

GHazette

Official Newsletter of GHA Autism Supports

SCS and GHA Embark On New Partnership

GHA Autism Supports has had a long history of partnering with Stanly County Schools on a number of levels to enhance the educational and vocational experiences of the school-age population that both organizations support. On January 29th, GHA Autism Supports and the local school system embarked on a new partnership with the Stanly County Schools Occupational Course of Studies (OCS) Department. The program prepares students for adulthood and independent living by strengthening basic life competences, as well as occupational skills. North Stanly High School student Hannah Carrick is enrolled in the OCS and is currently working 2 hours daily on Monday through Friday at Second Street Sundries, the café and coffee shop owned by GHA Autism Supports. Hannah's experience at Second Street Sundries represents her journey in completing a minimum of 225 non-paid, work-based hours in the community, a requirement of the OCS Program. Julie Furr, a 25-year veteran Stanly County Schools teacher, helps to oversee the OCS Program at North Stanly and worked with GHA Autism Supports VP/ Chief Quality Services Officer Dee Pankey Thompson and Hannah's family to develop this opportunity for Hannah. "Partnerships with local businesses enhance our students' experiences and are crucial to their growth and success. Second Street Sundries is one of these amazing businesses that open their doors, offering first-hand work experience for our students," shared Mrs. Furr. "This partnership has been phenomenal, having such a positive impact on Hannah. Gaining experience beyond the classroom in the specialized work environment allows her to build upon established occupational skills, fine-tune professional competencies and explore new vocational talents. Their willingness to sponsor our students ensure they can be successful in the competitive workforce, but more importantly, explore their unique path to self-worth that comes from serving others and a job well done." Six weeks into the partnership, Hannah is thriving and doing an exceptional job. North Stanly High School teacher assistant Lisa Dry works alongside Hannah each day at Second Street Sundries providing any additional support that Hannah may need in performing the tasks at hand. "This has been an exceptional win-win for Stanly County Schools and GHA Autism Supports, but most importantly, we see an incredible growth in the development of Hannah's skills," said Dee Pankey Thompson. "To have the opportunity to team this approach for the benefit of helping Hannah reach her fullest potential has been extremely rewarding!"



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Manager Spotlight with Rhonda Mertlik



Residential Manager Rhonda Mertlik began her career in June of 2021 at the Cowan Home in Albemarle. Approximately one year later, she was also named Residential Manager of the Doby Home in Albemarle. Rhonda has a lengthy career supporting individuals in residential and vocational settings. She spent 21 years with The Mentor Network in New York serving in multiple roles including direct support professional, assistant manager and residential manager. Rhonda has years of experience working with individuals with both autism and traumatic brain injuries. Originally from Poughkeepsie,

New York, she relocated to North Carolina five years ago and enjoys hiking for enjoyment. When asked to reflect upon her time at GHA Autism Supports, Rhonda shared, "It's all about supporting the guys to me. It is about seeing them do something for the first time and celebrating every milestone, no matter how big or small."



Community Partnership Groups Treat Residents to a Night Out

Individuals we support at GHA Autism Supports danced the night away at both the Night to Shine in Wilmington and the Annual Sweetheart Dance in Albemarle. The Night to Shine is sponsored by the Tim Tebow Foundation in cooperation with local churches and the Sweetheart Dance is hosted by Pine Grove Methodist Church and Bethany United Methodist Church. We appreciate both hosts and their entire network of volunteers for providing such fun and memorable gatherings for the people we support. From selecting the perfect outfit to hair and makeup, individuals were all dolled up for these special events where many danced the night away! A special thank you to the direct support staff that helped our individuals shop and select their finest wear and accompany them to these wonderful events. We also appreciate students at Stanly Community College's Cosmetology Program for providing services for hair and nails. The Night to Shine and the Sweetheart Dance added to the quality of life for many and serve as a time to reconnect with old and new friends each year! Check out scenes from events on page three. We look forward to continuing these partnerships in 2024!



sweetheart dance

SCENES FROM

NIGHT to Shine



"Community partnerships allow us to promote integration, but most importantly aid in enriching the lives of the people we support."

DEE PANKEY-THOMPSON,
GHA AUTISM SUPPORTS VP/
CHIEF QUALITY SERVICES OFFICER



GHA Autism Supports gratefully acknowledges the following individuals who made memorials and honorary gifts between December 1, 2023 and February 29, 2024. 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, x125.

