



# THE BRIDGE

BRIDGING GENERATIONS WITH AGELESS FRIENDSHIP

*Friends Across the Ages • Nursing Home Outreach in Gainesville, Florida*

Vol. 12 Spring/Summer 2013

## President's Message



ANDREW MITCHELL

*Hi everyone, I am honored to be the new President of the Board of Directors for Friends Across the Ages. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Jon Shinn for his years of service as the previous President and for his ongoing service as a board member. I would like to thank all of the volunteers that helped with the spring festival and also those who came out to the volunteer appreciation party.*

*My wife Kim and I began volunteering a little over five years ago. Since then we have taken on more active roles as coordinators, board members and now as the President. Even though we have taken on extra responsibilities, the most important role that we have served is that of Friend. During our first visit in 2008 we met a wonderful man by the name of Nathaniel Clark. Nathaniel was a young 87 years old at the time and he loved to talk. For the next five years we never missed a week of visiting Nathaniel. There is far too much to write here but he became one of the best friends I have ever had. Last week Nathaniel passed and I lost a great friend. The main thing that I have taken away from his passing, and would like to share, is that while we may think that we are doing a service for all of our friends in the nursing homes, we are actually receiving a very meaningful gift from them in the form of reciprocated friendship. Thank you to everyone who helps make Friends Across the Ages the organization that it is.*

## SPEAKING ABOUT DEMENTIA: A FRESH APPROACH

by Allison Blay

Do you know anyone who is experiencing some form of dementia? Are you concerned that you may someday face this condition yourself? How do you approach the people in your life with dementia? When you hear the word "dementia," what pops into your mind?

For me, the answer to the first two questions is yes. I have known many people over the years at the nursing home experiencing some form of dementia, and my own grandfather had Alzheimer's disease for the last couple of years of his life. I am deeply concerned that this is a condition I may one day face myself, and I am afraid it will rob me of who I am and the things I enjoy most—reading, writing, sharing a good conversation with a friend, sifting through memories... I feel worried and scared about it when I do think about this—but mostly I try not to think about it. I approach people with dementia with kindness, but sadness as well. When you say dementia, "heartbreak" is what pops into my mind. It doesn't have to be this way.

This spring, both of our speaker series presentations focused on dementia. In January, Carolyn Lukert—co-founder and president of the Center for Dementia Education ([www.facebook.com/CenterForDementiaEducation](http://www.facebook.com/CenterForDementiaEducation))—gave a powerful presentation entitled "Strengthening Relationships with Those in Your Life Who are Dealing with Memory Loss." In essence, what I took away from this presentation is that dementia is here to stay, especially given our aging

population. The chances are extremely high that either we will know someone with dementia, or experience it at some point ourselves. We may as well accept that, and try to live with dementia in a more life-giving way. There are ways to



Carolyn Lukert

have a full and happy life, even if one is experiencing dementia. There are ways to help those with dementia to be active in our communities.

Carolyn used the metaphor of "ramps" and talked about the ways we accommodate other disabilities and diseases, and include all kinds of people in our society. She said we need to create ramps for people with dementia—and since this is not so much a physical disease as a mental and emotional one, those ramps will mostly involve mental and emotional accommodations on our part: kindness, understanding, patience, creative responses, etc. People with dementia are still people, and should be treated as such. We should not be afraid, for example, to bring a family member with dementia out to a restaurant, for fear they might cause "a scene" or make someone uncomfortable. We take our kids out to restaurants and they often cause "a scene" as the throw food on the

*Speaking about Dementia: A Fresh Approach cont.*

floor, talk too loud, or cry – and does that stop us? She also talked about how we may be surprised that even folks who seemingly are not responsive at all may respond to touch, to being called by name—in short, to being treated like they still matter.

In March, Tom Rinkoski, a Caregiver Coach at Elder Options, the Mid Florida Area Agency on Aging ([www.agingresources.org](http://www.agingresources.org)), gave a presentation that dovetailed nicely with Carolyn's, in that it also focused on dementia, but



Tom Rinkoski

more on practical strategies rather than the general way one views dementia. Tom leads a program called "Become a Savvy Caregiver," in 16 counties in North Central Florida with special attention to caregivers working with persons with Dementia and/or Alzheimer's. This presentation was sort of an overview/introduction to that training. He shared some of the different ways of categorizing stages of dementia, and how it is important to be aware of which scale is being used when dealing with health care providers. He showed clips of videos that demonstrated the difference between people with various stages of dementia. Overall it helped to get a sense for how dementia is understood from a medical point of view, and how caregivers can assist those with dementia through a better understanding of the disease and the strategies one can use to aid people at the various stages.

In short, these two speakers gave us a whole different way to think about dementia and help those who are experiencing this disease. People with dementia can still lead lives filled with joy and meaning—it just takes people with open hearts and minds to help them to do that.

Look for more speaker series presentations in the fall—we will offer two more in September and November. You won't want to miss them!



## The Bridge

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### Pictures from 2013 Spring Festival



# Friends Across the Ages Spring Festival

For the past several years, the highlight of our year has been our Spring Festival. This is a week-long series of events held at each of the different nursing homes we serve. This year, the festival included a wide range of events—a drum circle, a casino event, a 50's soda fountain, a football watching party, a poetry group, and a family-friendly arts n' crafts event. Here's a quick run-down on each of the events...

