

MISSION STATEMENT

The Alliance for the Physically Disabled (APD), Inc. is a non-profit organization committed to creating accessible and affordable housing opportunities with full-time personal assistance services for adults with severe physical disabilities.

A Volunteer who brings love, faith and hope, by Fred Day

Over the past few years, the residents of Merica House have developed a close friendship with a young Catholic priest named Father Matthew DeForest. Father Matthew is a graduate of Bishop O'Connell High School in Arlington, Virginia, Class of 2000. After high school, Father Matthew entered the seminary. He was ordained as a priest in June 2009. In 2011, Bishop Paul Loverde assigned Father Matthew to be the parochial vicar at St. Anthony of Padua Church in Falls Church, a position he held until June 2014. He is now assigned as the parochial vicar at the Cathedral of St. Thomas More in Arlington. The story of Father Matthew's relationship with Merica House and its residents is told in a book that was recently published by 2DonnBooks of Reston, Virginia. The book is titled *Of Mice and Miracles: An American Educator's Story*. The author of *Of Mice and Miracles* is Fred Day, a member of the APD Board of Directors. We have printed below an excerpt from *Of Mice and Miracles* that tells of Father Matthew's work with the Merica House residents. *Of Mice and Miracles* may be purchased through the publisher's website, www.2donnbooks.com.



In the Spotlight — Father Matthew DeForest

In the years since his ordination, Father Matthew DeForest has developed into an engaging and dynamic priest with a gift for delivering inspirational homilies. DeForest's words vary from week to week, but the essence of his message remains consistent. "People of hope," he tells the congregation, "must live differently." One way in which Father Matthew lives differently is in the work he undertakes to nurture his own unique "pots of gold." In the fall of 2011, DeForest took interest in a gentleman named Sean Wawrzaszek, a 45-year-old resident in a private condominium known as Merica House. As with other residents of Merica House, Wawrzaszek was afflicted with cerebral palsy. Wawrzaszek's disability prevented him from manipulating his fingers or articulating words; he depended on a touch-sensitive computer linked to a speech synthesizer to convey his thoughts.



With Wawrzaszek's lack of manual dexterity, forming sentences on the computer was a formidable task. Wawrzaszek had to repeatedly cursor through characters and words projected on his monitor to transform his thoughts into meaningful expressions. The process did not lend itself to quick conversations. A routine exchange could take several minutes.

On one occasion, Wawrzaszek, a practicing Catholic, was particularly distressed. He believed there was an effort underway to discourage him from attending Mass at his favorite church. Upon learning of the situation, DeForest paid a visit to Merica House. Talking through his computer, Wawrzaszek asked if it would be okay for him to change religions. It was a question that Wawrzaszek did not pose lightly; his family was steadfastly Catholic. Family tradition notwithstanding, Wawrzaszek wanted a church that would welcome him on Sundays, whether Catholic or not. DeForest spoke to Wawrzaszek at length, with words designed to soothe the anger. After assessing the situation, DeForest proposed a simple solution. "You know," he told Wawrzaszek, "we could do a Mass each month right here at Merica House." With that simple gesture of caring, a glorious smile came over Wawrzaszek's face, a smile that spoke volumes. In the months after DeForest's conversation with Wawrzaszek, Father Matthew's monthly Masses became a staple at Merica House.

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OUR GRATEFUL THANKS

The APD wishes to thank the following patrons for their generosity in supporting Merica House from April 1, 2014 to October 1, 2014

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Father Matthew DeForest (continued)

The "congregation" included Wawrzaszek as well as fellow Merica House residents Cathy Parr and two sisters, Deirdre Shields and Maureen Shields.

Sean Wawrzaszek passed away, unexpectedly, in August 2013. Nonetheless, DeForest continues his practice of celebrating Mass once a month at Merica House. On each occasion, DeForest delivers a stirring homily for the Merica House residents, sometimes focusing on the joy that came from the magnificent smile of their friend Sean Wawrzaszek or the grace with which Wawrzaszek accepted his physical limitations.

DeForest likes to tell people that "homily material is all over the place." On any given Sunday, his homily material may come from Thomas Aquinas or Mother Teresa, but it is equally likely to come from Sean Wawrzaszek or former pro football player Curtis Martin. In his homilies, DeForest encourages parishioners who are in search for inspiration "to look to the Cross." Echoing the advice once given to him by the rector at his seminary, DeForest reminds parishioners, "When you are out and about, remember to smile."

On a Sunday evening late in 2013, DeForest opened a homily at St. Anthony of Padua Church by playing a recording of Bill Withers' 1972 hit song, *Lean on Me*. DeForest used the song to launch into a reflection on the special ways in which Christians can provide solace and strength to others.

