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GHAzette

Official Newsletter of
GHA Autism Supports



Happy 45th Birthday GHA Autism Supports!

Over 150 GHA Autism Supports family members, staff, volunteers and board members gathered in the First Baptist Church Fellowship Hall on April 18th to celebrate the organization's 45th Anniversary! It was a time to share stories from the journey along the way and celebrate the outstanding accomplishments from what began as a small group of family members striving to provide a better quality of life for their loved ones with autism in 1978. Longtime parents Thomas Southerland and Maureen Morrell were featured speakers and both did an exceptional job sharing their heartfelt stories of how GHA positively impacted their loved ones' lives. Michael Francis shared his time and talents with his piano playing, and works of art handcrafted by participants in the GHA Creative Arts Program were on display, many of which were sold at the luncheon! In addition, the first two recipients of the GHA Autism Supports Community Partner Impact Award were named and honored (more information featured on page 3).



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SCENES FROM THE



45th ANNIVERSARY



"From a one 5-bed children's home in 1978 to over 25 programs serving more than 100 individuals with autism, we have so much to celebrate for the lives that have been transformed by our GHA Team along the way,"

DAWN ALLEN,
GHA AUTISM
SUPPORTS
CEO



Highlighting the First Recipients of the GHA Autism Supports Community Impact Award



First Presbyterian Church of Albemarle was recognized as one of two Community Partner Impact Award winners at GHA Autism Supports' 45th Anniversary Celebration on April 18th. FPC and GHA have partnered together on a number of activities that have enriched the lives of individuals with autism served by GHA as well as the church members. For six years, they have hosted art shows featuring GHA creative works of visual art from origami to pop art, as well as featuring talented musicians during gallery receptions. GHA received a grant from FPC's Gaither Endowment to enhance its music program at the Albemarle Day Services Program. A variety of instruments were purchased and will allow for soothing sounds and repetition. For seven years, FPC campers from their cooking camp have visited Carolina Farms, where campers harvested flowers, produce, and eggs. Individuals supported by GHA have volunteered for a number of years with the Music and Arts Camp, as well as the Youth Club where activities ranged from putting supplies back in their proper place to tidying up the gym. These volunteer opportunities have helped teach essential life skills, build self-confidence and expand social skills. First Presbyterian Youth also helped with GHA's Annual Duck Derby in 2022 by sorting 7,250 rubber ducks. That's a lot of ducks...just ask any FPC youth or adult volunteer!

Kathy Odell, who serves as the local Coordinator of the Stanly County Special Olympics, was also honored as one of two first recipients of the GHA Autism Supports Community Partner Impact Award. Her relationship with GHA spans over 15 years, and her love for working with individuals with special needs traces back much further. When Kathy was a senior at West Stanly High School, she assisted with a weeklong day camp sponsored by the Albemarle Parks and Recreation Department at Rock Creek Park for individuals with special needs. Kathy was a committed volunteer for more than 10 years until she became the Coordinator of the Stanly County Special Olympics in 2009, a role she put her heart and soul into for 10 years. After a 2-year break and a pandemic that heavily impacted all group activities, Kathy was brought back as the Coordinator once again in 2022. Countless individuals supported by GHA have been active participants of Stanly's Special Olympics program. Kathy shared, "We get way more than we give from Special Olympics."



"Heroes are ordinary people who make themselves extraordinary."

--Gerard Way

GHA Autism Supports gratefully acknowledges the following individuals who made memorials and honorary gifts between March 1, 2023 and May 31, 2023. Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this list. If you feel an error has been made, please contact the Development Department at 704-982-9600, x 125.

**In Honor of Direct Support
Professionals**

Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Southerland

In Honor of Paula Gates

Jane Gates

In Memory of Norman Gross

Ann & Al Sadowsky

In Memory of Reuben Klamer

Bea Pardo

In Honor of Sharon LaRocco

Ellen Williams

In Honor of Dr. Linda Lawrence

Mark & Jill Dry

In Honor of Samantha Messer

Allison Crotty

In Honor of Justin Morrell

Clare Casale

In Memory of Florence Rorie

Maureen Morrell

In Memory of David Sadowsky

Bea Pardo

In Honor of Nicky Sundquist

Dick & Mary J. Mason

In Honor of Emily Whichello

Amy Whichello

Cannon Foundation Funds Home Renovations



The Robert W. Thompson Home was built in 1989 and has been home to countless adolescents that GHA Autism Supports has served for 30-plus years. Although minor cosmetic updates have been made over the years, the home has been well-loved and needed major renovations. Funding from the Cannon Foundation helped provide the necessary monies for the renovations, along with donations from GHA parents and families. Renovations included an updated kitchen with new cabinets and countertops, new flooring, water-resistant wall boards in the bathrooms and hallways, updated bathroom fixtures and a fresh coat of paint on all doors and walls in the home. Individuals and staff were excited to move back into the newly renovated home on May 25, 2023!