❄️ 1. "DRUM CIRCLE AT PALM GARDEN": *Friends* volunteers facilitated a drum circle for approximately 25 residents of Palm Garden. The purpose of the drum circle was to enable participants to express themselves rhythmically, with no right or wrong expression. The group started off with a simple beat, and progressed to something a bit more complex. Participants were allowed the freedom to basically do whatever they wanted with their "instruments" and the results were quite amazing. One lady very much wanted to do a solo, and just "went to town" on that drum! It was obvious that she was enjoying expressing herself in that way – and others were enjoying her, as well.

❄️ 2. "REACTION READING" at Park Meadows: Dr. Vi Asmuth, a longtime past Friends Across the Ages volunteer and board member, graciously agreed to come back to Park Meadows to reprise this choral poetry event which she used to facilitate there on a regular basis. She brought a number of favorite poems which the group read together, and then shared reactions—memories, associations, stories, and more. The group enjoyed cookies and lemonade together along with the poetry, and a "sweet" time was had by all.

❄️ 3. "SPRING BREAK IN LAS VEGAS" at Parklands: Steve Blay looks forward to this event all year (as do the residents of Parklands). The games include blackjack, poker, roulette, and more, and residents play for fun and prizes. The highlight this year was live music! It just so happened that a musician named Ross Humphrey had been double booked in the dining room at the same time as the casino event. What started out as a mistake turned into a blessing in disguise as our musician friend played old favorites and jazzy tunes, creating a real Las Vegas feel.

❄️ 4. "'50's Soda Fountain and Bingo" at GHCC: The volunteers of Gainesville Health Care Center came up with this creative idea to make root beer floats, coke floats, and other treats for the residents, and play 50's music (some even dressed in 50's clothes). This was followed by a round of BINGO which included 50's themed prizes like vintage candy, etc. The residents had so much fun; they have asked to do this event again soon!

❄️ 5. "CELEBRATE SPRING" at NFRSC: Every year, Keri and Jon Shinn and family lead this event at North Florida Rehab and Specialty Care. A number of families (mostly from their home school group) come to help residents decorate flower pots, with plants they can keep in their rooms. As Keri commented, bringing the children to the nursing home adds a whole different kind of energy, and it is always so sweet to watch them work with the residents. Keri and Jon are hoping to do this event more regularly in the future!

❄️ 6. "SPRING SCRIMMAGE PARTY" at Signature: The volunteers at Signature brought food and decorations to help the residents enjoy watching the "Orange and Blue Debut" Gator spring scrimmage game. Although the "game" ended up being more of a "practice" this year, still, fun was had by all, and many of the residents really got into doing the "Gator chomp"!

As always, the week of events was capped by our Spring Volunteer Appreciation Party, held in the beautiful courtyard at Barr Systems. We shared a light luncheon and ice cream, and gave thank you gifts to all of our volunteers. We also had some special recognitions for several volunteers:

- DEEPIKA & NARAYAN KULKARNI—Dedication Award
- HOLLY MANN—Dedication Award
- ANA OLIVEIRA-BEUSES—Spirit Award
- DIANNA VAUGHN—"Stick-to-It" Award
- KIM AND ANDREW MITCHELL—5-year award
- KERI AND JON SHINN—10-year award

Our heartfelt thanks to all of our volunteers and to all who made our 2013 Spring Festival such a success! We can't wait for next year!

# Resident Project Spotlight ... Blanket Project

BY CAROLYN LUKERT



*Dolores and Marie*

Volunteers Carolyn Lukert and Colby Lowe, together with their Palm Garden friends Marie and Dolores, made tie blankets and donated them to the Shands Pediatric Center. This group loves to do projects that help people in need. For the past couple of years, they worked with coordinator Dianne Walsh to create holiday goody bags for clients of the Helping Hands Clinic. Because it felt so good to do something good for others, both Marie and Dolores expressed an interest in doing another service-type project. Carolyn suggested the blankets

because they require no sewing – just tying knots! And we all are very able to do that. So, we worked side by side for three weeks and made some amazing creations. Then we wrote notes to the children who would eventually get the blankets. The notes went something like this:

*This blanket was made with lots of love. I hope you can feel the warmth and caring as you wrap it around you!  
Love,  
your friend from Palm Garden*

## Volunteer Anniversaries

🌀 12 years: Agnes Bierbaum—Parklands

🌀 6 years: Robbie Curry—Parklands

🌀 5 years: Kim & Andrew Mitchell—Signature

🌀 2 years: Christine & Lena Hall—GHCC  
Colby Lowe—Palm Garden  
Holly Mann—GHCC  
Rachel Montealegre—Parklands

🌀 1 year: Dianna Vaughn

## NEW FACEBOOK PAGE...

We have recently set up a new facebook page for Friends Across the Ages—you can find it at [www.facebook.com/friendsacrosstheages](http://www.facebook.com/friendsacrosstheages). Check it out—and “like” us to keep up with all the news!

## Welcome New Volunteers

🌀 Gainesville Health Care Center

TESS FIELDER

AUDRA KIESLING

🌀 Park Meadows

ALISA MOODY

AMANDA NOVATNIK

🌀 Signature

SHERIN MERCHANT

KANGANA PATEL