In Honor of Julian Allard
Phil & Brenda Julian

In Honor of Ms. Lynn Allard
Phil & Brenda Julian

In Honor of Macy Allard
Phil & Brenda Julian

In Honor of Dawn Allen
Merlin Amirtharaj
Paul & Brooke Childress
Chet & Elaine Gurski
Dr. & Mrs. Tom Norwood
Harold Sharpe & Nancy
Sullivan
Dr. Michael Taylor

In Memory of Jimmy Bayne
Jane Ballenger
Linda D. Couch
Electric City Shag Club
Joe & Jamie Ellers
Mr. & Mrs. William Menees
Eugenia H. Remoll
Mr. & Mrs. Wayne Selman
Pamela S. Skelton
Lowell Stern

In Honor of Kayleigh Boyd
Steve & Susan Boyd

In Memory of Ellen Brooks
Shawnee Sundquist

In Memory of
Mrs. Ernestine Cofield
Denise Drye
Beth Olivieri

In Memory of
Christopher Cook
The Rev. Dr. Cathy Cook

In Honor of Jason Cory
Linda Varblow

In Honor of Cannon Cowles
Dr. & Mrs. Thomas Norwood, Jr.

In Honor of Ange Craft &
David
Suzanne S. Surratt

In Honor of Scott Denton
Marian & Taylor Carson
Griff & Christie Garner

In Memory of Linda DeYoung
Phil Ponder

In Honor of Seth Dickinson
Edward Dickinson

In Honor of Madalyn Dockery
Jane R. Williams

In Honor of the
Durrett Home Staff
Larry & Thea Gardner

In Honor of Emily
Bob & Colleen Whichello

In Memory of Michael Forrest
Rick & Penny Brown

In Honor of Robbie Gardner
Nancy Rich

In Honor of
GHA Autism Supports Staff
Deborah F. Wilson

In Memory of
Bobby K Harwood
Ron & Lisa Burris
Dr. & Mrs. Henry Cremisi
Denise Drye
Charles & Peggy Hughes

In Honor of
Mr. & Mrs. JT Hinton
Phil & Brenda Julian

In Honor of P. Lauren Hinely
Phil & Susan Hinely

In Honor of
Sandy Hinson
Roger & Gina Martin

In Honor of Lori Ivey
Brenda Cox

(Continued from page 3)

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**In Honor of
Dr. & Mrs. Eric Johnsen**
Susan Stokes

**In Honor of
Drew Julian**
Paul Boileau
Gordon & Ruby Johnson
Howard & Frances Montague

**In Memory of
Mr. Henry Julian**
Denise Drye
Beth Olivieri

**In Memory of
Henry & Mildred Julian**
Phil & Brenda Julian

**In Honor of
Dr. Jennifer Julian**
Phil & Brenda Julian

In Memory of Reuben Klamer
Bea Pardo

In Honor of Charlie Lawrence
Winifred Helton

In Honor of Lindsay Leggett
John & Taryn Williams

In Memory of Ashley Lowder
Ronnie Michael

In Honor of Zach Lowder
Tony & Martha Lowder

In Honor of Jonathan Martin
Sue Martin

**In Memory of
Michael Jonathan McCrann, Sr.**
John McCrann

In Honor of Caleb McElreath
Shirley M. Bayne

In Honor of Peggy McHolland
Bob McHolland

In Honor of Cindy Moore
Jane R. Williams

In Memory of Curtis Moore
Jeff & Debra Inscore
The late Mr. Michael E. Snyder
& Mrs. Karen Snyder

In Honor of Justin Morrell
Julie Bryce

Carson Bynum
Katherine Fogleman
Conrad Gordon
Katherine Hall
Eric & Emily Iverson
Brooke Jenkins
Jack & Kathleen McMackin
Evan McMillian

In Honor of Justin Morrell
Continued

Tom FitzGerald Morrell
Lester Parker
Mike & Linda Riley
Bo & Helen Roberts
Justin & Lara Trowbridge

In Honor of Maureen Morrell

Linda & Brad Griffin
Katherine Hall
Rebecca Stern
Martha Webb
Catherine Wilson

In Memory of Dr. Rob Morrell

Emily Balance
Amos Dawson
Kathleen Dawson
Sandra DeAngelis Peace
Denise Drye
Linda & Brad Griffin
James Hunt
Mike & Linda Riley
Michael & Elizabeth Ross

**In Honor of
Dr. & Mrs. Thomas Norwood, Jr.**
Susan Stokes

In Honor of Beth Olivieri
John Olivieri

In Honor of Matthew Peele
Melanie Barfield

(Continued from page 4)

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In Honor of Alexandra Phillips
Phil & Brenda Julian

In Memory in
Clay & Etta Stafford
Phil & Brenda Julian

In Honor of Claire Phillips
Phil & Brenda Julian

In Honor of
Ms. Heather Stafford
Phil & Brenda Julian

In Honor of
Mr. & Mrs. Matt Phillips
Phil & Brenda Julian

In Honor of
Mr. & Mrs. Phillip Stafford
Phil & Brenda Julian

In Honor of Will Phillips
Phil & Brenda Julian

In Honor of John Stoehr
Mr. & Mrs. Lawrence Stoehr

In Honor of Braden Poplin
Dr. & Mrs. Thomas Norwood, Jr.