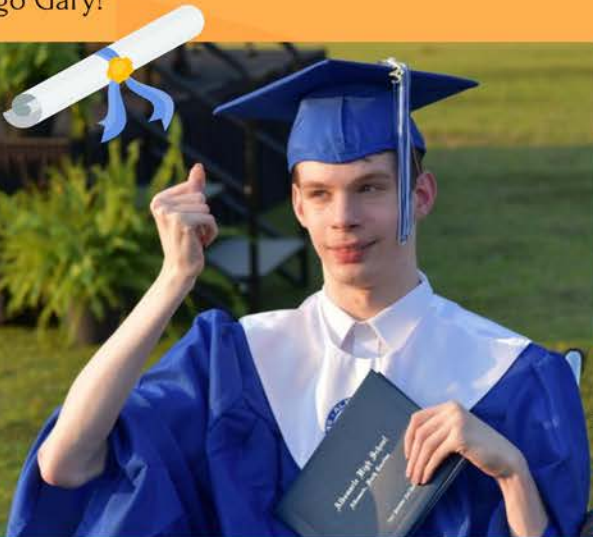
Putting In the Work at Carolina Farms

We are so grateful for the youth and adult youth leaders from Vortex Church in Albemarle who dedicated their time and service skills to spruce up several areas at Carolina Farms on Saturday, March 25th! From spreading mulch and planting summer bulbs to creating a new rock garden, this group came ready to make a difference! We depend on volunteers at GHA Autism Supports to assist with a variety of activities including sprucing up our facilities.



Congrats Graduate!

We are extremely proud of one of Albemarle High School's Class of 2023 graduates and a member of our GHA Autism Supports family. Way to go Gary!



GHA Hosts Japanese Visitor

For two weeks in June, GHA hosted a visitor from Japan, Yutaka Ikeuchi, affectionately known as "Yuta" to those who had the pleasure of meeting him. Yuta is a Clinical Psychologist from the Okayama Public Support Center for Persons with Developmental Disabilities. He toured many of GHA's homes and Day Programs, interviewed a parent, and met with numerous departments. He particularly enjoyed participating in activities with individuals and stated "It was a great experience to meet so many individuals and GHA staff." He wanted to express his appreciation to everyone he met for showing him such kindness. Yuta indicated he was very impressed with GHA's innovation and expansion over the years to meet individuals' needs as they grew and changed. He plans to share the information he learned about services for individuals with autism with his colleagues in Japan. We wish him much success!

Sharing ideas!



2023 Board of Directors

- Dr. Robert Craft
- Granseur Dick
- Brian Freeman
- Dr. Phil Julian
- Gina Martin
- Beverly Moore
- Dr. Russ Sharples

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15th Annual Rubber Duck Derby Huge Success

On May 20th, a few lucky ducks crossed the finish line for some fabulous cash prizes during the 15th Annual GHA Autism Supports Rubber Duck Derby! It was another record-breaking year, selling nearly 7,250 rubber ducks to support the many activities and programs at GHA Autism Supports. We appreciate the support of corporate and patron sponsors that assisted us in raising more than \$50,000 from this year's fundraising effort. A big thank you is extended to the Stanly County YMCA for hosting our annual event and to the numerous volunteers that served as "duck dumpers". We look forward to another sea of yellow ducks next year!



AND THE WINNERS ARE...

- \$75 WINNER - DON STEDMAN**
- \$100 WINNER - AMY WHICHELLO**
- \$250 WINNER - MANDI ROGERS**
- \$1,000 WINNER - TERESA ANDREWS**

AND THE GRAND PRIZE WINNER IS...

\$3,000 - RAMON SUNDQUIST

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!

Presenting Sponsor

In Memory of Ellen Brooks

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For GHA’s Quality Management Department, Spring was Survey Season!

