



Alliance for the Physically Disabled, Inc.

Summer 2021

## IMPOSSIBLE: MERICA HOUSE NAMED AS REAL WINNER OF KENTUCKY DERBY

**Frederick J. Day, Esq.**

Vice President, Board of Directors

Jennifer Mercer has a long and distinguished history of turning lost causes into winners. "When life hands you lemons," Jennifer has often been heard to say, "make lemonade." And that is exactly the advice that Jennifer gave Bob Baffert, the trainer of Kentucky Derby winner Medina Spirit, in the second week of May.

To recap recent history, on May 1, in the 147<sup>th</sup> running of the Derby, Medina Spirit finished first in the field of 20 horses at Churchill Downs. Mandaloun, going off at 12-1, placed second and Hot Rod Charlie, an 8-1 shot, came in third. Roughly a week after the Derby, Medina Spirit was found to have run the race with an impermissible level of the drug betamethasone.

In response to the allegations, Baffert staunchly defended both his horse and his record as a trainer. He denied that Medina Spirit had ever been treated with betamethasone and added, "He's a great horse, he didn't deserve this. He ran a gallant race."

Jennifer knew the reality. Whether the allegations were true or not, Medina Spirit's victory in the Derby would be forever tainted. In conversations with Baffert, Jennifer urged the legendary trainer to find the silver lining. "Behind every obstacle," she told Baffert, "lurks an opportunity."

Baffert was quick to respond. "I'm having a hard time finding the silver lining," he told Jennifer. Mercer then turned brutally honest. "Some people will always perceive you as wearing the black hat in all this, but that shouldn't stop you from letting your better angel shine through," she told Baffert.

By this point, Baffert was hopelessly confused. "I'm having to deal with the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission. I don't think they care about my better angel."

Jennifer proposed a hypothetical. "Let's suppose that I talk to the Commission and, without admitting any wrongdoing, urge them to name a well-deserving alternate as the Derby winner." Baffert was intrigued. "And who do you propose as a well-deserving alternate?" he asked.

Jennifer responded, "Why Merica House, of course."

In short order, Jennifer met with the members of the Commission and urged them to declare Merica House as the winner of the 2021 Derby. Her bottom line to the Commission: "You vacate Medina Spirit's victory and award the crown to Merica House, and then Bob channels a share of Medina Spirit's winnings to Merica House. It's win-win-win: the Commission's concerns about the integrity of the race are resolved, Baffert looks good, and Merica House benefits."

The Horse Racing Commission was skeptical. "What about the racing purists who will insist that the Derby winner must be a horse?" one member asked. Jennifer offered a ready solution: "Replace the 'U' in Merica House with an 'R' and there you have it."

And that's the true story of how Merica Horse – er, Merica House – was named the real winner of this year's Kentucky Derby and came away with a purse of \$7,200.

From his home in Westlake Village, California, venerable baseball announcer and horse racing enthusiast Vin Scully was heard to say, "In a year that has been so improbable, the impossible has happened!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Many thanks to Jennifer and Mark Mercer and Brenda and Bobby Bray and all their friends south of the Mason-Dixon Line for making the impossible happen.



Kentucky Derby trophy on display before the race. How magnificent and beautiful! We at Merica House are even luckier to have won the hearts of so many wonderful friends and supporters!



Jennifer Mercer presents Annette Porter, the President of the Board of Directors with a check for \$7,200 from the Kentucky Derby fundraiser she and her friends held in support of Merica House.



# Madam PRESIDENT



## Dear Family & Friends,

There's a newness in the air and with it comes joy. With pandemic restrictions lifted, there is an air of thanksgiving and happiness. Merica House residents are elated that visitors are able to come again. An exuberant Maureen Shields yelled out "thank God" when the Board of Directors voted to relax the COVID protocol restrictions for Merica House. I think that goes for all of us. Programs are opening up again. Deidre and Maureen both have been able to avail themselves of the SPARC program that they so fondly enjoy. One of the first things Maureen wanted to do was bake several kinds of desserts to share with staff there as a way of saying "thank you." Cathy Parr immediately stepped out into the community and while decorating her wheelchair in full regalia, took off on the metro for the D.C. downtown mall. While there, she was asked to make a presentation honoring fallen women at the Women's War Memorial. Matt is enjoying going back and forth between Merica House and his parents' home in Warrenton, where he often studies for the Computer Science class he is taking online. Joe continues to participate in the at-home therapy programs designed for him by the physical therapists who come to visit. It's nice to see a busyness in the air.

