



GHCC Movin' On Up (to the West Side)

by George Hamilton, GHCC Administrator & FATA Board Member

Gainesville Health Care Center will be moving in the near future. We thank all the folks who have volunteered with us in our over 30 years up till now. We will be a new and improved GHCC—a fantastic new facility featuring a state of the art rehab center, an exceptional memory program, and a separate traditional long term care nursing unit. The new facility is located on SW Archer Road, about four miles southwest from the current facility. Look for more information soon!

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The Bridge

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Welcome New Volunteers

DANIEL COHEN—PARK MEADOWS
CASSIE COOPER—SIGNATURE
MICHAEL GILMARTIN—PARKLANDS
BRITTNEY HAWLEY—PARK MEADOWS
JAMIE KISTLER—PARKLANDS
MAUREEN MOHAN—SIGNATURE
LISANDRA PERDOMO—SIGNATURE
ABIGAIL PERRET-GENTIL—SIGNATURE

Volunteer Anniversaries

| | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| 15 years | Agnes Bierbaum |
| 9 years: | Robbie Curry |
| 8 years: | Kim & Andrew Mitchell |
| 5 years: | Christine Hall |
| | Lena Melendez |
| 4 years: | Dianna Vaughn |
| 2 years:..... | Rosha Poudyal |
| 1 year: | Erika Kraus-Theis |
| | Neha Lodha |
| | Karen Tecler |
| | Betsy Thewes |

President's Message



ANDREW MITCHELL

Thank you to everyone who was involved in the Friends Across the Ages 2016 Spring Festival. The festival had a great turnout and made a lot of residents happy. I hope that it was also a great experience for all of our volunteers. Congratulations to all of our Spring graduates. If you have been involved with our organization, then I know that you will go forward and have a positive impact on the world. Let's all try to do something every day to make someone else's life a little more enjoyable. I hope everyone has a great summer.

FRIENDS ACROSS THE AGES SPRING FESTIVAL 2016

Every spring for a number of years now, Friends Across the Ages has held a "Spring Festival"—a week of festivities at various area nursing homes. We host a special event each day of the week at a different facility, and end with our annual Volunteer Appreciation Party in the lovely courtyard at Barr Systems. This year's events included a Karaoke Party at Park Meadows, "Trivia Across the Ages" at The Terrace, "Spring Break in Las Vegas" Casino Party at Parklands, a Luau Bingo Party at Gainesville Health Care Center, Spring Arts N' Crafts at North Florida Rehab, and "Orange and Blue Bingo" at Signature Health Care. (See inside for a collection of photos from these events.) Highlights of the week included a rousing rendition of Elvis' "Jailhouse Rock" at the Karaoke event, a huge win at the Roulette wheel for one resident at the Casino Party which earned her a \$5 lottery scratch off ticket, and the biggest turnout ever of both residents and volunteers at the "Orange and Blue Bingo" event.

The wrap-up party at Barr Systems, while always nice, was really the best we have experienced in our many years of doing this. A great turnout and perfect weather contributed to the afternoon's delights, and everyone lingered over sandwiches, delicious side dishes, decadent desserts, and ice cream. As always, we gave appreciation gifts to all volunteers, and a few special awards. This year's special awards included the following:

- "Rookie of the Year"—JAMIE KISTLER: for jumping right in as a new volunteer at Parklands, and being willing to go the extra mile—sometimes literally, as parking at Parklands can be tricky!

- "Pinch Hitter"—KAREN TECLER: for filling in for coordinator Morgan Witter to keep our group at Park Meadows going during the month when Morgan needed to step back from volunteering in order to complete her thesis for her graduate degree.

- "Resident Scholar"—JOHN HOBBS: John has brought a number of books to share with the residents at Parklands, including stories about Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone, and Pocahontas. The residents often stop to ask questions about the history behind the stories, and John, in his quiet gentle way, always seems to have some good answers!

- "Spirit Award"—ERIKA KRAUS-THEIS: Every year we give this award to someone who seems to embody the spirit of our organization, and Erika certainly does! She is always willing to do whatever is needed to help, including mentoring new volunteers, and recently, accepting our invitation to serve on our board of directors.

- "Royal Medal"—JEAN LANSFORD: Jean was once the coordinator of our Signature group, and offered to come back and help while current coordinators, Kim and Andrew Mitchell, adjusted to life with their newborn. We thought Jean's willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty deserved recognition, and since she is originally from England, a "royal medal" seemed fitting.

