

Home Happenings

Number 64 / Summer 26



Clockwise from top left: Nicole Fini and Lily; Callie (Woody) offers a gift in a resident's room; Carolyn Appich and Ivy with Charles Christian at the 5k; Mama Coco with Tom Stumm and Megan Portelos; Ellie (West) in her Halloween finery; Virgil (Austin) gets close up to Mickey Dowdy; new family member Cleo (McDermott).

Love on Four Paws

Meet a Few of our Tail Waggin' Friends!

At The Virginia Home, some of our most beloved volunteers arrive with wagging tails, wet noses, and hearts full of love.

Whether they're making weekly therapy visits, attending special events, or accompanying family members and staff, our canine companions have an extraordinary gift for lifting spirits. They spark conversations, inspire laughter, offer comfort, and remind us that sometimes the best medicine is simply the presence of a good dog.

Therapy Teams That Make a Difference

For the past 10 years, **Ellie** has been a familiar and much-loved visitor at The Virginia Home. This 12-year-old Mini Goldendoodle may be calm and gentle today, but according to her owner, Cabell West, she had a mischievous beginning.

"I rescued her from my best friend after she ate all the bushes in the front yard—and the sprinkler system!" Cabell laughs.

Within three months, Ellie became a certified therapy dog. Since then, the pair has made thousands of visits through **Caring Canines**. Ellie has earned the American Kennel Club's highest therapy dog recognition, but Cabell says her favorite activity is simple: "She loves coming to The Virginia Home."

Since becoming a certified therapy team in 2018, **Caroline Appich** and **Ivy** have also become cherished visitors.

"Ivy has a special gift for bringing smiles, comfort, and companionship to everyone she meets," Caroline says. "She's especially known for enthusiastically 'helping' clean wheelchairs with her happy tail!"

The pair also participates in events like Walk 'n Roll 5K, helping raise awareness of the positive impact therapy dogs have on people's lives.

For one of our newest volunteer teams, the greatest reward comes from quiet moments. After learning about The Virginia Home through a neighbor whose son had been a longtime resident, **Landon Woody** began visiting with her dog, **Callie**.

"I'm still learning everyone's names," Landon says, "but I've been particularly moved by residents who are on bed rest and are so brightened by simply touching Callie." During visits, Landon gently places Callie's front paws on residents' beds so they can pet her comfortably. "It's amazing to see the connection they make," she says.

Another familiar face is **Virgil**, who is following in the paw prints of the beloved **Atticus**, a longtime favorite at The Home. Alongside his owner, **Finley Austin**, Virgil has already become a favorite at the Walk 'n Roll, birthday parties, and other activities. Still full of puppy energy, whether posing for photos or enthusiastically collecting sticks instead of fish during our annual fishing tournament, he brings smiles wherever he goes.

Family and Staff Favorites

Many residents also enjoy visits from their own family dogs, bringing a comforting piece of home with them.

Resident **Nicole Fini's** Standard Poodle, **Lily**, visits often now that Nicole's parents, Beth and Bob, have moved to Richmond. Lily loves the attention she receives but is happiest spending time with Nicole.

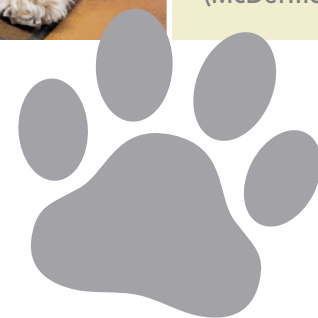
Thomas McDermott's family recently introduced everyone to **Cleo**, an adorable puppy with an important future. After seeing how naturally attentive Cleo was to Thomas during her first visit, the family began training her to become a certified therapy dog.

Staff members also share their four-legged companions with residents. During the COVID pandemic, Recreation Therapy staffer **Megan Portelos** began bringing her rescue dog, **Mama Coco**, to Saturday Rec Café gatherings. Mama Coco quickly became a resident favorite. Admissions Director **Jessi Young's** dog, **Chewy**, has been delighting residents since joining the Walk 'n Roll in 2022. One resident even requested a visit with Chewy as a reward for reaching a physical therapy milestone!