DeForest finds more good in the world than bad. He adheres to the belief that if people only dare to dream big, it is possible to change the world "one word, one footstep, one burden at a time." For inspiration, DeForest invokes a prayer attributed to Sir Francis Drake, "Disturb us, O Lord, when our dreams come true because we dream too little, when we have arrived in safety because we have sailed too close to shore."

Summer Recap at Merica House by Roxane Burkhart

It's been a slow, quiet summer since the residents had to stop attending an activity program early this year. Fortunately, there were highlights in the individual residents' lives.

After having gone through a process of seek and study with a gentleman from her new church, Sharita had her first Communion in April and Confirmation a few weeks later. All the residents (well, the female residents, at least) and friends of Sharita's participated in the planning of this sacred event. They picked out a beautiful lacy white dress and veil, as well as some dainty jewelry to fit the occasion. Sharita's Grandmother provided white satin slippers. Sharita planned a Confirmation party at Merica House while Cathy & I designed the invitations. There was a very good turnout at the church. The party at Merica House was well-attended. Many of the attendees brought gifts with religious significance to Sharita as she started her life of renewed commitment to the Lord.

In August Cathy accompanied her family to Minnesota for a family reunion. She returned to Merica House with lots of pictures and happy stories about her family members. Later in the month she took the Ice Bucket Challenge with her Mom doing the "honors" (of dumping ice on her head) & the Aides & other residents cheering her on and taking pictures.

Dee enjoyed Mass at Merica House, visits from family members bearing pizza, and volunteers with computer and cell phone savvy. She attended her brother's wedding and a couple of Nationals baseball games with him.

Matt spends his weekends with his Mom & Dad and his weekdays with Dee. Dee watches TV in the morning with Sharita in Sharita's bedroom, but she spends her afternoons watching game shows & sports on TV with Matt. In October Maureen returns to Merica House after being gone for a year. We are looking forward to having one of our family members back at home with us. At the same time, a couple of the ladies have been given the opportunity to return to their activity program once or twice a week. Looks like the holidays are going to be very busy with lots of change and plenty of joyful occasions.

A Hair Raising Experience



Maureen Shields makes the cut. For the third time, Maureen Shields has donated another crop of beautiful hair. This time she donated to the

"Pantene Beautiful Lengths" program associated with the American Cancer Society. Nine inches of her lovely red hair were cut off and will be made into a real hair wig, and then given free of charge to a woman with cancer. Thanks Maureen for the gift of giving.



AMAZON SHOPPERS

Are you shopping on line using Amazon? Consider beginning you shopping at the Merica House website. You can link to www.amazon.com from the Merica House website theapd.org. Since this program was started on November 26, 2012, Merica House has received \$666.79.

So remember, when purchasing on Amazon first visit our web site theapd.org. We will receive 4% of your purchase without any increase in a charge to you. If you forget the name of our web site no problem just Google Merica House and visit our site that way! Thank you again for you support. If you have any questions please contact Kathy at kms Shields@cox.net.

VACANCY

Vacancy at Merica House

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We have a male, vacancy at Merica House. The applicant must be between the ages of 18 and 45 years of age and capable of directing his own care. The applicant must have, or be eligible for, the EDCD waiver. Round the clock care is provided for EDCD eligible individuals. Section 8 vouchers (Virginia Choice) are accepted. For more details, please call Merica House at: (703) 671-7991.

Photos of Merica House Resident Summer Activities



Cathy Parr, takes the Ice Bucket Challenge with some assistance from her mother Sunny Parr



Deirdre w/ her brother Andrew and Ray Knight a Washington Nationals Baseball Team Announcer.

Deirdre Shields talks shop with MASN Nationals' TV personalities Johnny Holliday, Ray Knight and Bob Carpenter before the Nats' win, on 9/14



MATCHING GIFT CHALLENGE !!

Double Your Donation!

An unnamed donor has committed to match on a 1:1 basis, \$10,000 toward our Thanksgiving goal of \$20,000!

GIVE A GIFT AND CHANGE A LIFE !

THE APD is a qualified 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization. Donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.



Even though Sadie Jane is not an official therapy dog she certainly does look comfortable on Deirdre's lap. Thanks to Roxane and Mike Burkhart for sharing their well behaved beagle with our residents.

Eat For a Cause

The APD once again is happy to team with Pistone's Restaurant for our Eat for a Cause fundraiser. On **OCT. 22, 2014 from 5-9 PM** come and eat at Pistone's with your family and friends and a portion of your bill will be donated to Merica House. Pistone's is located at 6320 Arlington Blvd Seven Corners VA. Visit their web site to view their menu and directions Call 703-533-1885 for reservations.

Pistone's
Italian Inn



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We are on the WEB at: theapd.org



Phone: (703) 671-7991 E-mail: apdsuper1@cox.net
Fax: (703) 671-7991 (call first before sending FAX)



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