Thank you to all who participated in this year's Spring Festival festivities. We look forward to next year!

Spring Festival 2016

New volunteer Michael deals Blackjack at the Parklands "Spring Break in Las Vegas" event. Florida Lottery tickets were given out as prizes, but unfortunately nobody won the million dollars. →



← Morgan and Annie help a resident sing "Let it Go" (from Annie's favorite movie, Frozen) at the Park Meadows Karaoke event.

Kids assist residents at the Spring Arts 'n Crafts event at North Florida Rehab. This event is a big hit every year, for both the children and the residents. →



← A huge crowd attended the "Orange and Blue Bingo" event at Signature. So many volunteers and residents packed the dining room that it was nearly a violation of fire code!

Everyone wore a Lei at the Luau Bingo Event at Gainesville Health Care Center. No Hula Dancers but hey we're on a budget here! →



← Kim, Andrew, and Baby Will Mitchell enjoying the Spring Volunteer Appreciation Party on a perfect Sunday afternoon.



Special Resident Spotlight SUNDAY AFTERNOON WITH DEE AND WILLIAM

BY DANI CLARK

Editor's note: Dani is a friend who lives in Washington D.C. She wrote this reflection a few months ago about one of her visits with her friends at a nursing home in her area. We asked her permission to share it both here and on our blog, which can be found at www.friendsacrosstheages.org



It's another Sunday afternoon at the nursing home.

My friend Dee is waiting for me at the entrance, bouncing her birdlike frame from foot to foot, impatient for the cigarettes I promised to bring. Newport 100s, as always.

I got you a present, she says, handing me a trash bag as I slip her the contraband cigarettes. Inside is cafeteria booty: two sodas, a Nutrigrain bar and a plastic fruit cup. Her wizened, nearly toothless face looks at me with expectation. Will you use it? I hope you can use it.

This is our routine.

Yes, yes, I will use it. Thank you so much.

We sit outside while she smokes. The weather is fair and snow water drips from bushes nearby. She's happy, she tells me, that her youngest child surprised her with a visit the other day.

Michael is 40 now, a janitor in a Virginia Beach motel. He was 12 when his father died and things fell apart. When Dee became addicted to Valium and lost the house. When she lost him, and his four siblings. When she took to the streets and then they lost her—for 20 years.

Maybe I can finally get my own place by Easter, Dee says, sucking in smoke. Michael can visit and I can cook for him. We can do what we used to do in the old days: take a trip to McDonald's and go to the mall.

This dream is Dee's obsession, and I've heard it a million times. I never know what to say. It's clear she can't take care of herself physically. She's lucky to be in the nursing home.

But something else is on her mind today. Yesterday, someone died.

Dee didn't know her too well. But the death, when she reports it, prompts a serious look, and a confiding, low voice. Dani, is there such a thing as a shot to make you live longer? Her eyes search mine, reminding me of a child. I tell

her there are many medicines for many different types of diseases, but there's no magic shot.

Her chin drops and carries her head down with it. Dee is 69 years old. Someone told her there was a shot. We all have to die, she says, nodding now, and resigned. But what happens then, Dani? Is it real that we go to heaven? I don't want to die here.

My answer is wanting and incomplete, exactly how I feel. But Dee seems so relieved of it, of the clichés I repeat, harkening things the nuns told us in grade school. My hands feel so empty, my heart so poor.

The cigarette is a stub. It's time to go inside.

Before leaving I make the rounds of the dining room and run into William. He wants to talk. I haven't known him that long, but there's a connection between us, a spark of recognition shining from the eyes.

Who this elderly black man was or what he did before he was confined to an electric wheel chair is still a mystery to me. But I do know that he is lucid and wise, and that he thinks deeply about things—rare attributes, in the nursing home.

He's worried about the residents, he says, they all seem so down because of the death. He plans to purposefully lose a game of chess with Maurice, just to make Maurice feel better. He knows everyone thinks about death, especially in the nursing home, especially when you get older, he says, but he doesn't worry about it anymore.

Oh no?

No. If you pay attention, if you pay deep attention, William says, you will realize something. Heaven is right here too. It always has been and always will be. Heaven is happening now.

My heart leaps. I know what he is saying is true. And I grab a pen so I don't forget it.