



# THE BRIDGE

*Bridging Generations With Ageless Friendship*  
*Friends Across the Ages Nursing Home Outreach in Gainesville, Florida*

Vol. 7 No. 4 Fall 2009

## President's Message



**Jon Shinn**

*Over the past year, the Friends leadership team has endeavored to create the structure and processes that will help us be sustainable over time, with less reliance on the tireless dedication of our founders, Steve & Allison Blay. Although the Blays are still very involved in both leadership and hands-on activities in the nursing homes, the day to day administrative tasks have now largely been transferred to our Administrative Coordinator, Sarah Scales. Most importantly, Sarah now manages the entire process of getting new volunteers from the point of contact through to being set up with a coordinator or mentor at their chosen nursing home.*

*With these processes in place, we are eager to take on new volunteers to help serve a larger population of Gainesville-area nursing home residents. If you know someone who might be interested in volunteering, or have a connection that might help us get the word out about Friends, please let us know or send the interested person to our website at [www.acrosstheages.org](http://www.acrosstheages.org). We are ready to grow, but we need your help!*

## Younger Nursing Home Friends

*Many people mistakenly believe nursing homes are only a place for the elderly. In fact, many of the residents Friends volunteers visit with are younger than what most people perceive. Below, you'll meet two amazing residents who truly defy the odds.*

### Donnie Jones

Donnie Jones lives at the Parklands nursing center and is only 39 years old. A stroke in his early 30s put him in a wheelchair and took away the use of most of the right side of his body. Before he had his stroke, he used to play in a band in Live Oak called "Beggar's Blind". This was a Heavy Metal band and he played bass guitar. But Donnie is a multi-talented musician who also played Guitar, Drums, Piano, Violin, Oboe, and French Horn! He hopes that with continued physical therapy he can go back to playing them someday. In the meantime, he enjoys chatting with Friends volunteers as they keep him up-to-date on the latest happenings in the music scene. ...by Steve Blay



### Bob O'Brien

You know that expression, "The sky's the limit?" Most of us have heard it spoken by parents or schoolteachers, by people who believe in us and encourage us to accomplish our dreams. But how many of us have actually put it to the test? For Bob O'Brien, resident of Park Meadows Health and Rehabilitation Center, these

words represented more than a mere figure of speech. To him, they were a challenge. On June 14, 2009, Bob soared to a new height, successfully completing a tandem sky-diving jump from 13,500 feet. It was his first sky-diving experience, and one that changed his life forever.

Oh, did I mention that Bob is a quadriplegic?

When I first heard Bob's story, I

couldn't help but be amazed. How many quadriplegics do you know who have jumped out of a plane? (And a perfectly good plane, at that.) For Bob, skydiving was something that he had always wanted to do, but had to put off for many years due to timing and physical constraints. This summer, he was finally able to accomplish his dream, and he described the experience as "the most incredible thing I've ever done."

In June, the arrangements were made for Bob to travel to Palatka, the site where he would perform the jump. Park Meadows provided a special vehicle for his transportation there and back. Upon his arrival, Bob was strapped into a special harness and lifted into the plane by four men. During the ascent, Bob said that he felt more excitement than apprehension, but sent up an earnest prayer somewhere around 10,000 feet. As they prepared to jump from the plane,

Bob's instructor caught him off guard by



jumping out of the plane one second early. Bob had been waiting for the count to "three," but found himself sailing out of the plane after a mere "one...two."

Bob enjoyed "free-falling" for the first 7 to 8,000 feet, after which the parachute was released and he and his instructor floated the remaining distance to land. Bystanders who witnessed Bob's landing attested to his glee, saying that he had a grin stretched from ear to ear.

If there is one thing that I know for certain about Bob, it is that he enjoys life to the fullest. In the three years that I have known him, his positive attitude and sense of humor have been a constant source of inspiration to me. Visiting Park Meadows has been one of the highlights of my college experience, and I am grateful to call Bob O'Brien my friend. (Who knows, maybe one of these days I will work up the courage to go skydiving!)

...by Heather Geidel

## Welcome New Volunteers

Fall 2009

ELIZABETH HODGES & LAUREN MENKE  
at Signature Health Care

## Resident Memorials

GEORGE SCHNEIDER, *Palm Garden*      THOMAS JONES, *Parklands*  
ROSA LUNDY, *Signature*                  WILLIE BOYKIN, *Parklands*

## Volunteer Service Anniversaries

The following volunteers are celebrating their Friends Across the Ages anniversaries in August, September and October:

JON SHINN: .....7 years  
KERI SHINN: .....7 years  
JEAN LANSFORD: .....(5 years in April)  
GRETCHEN GRIGSBY: .....5 years  
PILI PAZ: .....5 years  
DIANNE WALSH: .....5 years  
HEATHER GEIDEL: .....3 years  
DONNA MOORE (along with sons CHASE & KYLE): .....3 years  
HUY PHAM: .....3 years  
DONNA MITCHELL: .....2 years  
ROSS SIMON: .....1 year  
BEN STEWART: .....1 year  
EMILY SULLIVAN: .....1 year



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## The Bridge

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Jon Shinn, *President*

M. Violet Asmuth, Ph.D., *Vice President*

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Allison Blay

George Hamilton

Sandy Johnson

Donna Mitchell

Maria Paz

Dianne Walsh

Sarah Scales, *Administrative Coordinator*

Ruth Hazen, *Honorary Lifetime*

*Board Member*