On a personal note, newness brings joy in my life as well. With the purchase of a new home in Keswick, Virginia, I successfully completed the

move from the DC area in June. Having things on one level has been a welcome change, and I look forward to meeting new neighbors and taking part in the activities of the Glenmore and Charlottesville community. Even bigger events were in store as my first grandchild was born. Harmon Christine Porter was welcomed into the world on June 3, 2021. Two weeks later, I flew to California to meet this little girl who immediately stole my heart.

As life gets back to a semblance of normal for all of us, I am excited that we can forge onward with our lives. Merica House will be back in action and fundraisers will be held in real life. We'll soon be starting the second year of our current Fairfax County CCFP grant and, in the coming months, we will begin working on writing a new grant proposal for Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024. We have an available spot at Merica House for a new resident, so we will be opening our arms wide to find the right person who is looking to become part of our family. We continue to look for a volunteer who can take over the reins as treasurer on the board. So much to do.... Stay in touch with us through our website, our facebook page, and more importantly.... join us in presence!

*Annette*

**Annette Porter**  
President, Board of Directors



Merica House  
Moments  
SUMMER 2021



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Alliance for the Physically Disabled Inc

## MISSION

The Alliance for the Physically Disabled, Inc. (APD), 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.

## Best Kentucky Derby Party South of the Mason-Dixon Line

**Frederick J. Day, Esq.**  
Vice President, Board of Directors

The members of the popular Cajun-country musical band known as Tim Cadiere and the Washboard Road Band bill themselves as "the best musicians south of the Mason-Dixon Line."

It was fitting, therefore, that when Jennifer and Mark Mercer were planning what they expected would be the best Kentucky Derby party south of the Mason-Dixon Line, they invited Tim Cadiere and his band to perform.

Jennifer Mercer, the sister of our residents Deidre and Maureen, conceived of the event as both a post-Pandemic celebration and a fund-raising opportunity for Merica House. She was assisted in the effort by her husband, Mark, and their friends, Brenda and Bobby Bray.

The party was set for the day of the Derby, Saturday, May 1. The location was the Mercer residence in Reynolds Lake Oconee, situated in Greensboro, Georgia — roughly 85 miles east of Atlanta.

Early in the afternoon on Derby day, Cadiere showed up singing his hit song, "Hop in My Truck." Aside from breaks for refreshments and to watch the running of the 147<sup>th</sup> Derby, Cadiere and his band members continued to perform until late in the evening.

For the guests at the Derby party, the primary motivation was the chance to reconnect with friends and cheer on their favorite Derby contender. Equally important, however, was the opportunity to make a financial contribution to Merica House.

The Derby party was the third fund-raising event that Jennifer and Mark have held to benefit the residents of Merica House. By any measure, this year's party was the most successful of all. More than 80 guests attended. In total, the guests donated \$7,200 to benefit Merica House and its residents.

Remarking on the success of the fund-raiser, APD president Annette Porter stated, "The Derby party was absolutely the single most successful fund-raising event ever for Merica House. The residents are truly grateful for the dedication and support of Jennifer, Mark, Brenda and Bobby and for the amazing generosity of everyone who attended the Derby party."

And, for the record, "the best musicians south of the Mason-Dixon Line" now have five new fans in Virginia.



Recipe presented by: **Deidre and Maureen Shields**  
Merica House Residents

Recipe reviewed by: **Sonja Jarvis**  
Co-Secretary, Board of Directors

### Mom's Chicken Tetrazzini

ACTIVE: 20 min | TOTAL: 45 min | SERVES: 4

- 1 lb. spaghetti (cooked and drained)
- 5 chicken breasts (cooked and cubed)
- 2 10.75 oz cans condensed cream of chicken soup
- 2 1/4 cups water
- 2 cups butter
- 2 cubes chicken bouillon
- 1/4 cup shredded cheddar cheese