In Honor of Robbie Stevenson
Bill & Diane Stevenson

In Honor of Sam Poplin
Joe & Ellen Story

In Honor of Nicky Sundquist
Dick & Mary J. Mason
Shawnee Sundquist

In Memory of David Sadowsky
Bea Pardo

In Honor of Ryan Sadowsky
Janet Hartman

In Honor of
Mr. & Mrs. Ron Swanner
Kay Cochran
Susan Stokes

In Honor of Sam
Gerald Stuart

In Memory of Patricia Tripp
Teresa Andrews

In Honor of
Mrs. Margaret Snyder
E. Lake I. Snyder

In Honor of Tylisha Walker
Jane R. Williams

In Honor of
Thomas & Marie Southerland
Paul Gerald, Jr.

In Honor of Emily Whichello
Owen & Mickey Calloway

2023 Parent Satisfaction Survey

Survey, surveys and more surveys! Every year GHA's Quality Management Department gathers an incredible amount of survey information from parents, guardians, all the individuals we serve, community stakeholders, employees, individuals who hold jobs in the community and others.

Here's a chance to sample a few of the highlights from our 2023 Parent Satisfaction Survey.



100% of parents strongly agree or agree:

- GHA Autism Supports provides high quality services for my family member.
- As a result of services with GHA Autism Supports, the quality of my life has improved.
- My family member seems happy with the supports provided by GHA.



Additional questions or concerns for the Quality Management Department? Contact Dee Pankey Thompson at 704-626-2340.

Partnership With Pfeiffer University Benefits All Involved



opportunity to share tips for working with individuals on the autism spectrum. GHA Autism Supports values the community partnerships with Pfeiffer University and countless others in collaborative efforts to greater impact the autism community.

GHA Autism Supports VP/Chief Learning Officer Janet Banks and VP/Quality Services Officer Dee Pankey Thompson had the pleasure of presenting to students at the Pfeiffer University Jerry and Evon

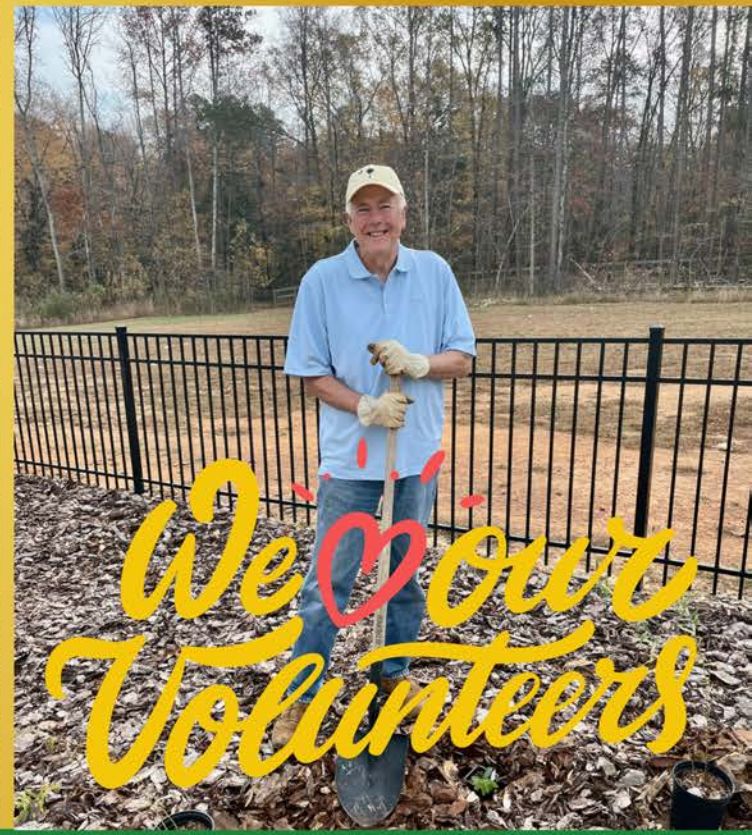
Jordan School of Occupational Therapy at their Health Sciences Campus in Downtown Albemarle last month. We loved having an interactive discussion about the characteristics of autism and an





Completion of Garden Areas Pay Tribute to Thompson Family

After more than two years of planning, we are pleased to announce that The Robert and Joyce Thompson Garden of Peace and Tranquility in Honor of Eric and Nancy has been completed! The garden features two wheelchair-accessible planters, a birdhouse and birdfeeder, a meandering sidewalk and plant beds full of native perennials, shrubs, and trees. Additional planters have been placed at building entrances and along the patio at Morrow Valley Farmstead. The sunny location also features a seating area with a sunshade helping reduce summer temperatures on the patio. We are so appreciative of the Stanly County Extension Master Gardener volunteers who helped create a plan, staff and parent/guardian volunteers who put in the elbow grease to get the sensory garden prepared and planted, as well as funds for plants, equipment, and supplies. Robert Thompson was an instrumental figure in the organization of GHA in the late 1970s, and he served as an involved parent and board member up until his passing in 2019. We are looking forward to Thompson Garden being in full bloom this spring and summer!



