trips, birthday visits, their **Valentine’s Day Party**, and the **Spring Clothes Closet**.

Residents also enjoyed **Catholic Mass** and **Holy Communion**, games and activities with **CarMax**, **Redeemer Anglican Church**, and **Longwood University Recreation Therapy** students, and performances from talented local musicians and harpists. Students from **St. Bridget** brought fun and energy to multiple visits, while **VCU’s Disability Advocacy and Accessibility Caucus Group** partnered with residents to create posters for the **15th Annual Walk ‘n Roll 5K**.

We are especially grateful to everyone who supported this year’s Walk ‘n Roll, helping make it an unforgettable event. Favorite monthly groups also continue to bring joy, including **Caring Canines**, **Fiction to Film**, **Bible Study**, and **Bridge Club**.



SEWING KINDNESS

Gloria Howley

We are fortunate to have a remarkable behind-the-scenes volunteer at The Virginia Home. Gloria Howley, a longtime friend of TVH, continually makes a meaningful impact through her generosity, creativity, and care.

From decorating and supporting special events to donating clothing, jewelry, and collected plastic bags for our TredEx recycling project, Gloria’s contributions touch many parts of our community. She also shares her sewing talents in countless ways for residents, creating clothing protectors, making alterations, and adding special fasteners that help make clothing more comfortable and functional.

Gloria is also a cherished member of **Danny’s Ladies**, bringing joy, laughter, and fun wherever she goes. Though she prefers to stay out of the spotlight, we couldn’t let her kindness and dedication go unrecognized. Thank you, Gloria, for all you do for The Virginia Home!



CARE YOU CAN SEE

Daniel P. Gray, OD

For many residents at The Virginia Home, a visit from Dr. Daniel P. Gray means far more than an eye exam. It means being cared for with patience and compassion.

Once each month, Dr. Gray spends three hours at The Virginia Home’s clinic, seeing seven to nine residents. He provides comprehensive eye exams, including vision testing, eyeglass prescriptions, eye pressure checks, dilation, and evaluation of the eye’s health. When specialized care is needed, he helps connect residents with outside providers.

What residents and staff appreciate most is the way Dr. Gray meets each person where they are. If a resident cannot complete a traditional vision test, he finds another way—using pictures, pointing, or having residents trace letters in the air. His calm approach helps residents feel comfortable.

Despite a busy schedule at Brook Run Vision Center, Dr. Gray continues to faithfully make time for The Virginia Home—even coming on his day off.

Dr. Gray earned his degree in biology from Pennsylvania State University and graduated from Pennsylvania College of Optometry in 2003 before completing a residency in ocular disease in New Jersey and New York City.

At The Virginia Home, we are deeply grateful for Dr. Gray’s expertise, generosity, and kindness.

Your Support Matters

And so does timely delivery

In an effort to be good stewards of every gift entrusted to us, The Virginia Home recently transitioned from using postage-paid business reply envelopes to traditional stamped return envelopes.

Over time, we experienced increasing delays in the delivery of business reply mail through the postal system, which sometimes meant donor gifts were not reaching us as quickly as intended. Some gifts were delayed as much as six weeks during our busiest time of the year—year-end giving.

By asking donors to use their own stamp, we hope to improve the timeliness and reliability of mail delivery while continuing to ensure that every contribution is received and acknowledged promptly. We are deeply grateful for our donors’ understanding and continued support of our mission.

Remember that you can always making your gift online by scanning the code or by visiting thevirginiahome.org/giving



“Thank you” from John Blosser and The Virginia Home community! We are grateful for every gift received



Wes Ashberry and CEO Doug Vaughan reel in the big one at our Annual Fishing Tournament earlier this month.

Coming Attractions

- Jun 6 Special Olympics State Games
- Jun 10 Best Day Ever Movie Premiere
- Aug 8 Life Rolls On Adaptive Surfing
- Jun–Aug Summer Sports
Junior Board Ice Cream Socials
- Jun–Aug Jammin’ in the Gym
Summer Concert Series:
Jun 24, 6–8 pm with Greg Ward
Jul 29, 6–8 pm with Matt Waller
Aug 26, 6–8 pm with Vertigo

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

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