More Than A Visit

Therapy dogs do far more than brighten a room. They reduce stress, encourage conversation, create meaningful connections, and offer unconditional affection. For many of our animal-loving residents, a visit from one of these remarkable dogs is the highlight of the week.

We are deeply grateful to the volunteers, families, and staff members who generously share their furry companions with our community. Their visits remind us that kindness often arrives on four paws—and that a wagging tail can make any day a little brighter.



FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

By Laura Stewart, Chair

Dear Friends:

As you enjoy our Love on Four Paws issue, you'll meet some of the wonderful canine companions whose visits bring comfort, companionship, and lasting relationships to our residents.

Speaking of lasting relationships, one of my favorite parts of serving as Board Chair is recognizing employee service anniversaries during our board meetings. While we cover the important business of the organization, celebrating the dedicated people behind our mission is always a highlight.

Employees reaching milestone anniversaries are recognized at board meetings, where we learn a little about their work and lives beyond The Home. This year, every month from January through October includes someone celebrating at least 20 years of service.

One nursing assistant celebrated 40 years at The Home in June. The gentleman who keeps our floors looking their best marked 30 years in April, one of his colleagues celebrated 25 years in March, and the man who keeps our wheelchairs in top condition reached 20 years in January.

That kind of commitment says so much about our community. Residents, families, volunteers, employees—and yes, even some of our beloved therapy dogs—create the caring spirit that makes The Virginia Home so special. Thank you for being part of that community. I hope you enjoy this issue and wish you a wonderful rest of the summer.



A rare moment of repose with my dog, Buster...

A Playful Gift

The Regirer Foundation Expands Access to Adaptive Sports

The **Regirer Foundation** was established in 2014 by the late **Walter W. and Maria Teresa Regirer** to support organizations serving residents of Greater Richmond and Central Virginia. During their lives, the Regirers owned several Richmond-area nursing homes, including Mrs. Plyler's, University Park, and Windsor Nursing Home.

The Virginia Home was grateful to receive a Regirer Foundation grant to expand our recreational therapy program through the purchase of adaptive sports equipment and accessibility ramps. The new equipment enables residents of all abilities to participate in activities such as bocce, bowling, wiffleball, badminton, fishing, swimming, and gain access to other community opportunities via special ramps.

The impact has been significant. Residents recently used the new ramp during a trip to Sandbridge, Virginia, where they enjoyed live music, shopping, and access to the beach. New pool floats have enhanced aquatic therapy sessions, and adaptive bowling equipment has supported inclusive events with St. Bridget School, Redeemer Anglican Church, and CarMax.

The equipment has become a permanent part of our recreational therapy program, increasing resident participation, strengthening social connections, and supporting physical and emotional well-being. The grant has exceeded expectations by expanding opportunities for residents to live life to the fullest.



Tracy Fryar and Maeve Kravitz enjoy a spring trip to Sandbridge, Virginia, where a specialty ramp purchased through a grant from the Regirer Foundation allowed better access to beach-related activities.

Finding Home

A Place That Feels Like Family

When Kristin Mills talks about her sister, **Debbie Arnold**, one thing comes to mind immediately.

"Her smile," Kristin says. "We love Debbie's big smile and her laughter."

Born in Washington, D.C., and raised in Northern Virginia, Debbie enjoys life's simple pleasures. She loves word searches, collected matchbooks and thimbles for years, and has always enjoyed going to the movies and live shows. Today, those interests continue to bring her joy at The Virginia Home.

For Debbie's family, their connection to The Virginia Home began years before Debbie became a resident. Their father was searching for specialized care for his wife, Sandye, who was living with multiple sclerosis. Friends in Reedville recommended The Virginia Home, and it soon became clear they had found the right place.

While visiting Sandye between 2017 and 2019, Kristin, her sister, and their father witnessed more than excellent care—they saw residents living full, active lives. One favorite memory was watching Sandye and their father enjoy a Motown performance together.



Dotty Rilee, Debbie Arnold and Kristin Mills

"It was our dad's wish that Debbie would become part of The Virginia Home family," Kristin says.

