



# THE BRIDGE

BRIDGING GENERATIONS WITH AGELESS FRIENDSHIP

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

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STEVE & ALLISON BLAY

## Directors' Message

One of the developments we are most excited about this year is how several of our board members and volunteers have taken on projects of their own. These projects include a "rhythm circle" to give residents a chance to express themselves musically, and a "reaction reading" group for those residents interested in literature and poetry. We even had one of our brand new volunteers, Cindy Perez, plan a "snowman making" arts-n-crafts event held Dec 3rd at University Place nursing home.

Some further detail on these projects can be found in this year's holiday letter. When creative initiatives like these are put into action by dedicated and caring volunteers, it can really make a difference in the lives of nursing home residents. If you are ever inspired to try something new, we are always open to new ideas, and will do everything we can to support you in your endeavor.



*On a recent outing to the new Guthrie's Fried Chicken restaurant near Parklands nursing home, 89 year old resident Frances Rutkowski is shown enjoying a box of chicken fingers and French fries.*

## Baby Boom

*Friends Across the Ages* has always been an organization dedicated to reaching out to nursing home residents of all ages through the efforts of volunteers of all ages. However, lately it seems like the description "across the ages" has fit our group better than ever! We had already been pretty near the top of the age spectrum; some of the residents in our program have been in their late 90's, or even 100+. But recently we have had several volunteers on the other end of the age spectrum: babies! This trend is not completely new. It started back in 2000 when Ena Schentrup (who is now 6 years old) began attending singing nights and other group events with her parents, Anne and Joe Schentrup. Since then, other kids have come out to events too, including her younger brother Max who joined the scene in 2004.

A year ago, Linda became our first baby one-to-one volunteer. Linda has been visiting a sweet elderly lady named Mary each week with her mother Karen. Linda was just 2 months old when she started! Donna Moore and her sons Kyle (age 6) and Chase (age 1) have recently become regular volunteers as well. They have done some one-to-one visitation, and are currently planning on helping out with arts and crafts each week at North Florida Rehab and Specialty Care. Rounding out the list of little ones who regularly participate in *Friends Across the Ages* are Peter Blay, age 1 (son of directors Steve and Allison Blay) and Jonah Shinn, age 7 months (son of board members Jon and Keri Shinn). Both can be seen at Friends board meetings, and their parents have plans for keeping them involved in nursing home volunteering for many years to come.



A recent visit by a local playgroup to the nursing home for Halloween highlighted how children can bring joy to nursing home residents. Eleven babies/small children attended with their moms (and a couple of dads)—and the residents haven't stopped smiling since! One 96 year old resident, Bessie, remarked, "I haven't had this much fun in ages. If I had to pick the cutest one, I'd never be able to!" The playgroup has already started talking about when they can come back, and the residents are eagerly awaiting them.

All of this just shows how truly intergenerational *Friends Across the Ages* is. What a blessing for people of all ages and backgrounds to be able to come together in love and friendship. That is certainly a message to take to heart this holiday season.

# Resident Spotlight...Verlene Robinson

Verlene and I first met by chance about five years ago. I came to visit another resident at the Manor and she was sitting in the hallway. We had a nice chat while I waited for my friend to return to her room. Before I left, I asked Verlene if there was anything I could bring her. She said she would like some corn curls. On my next visit, I brought the requested snack and a friendship was born.

After a few visits, Verlene and I found we had a lot in common. She grew up in a rural setting in Florida. My background was from a farm in Missouri. We spoke easily of gardening and flowers. We shared our love for cats. She had a favorite pet cat called Tiffany that was important to her through the years.

A Manor resident who knew Verlene before she came to the care center consistently raves about Verlene's cooking skills. She has spoken of making sweet potato pie and other southern dishes. Even though I

have never had the pleasure of tasting her culinary delights, I know they would have been delicious.

When Verlene hears the strains of old hymns like Amazing Grace or the Old Rugged Cross she quickly breaks into song with a firm, mellow voice. She is a woman of strong faith and enjoys having prayers and scripture quotes read to her. After the loss of her sight, she has been unable to read on her own.

It is evident by the kind words and frequent hugs of the staff that they have a deep affection for Verlene. She has a beautiful smile and an infectious laugh that melts your heart. After each weekly visit, her final words to me are, "Be sweet."

This farewell never fails to bring a smile to my lips and a warm feeling. I consider myself fortunate to have a friend like Verlene.

...By Agnes Bierbaum



## Welcome New Volunteers

- ✿ AMANDA ARICK at Parklands Nursing and Rehab
- ✿ KATIE CHESNUTT at University Place
- ✿ HEATHER GEIDEL at Park Meadows

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