We ♥ our Volunteers



NAMASTE

Whole-Person Care Approach Continues at MVF While Expanding to Other Programs

Through funding from the Duke Endowment, we are continuing to implement a whole-person integrative care approach to provide several alternatives to traditional medicine. The hope is that by enhancing the quality of life and assisting each individual in managing what can at times be limited coping skills, that we can make strides in reducing their overall level of anxiety. This pilot project initially focused on the ten residents at Morrow Valley Farmstead (MVF) during the first year of grant funding. As we are approaching the second year of the project, we are offering yoga in a variety of settings. We are participating in classes at Mindful Yoga, Pilates & Art studio in Albemarle, as well as utilizing instructional yoga videos at Morrow Valley and our day programs in both Albemarle and Wilmington. In addition, we kicked off reflexology with foot massages performed by two massage therapists who have been coming to Morrow Valley Farmstead regularly since October. We hope to expand reflexology to include additional individuals shortly. Music therapy has also been very popular and well-received by individuals at Morrow Valley Farmstead. Initially Voices Together, the music therapy group, worked with individuals at Carolina Farms #1 prior to the Duke Endowment project. The program was so well received that we began offering music therapy to residents at Morrow Valley as a part of the pilot project. Plans are to expand this offering to many others at GHA. Stay tuned for additional updates about our activities funded through the Duke Endowment grant!



Don't "Duck" a Chance to Win \$3,000! 



Make plans to join the fun at the 16th Annual GHA Autism Supports Rubber Duck Derby on Saturday, May 18th at the Stanly County Family YMCA Park in Albemarle! Most importantly, adopt your rubber ducks now for a chance to win \$3,000 and numerous other exciting prizes. All ducks sold will plunge into the YMCA pool on event day at 1:00 pm. A complete list of prizes and event rules can be found at www.ghautismsupports.org. Purchase your ducks by visiting the website or by calling (704) 982-9600, ext. 125. Grab a duck nest, flock, flotilla or invasion now before they are going, going gone!

GHA Receives Support From Speedway Children's Charities

We were fortunate to receive a grant from Speedway Children's Charities - Charlotte. Grant funds provide support for programs for children and adolescents at GHA Autism Supports. Grant funds from 2024 will be used for a variety of equipment and supplies. We've been fortunate to add iPads with medical kiosks that provide a platform for all staff to enter records securely reducing our risk management and increasing quality assurance. In addition to the iPads and kiosks, we also created a sensory room at the Smith Home and plan to add additional equipment and supplies in our high school classroom, as well as Thompson Home. Lori Ivey accepted the grant on behalf of GHA Autism Supports during a ceremony in December at the Charlotte Motor Speedway.



STAY CONNECTED

Follow our programs on social media outlets including the Facebook and Instagram pages for GHA Autism Supports and Second Street Sundries!



Instagram

Sign up and encourage others to enroll in the electronic delivery of our GHazette newsletter on our website at ghautismsupports.org. Complete the Constant Contact form at the bottom of the opening page!



OUR EDITORIAL TEAM

The GHazette Newsletter is released quarterly. For feedback or to share story ideas, contact:

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betholivieri@ghainc.org

Let the fun begin at at





Take and Bake Kicks Off at Second Street Sundries

To meet customer demand, we are now offering “Take and Bake” frozen meals at Sundries. For busy families, preparing a home-cooked meal is difficult with the many activities they are involved in. For others, they may enjoy using their time for hobbies other than cooking! The famous daily specials have been popular over the last two years at Second Street Sundries and we are now offering them in both small and large casserole sizes for customers to purchase, bake, and enjoy at home. Meals are available in small sizes (3-5 servings) and large sizes (6-8 servings) and come frozen ready to thaw and prepare. Frozen meal options are chicken alfredo, chicken pot pie, vegetable or meat lasagna, meatloaf, and vegetable or meat-baked spaghetti. Prices range from \$18 to \$36 depending on casserole type and size. Pre-orders are not required, and all “Take and Bake” items can be purchased from 6:00 am to 2:00 pm during regular operating hours at Second Street Sundries on Monday through Friday. In addition, you can purchase the frozen meals at the walk-up window from 3:30 to 5:30 pm on Mondays and Wednesdays each week for your convenience.

yum!



Easy Peasy