Today, Debbie stays busy with the activities she enjoys most. She starts many mornings with cocoa in the **Recreation Café**, looks forward to having her hair and nails done, and enjoys playing Rummikub, Bingo, and attending movie showings with friends.

The family loves joining Debbie for special events, including **Walk 'n Roll 5K** and the biennial ball.

"We feel like we are part of The Home's family," Kristin says.

Kristin also brings her grandchildren to visit Debbie. Those visits have become meaningful opportunities for them to get to know people with physical disabilities, helping them see abilities instead of limitations.

Knowing Debbie is surrounded by compassionate caregivers and an active community brings the family tremendous peace of mind.

"It really is a great place," Kristin says. "It's such a comfort knowing she is being well taken care of."

For Debbie's family, The Virginia Home is more than a residence—it's a community where Debbie's smile, laughter, and love of life continue to shine.

Celebrating Caregivers

This spring, The Virginia Home proudly recognized our nurses and Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) during National Nurses Week in May, National Nursing Assistants Week in June, and National Nursing Care Week.

These celebrations honored the dedicated professionals who provide exceptional care, compassion, and support to our residents every day. Beyond meeting medical needs, our nursing team builds meaningful relationships, offers encouragement, and helps create the warm, family-like environment that makes TVH special.



CNA Christina Cherry and Greg Kelso

Through their skill, patience, and commitment, our nurses and CNAs promote dignity, independence, and quality of life for the adults we serve. Their dedication is felt in every interaction and every moment of care.

Thank you to our nursing team for the kindness, expertise, and heart you bring to The Virginia Home. You are an essential part of our mission and the reason our residents continue to thrive.

HOME TEAM HIGHLIGHTS

Behind the Scenes

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY: Our Occupational Therapy team welcomed OTA students from South University for a hands-on assistive technology presentation, where residents demonstrated innovative ways they access their phones using voice commands and adaptive switches. OT also supported the annual fishing tournament by creating adaptive fishing pole holders and 3D-printing trophies for participants. Director Shelley Jewell partnered with VCU occupational therapy students to develop custom adaptive gaming equipment, giving a resident greater access to Xbox games. Residents also enjoyed creative summer crafts, the popular Move & Meditate exercise group, glow-in-the-dark sensory projects, and the continued support of volunteers during nail care activities.



OTA Students from South University with Mona Sleeth and Orlando Smith

RECREATION THERAPY/COMMUNITY

INTEGRATION: Summer is one of Recreation Therapy’s busiest seasons. More than 60 residents kicked off the annual Summer Sports program by participating in the two-day Fishing Tournament, with kickball, baseball, and adaptive bocchia still to come.

Beyond sports, the Jammin’ in the Gym summer concert series returned with live performances, while Community Integration has kept residents on the go with trips to Camp Baker, Arts in the Park, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, movies,



Tyler Bowers and Thomas McDermott with Nutasha and Nutsy at the season opener!

the Cosmic Baseball game in Colonial Heights, and Flying Squirrels games—including a special outing to a Rail Car Suite made possible through a donation from Seredni Tire.

SPEECH THERAPY: When people think of speech therapy, they often think of improving speech. But speech-language pathology is about much more than words. At The Virginia Home, speech-language pathologists help residents communicate effectively, think clearly, and eat safely supporting independence and enhancing quality of life.



“Goofin’ in the Garden” with staffers Shelley Jewell, Chris Shepperd, Annie Kennedy with Kaleigh Kravens.

Our services address communication, memory and thinking skills, voice, and swallowing. Whether helping a resident express their needs, strengthen cognitive abilities, or enjoy meals more safely, our goal is to promote dignity, connection, and meaningful participation in everyday life.

Every conversation, every shared meal, and every opportunity to connect matters. Through individualized care, speech-language pathology helps residents live more confidently and stay engaged in the moments that matter most.

VOLUNTEER SERVICES: We kicked off the season with our Annual Fishing Tournament, where Junior Board members, family members, and many of our dedicated volunteers helped residents reel in a great day. Residents also enjoyed Summer Sports Kickball with support from our Junior Board, students from St. Bridget School, members of St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, local student-athletes, and our regular volunteers.