Each year, GHA Autism Supports surveys community stakeholders about their overall satisfaction with our services and supports. The Quality Management Department utilizes SurveyMonkey in gathering this pivotal data. The stakeholder email list is reviewed and revised each year. For the 2023 survey, a special effort was made to include new community supporters as well as community supporters of the Wilmington program. After revisions, the email list increased from 65 stakeholders to 80 stakeholders. To assure more meaningful data, only community individuals familiar with our organization were included. GHA’s survey was completed in April 2023. Stakeholders were asked to respond to ten statements selecting one of four responses: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree or Strongly Disagree. For each survey question, the Strongly Agree end of the continuum was the most positive response.

Responses from GHA’s community stakeholders to all statements were exceptionally positive. Examples included:

- GHA Autism Supports works with other community organizations on behalf of the individuals it serves.

97% of Stakeholders Strongly Agree or Agree.

- GHA staff are respectful and knowledgeable in their interactions with community members.

100% of Stakeholders Strongly Agree or Agree.

- Overall, I am satisfied with GHA and its supports and services.

100% of Stakeholders Strongly Agree or Agree.



Another special survey completed in May 2023 was the modified form of the Staff Satisfaction Survey. The modified form was designed for all individuals served by GHA who work at GHA as well. At present, eleven individuals fall into this category. One supported individual completed the SurveyMonkey form provided to all regular employees. The other ten supported individuals were surveyed by familiar staff; in every case, the individual provided all answers.

The survey asked three basic Yes/No questions; results are summarized in the table which follows.

| | | | | |
|--|------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Do you like your job? | Yes | 10 | No | 0 |
| Have you been trained to do your job? | Yes | 10 | No | 0 |
| Do you feel respected at work? | Yes | 10 | No | 0 |

For 2023, we can be reassured that supported individuals working within the organization seem extremely satisfied with their employment.



Arts Council Grant Funds Fused Glass Art Program

We continue to offer one-on-one glasswork using fused glass materials and molds. We have a handful of individuals that work one-on-one with our Creative Arts Director, Kyoko Rorie-Bruton, to create gorgeous pieces of glass that range from small votive candle holders to large platters. A highlight for our artists involves making the fused glass vases for the Stanly County Arts annual awards for the Fine Arts Educator. They also made the gorgeous centerpieces used at our 45th Anniversary Celebration Luncheon. The Stanly County Arts Council recently awarded GHA Autism Supports a grant to purchase kiln shelves, kiln shelf paper, miscellaneous glass cutters and glass to support our creative arts program. Local funding through Stanly County Arts Council was provided by the NC Arts Council through their Grassroots Art Program. We could not provide some of the excellent programming without the support of community partners like the Stanly County Arts Council!



Start Your Engines--Residents Enjoy a Day at the Racetrack!

April 28th was all about fast cars and yummy food for some of the children we support at GHA Autism Supports! After a delicious lunch stop at TGI Fridays, three GHA youth and two staff spent the day at ZMAX Dragway attending the National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) Four-Wide Nationals. They were able to walk around the pits and watch the race from a private suite complete with race-day foods! Youth also received sensory bags with headphones and other sensory items. A special THANK YOU to Children's Speedway Charities Charlotte for race tickets, sensory bags and an incredible experience. GHA is fortunate to receive continued grant support annually from the Speedway Children's Charities - Charlotte to enhance programming for our youth residents and provide equipment for our children's home.



Time and Talents Showcased at Landscape Art Show

GHA Autism Supports' artists knocked it out of the park with their Landscape Art Show on Thursday, June 8th at First Presbyterian Church in Albemarle. Pictures depicting scenery on land were created by many talented artists. Individuals we support at GHA were inspired by nature hikes, walks, visits to local parks and picnics. Their works of art depict nature through their eyes using a variety of mediums, especially recycled products that help us to keep a clean and more beautiful earth. We appreciate First Presbyterian Church for hosting our art exhibit and the wonderful reception they provided complete with delicious foods for all. Projects such as this would not be possible without the leadership of our Creative Arts Director, Kyoko Rorie-Bruton. We appreciate all that attended, and we hope those that were unable to be at the art show will visit the exhibit during the church's office hours through early August.



ARTS SHOW

SUMMER FUN IS THE BEST!