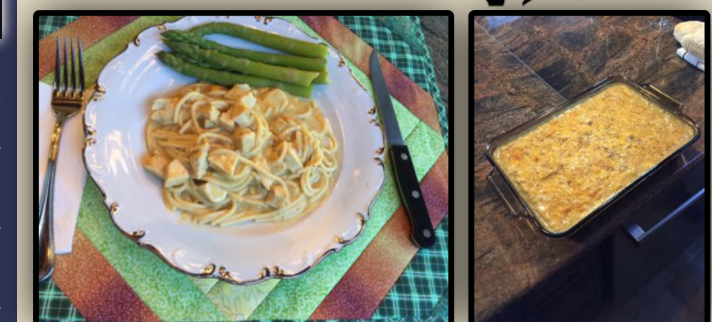
1. Place cooked spaghetti in 9"x13" baking dish.
2. Spread cooked, cubed chicken over pasta.
3. In medium sauce pan mix and heat soup, water, butter and bouillon cubes. Bring to boil.
4. Pour soup, water, butter and bouillon mixture over chicken and pasta in dish.
5. Cover with cheddar cheese.
6. Bake at 375 degrees for 25 minutes.

MERICA HOUSE  
GOURMET

\* Cut along lines to add to your recipe repertoire. Trust us, you be grateful you did!

I made this dish for a Saturday night dinner and was quite pleased with the outcome. It was very flavorful and uses easy-to-find ingredients. It takes approximately 35 minutes prep-time - less if you have already cooked chicken - and 25 minutes baking. The finished product displays well, and is quite a hearty meal. It easily feeds 6 people. Since I am on a low-salt diet, one alteration I made was to use low-salt bouillon cubes. I don't think it affected the flavor at all. There were only two of us eating, so we had plenty of leftovers. Maureen Shields gave me a great tip: this recipe works well with turkey after Thanksgiving. Bon Appetit!

### Merica House Test Kitchen Rating



## Shields Family Celebrates Birthdays

### Deidre Shields

Merica House Resident

Birthdays come in bunches for our family. My birthday is on March 14. Fast forward two months and my brother, Andrew, and Andrew's daughter, Keira, celebrate their birthdays on May 19. And my sister, Maureen, has her birthday on August 4.

This year, on Wednesday, May 19, our family held a festive and fun-filled birthday party on the outdoor patio at Merica House. In addition to myself, Andrew and Kiera, those attending the party included my mother and father, Kathy and Art; my sister, Maureen; Keira's brother, Wes; and one of our aides, Tracy. Only missing was my sister, Jennifer, who was unable to come up from her home in Georgia.

Marking the occasion, Tracy, who enjoys crocheting in her spare time, presented five-year-old Keira with a colorful blanket that Tracy had specially made as a birthday gift. There was food, drinks and a beautiful birthday cake. With the Coronavirus precautions lifted, the birthday party was the first time that our family had been able to gather together in nearly 18 months.

Photos from Maureen Shields' recent 40<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration. It was a fun celebration for family and friends at Merica House with plenty of cake! Happiest of Birthdays, Mo!







check out Cathy Parr's online store:  
[www.pinkprincessboutiques.com](http://www.pinkprincessboutiques.com)

## My Volunteering Experience

**Noah Tran**

Merica House volunteer

**W**hen I first came to volunteer at Merica House, I was worried that it would take time for the residents to fully welcome me. However, having volunteered for over a month at Merica House, I have developed special bonds with the residents. Whether it be making art and craft items with Dee and Maureen or helping organize Cathy's jewelry for her consulting work, I have found so much joy and learned so much.

The one thing that I enjoy the most and look forward to every week is the engaging conversations with the residents, which encompass discussions about favorite foods and the residents' efforts to overcome hardships, especially throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Dee, Maureen, Cathy, Matthew and Joe have so many stories to tell and always find something that they can bond with someone over. In particular, as a William and Mary student, I was able to bond with Dee and Maureen over our familiarity with and love of the Williamsburg area.

Throughout the time I have spent at Merica House, Roxane Burkhart, the Resident Services Coordinator, and several of the aides have been welcoming and kind. Roxane has made a special effort to help me in working with the residents and has asked me to help out as much as I could involving activities such as

hanging up decorations or folding laundry for the residents.

Merica House is committed to creating an accommodating residence where adults with physical disabilities can live in comfort and joy. Spending time volunteering at Merica House has made me realize how important it is to have people and programs that can provide support for physically disabled individuals. In a world that has been affected by a global pandemic, the one attribute that we should all have is care and compassion.

*[Editor's Note: During the summer months, Noah Tran has been volunteering one day a week to help the residents at Merica House. In September, Noah will be entering his sophomore year at The College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. This is his account of his experiences during his time at Merica House.]*



We are so deeply grateful to all of our friends and supporters. We'd like to recognize those who helped us financially in recent months:

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