Residents stayed busy with Bridge Club, Fiction to Film, Bible Study with Mollie, a Computer Safety presentation with Debra, and a Summer Bag Cleanout with CarMax. They also enjoyed outstanding entertainment from Tom May, Pam Jester, the Harp Ensemble, the Weatherford Sisters Improv Troupe, Flute Forte, Yvette’s Interactive Dance Program, and the always-popular Clown Alley #3. Special visits from Faith Landmark, Caring Canines, and the Windsor Farms Garden Club added even more fun, with the Garden Club helping with a spring garden cleanup and creating beautiful May nosegays.

The season also included Bowling with CarMax, Junior Board Summer Ice Cream Socials, a delicious vegetarian lunch prepared by Chef Rosa, and the Best Day Ever movie premiere, sponsored by one generous volunteer.



Bryn Davis and Sandy Toot at “Jammin’ in the Gym.”

FIFTY YEARS OF HEART

Louise Hartz



For 50 years, Louise Hartz has been a dedicated volunteer and cherished friend of The Virginia Home. Her extraordinary commitment to our residents earned her the title of Volunteer of the Year in 1995, but the true measure of Louise’s impact can be seen in the countless relationships she has built and the many lives she has touched throughout the decades.

Nearly 30 years after receiving that honor, Louise continues to bring the same enthusiasm, kindness, and dedication that have made her such a beloved presence at The Home. In fact, Louise is such a familiar face around campus that we often see her several times a week! Whether she is joining residents for our weekly Bridge Club, visiting one-on-one with friends, assisting with our monthly Catholic Mass, or sitting down for a spirited game of Rummikub, Louise brings joy, companionship, and a genuine sense of connection to every interaction.

For Louise, volunteering has always been about more than showing up—it’s about building meaningful relationships. She remembers birthdays, celebrates milestones, sends holiday greetings, and shares thoughtful notes of encouragement that remind residents, families, and staff that they are valued and cared for. Her personal touches have a way of making people feel seen, remembered, and appreciated.

Louise’s generosity extends far beyond her volunteer hours. She is also a dedicated financial supporter and a passionate advocate for The Virginia Home. She has nominated The Home for grants and funding opportunities, helping secure valuable resources that directly enhance the lives of our residents. She is always looking for new ways to support our mission and ensure that residents continue to receive the kind of care they deserve.

Over five decades, Louise has given her time, her talents, and her heart to The Virginia Home. Her presence is a gift, her friendship is treasured, and her commitment is an inspiring example of the difference one person can make.

Louise doesn’t just volunteer—she brightens days, strengthens our community, and is one of reasons The Virginia Home feels like family.



Top: Louise with Lee Coffin during our Live Out Loud summer music series events. Below: playing games with Chris Payton.

Your Voice Matters

Help Shape Our Future

For more than 135 years, The Virginia Home has provided lifelong care, dignity, and community for adults with permanent physical disabilities. Because of the dedication of our supporters, volunteers, families, and friends, we have continued to strengthen our mission and expand what is possible for the people we serve.

As we look toward the future, we are seeking input from members of our community who know and care deeply about The Virginia Home. Your perspective will help us better understand what matters most and guide our priorities as we continue building on our legacy of compassionate care.

Please take a few minutes to complete our brief community survey. Your feedback will help ensure the future of The Virginia Home reflects the needs, hopes, and experiences of those connected to our mission.

Scan the QR code or visit www.surveymonkey.com/r/TheVirginiaHome to share your thoughts and help shape our next chapter!



Jean Marie looked pretty in pink on a Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens outing.

Coming Attractions

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|------------|--------------------------------|
| Aug 8 | Life Rolls On adaptive surfing |
| Aug 13–17 | Travel Scholarship to NOVA |
| Aug 26 | Jammin' in the Gym/Vertigo |
| Sep 9 & 23 | Beyond Boundaries boat trips |
| Oct 9 | Fall Festival |
| Oct 29 | Halloween Boo House Social |

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

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