

Merica House *Moments*

Fall 2023



Merica House resident Cathy Parr, the 2022 Ms. Wheelchair Virginia, attended a Fairfax County Board of Supervisors ceremony to honor Rikki Epstein, retiring Executive Director of the Board of Supervisors.

BREAKING NEWS

On August 15, 2023, two officials from the Virginia Department of Medical Assistances Services, Nina Burrell-Braxton and Carolyn Vanderwarker, visited Merica House and met with our residents. Ms. Burrell-Braxton and Ms. Vanderwarker came away with a very favorable impression. In an email to Merica House resident services coordinator Roxane Burkhart, they wrote, "Thank you for the diligent care you and the staff provide."

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Fred Day *vice president* Christine Metz *co-secretary*
Mitch Opalski *acting treasurer*

Our website:
www.theapd.org

Facebook:
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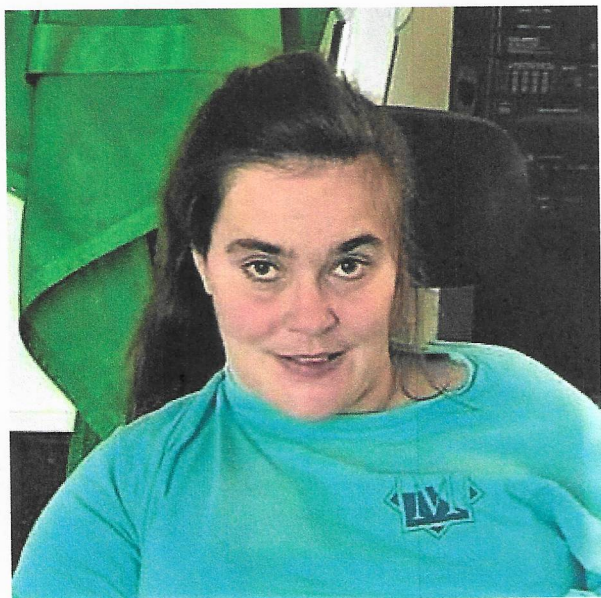
United Way:
#8245

Our 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.

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Merica House resident Robyn Schuler

Need Some House Plants To Talk To? Resident Robyn Schuler Can Fix You Up

An article published in *The Washington Post* earlier this year reported that 50 percent of individuals who responded to a *Post* survey admitted that they talk to their houseplants or to the trees in their yards. Additionally, 62 percent of the respondents who talk to their plants and trees professed to believe that such conversations helped their own mental health.

The author of the *Post* article, Stacey Colino, was unable to locate any published research on whether talking to plants improves the mental health of humans. However, the experts with whom she spoke suggested that there are plausible reasons why talking to plants might well be therapeutic for plant owners.

Colino spoke with one psychotherapist who believes it is in our nature to talk to plants and trees. The psychotherapist, Patricia Hasbach, says, "As humans, we often speak to what we're caring for — it's built in. It helps us to be very present or mindful." Kenneth Yeager, director of the Stress Trauma and Resilience Program at Ohio State University, agrees. Yeager suggests that talking to plants can be a way of tuning into the ways you talk to yourself and exploring how you're thinking about something. Yeager maintains that, "as we're talking to our plants, we're talking to ourselves — and formalizing our thought process."

So what to do if you do not have any houseplants at home to talk to? Why not visit Merica House's own Robyn Schuler? Robyn works at the Home Depot at Seven Corners in Falls Church on Monday, Wednesday and Friday of each week. She'll be quick to guide you to the plants in aisle 53. And don't be reluctant to ask Robyn for hints on which plants make the best listeners. Robyn, you see, is an authentic plant whisperer of long standing!



Disability Rights Activist Judy Heumann Passes Away at the Age of 75

Legendary disability rights activist Judy Heumann passed away on March 4, 2023. Heumann was born in Philadelphia in 1947. When she was only 18 months old, Heumann contracted polio. The disease infected her spinal cord and left her unable to walk. Heumann graduated from Long Island University in 1969 with a degree in education. She aspired to teach elementary school children but was denied a teacher's license by the New York City Board of Education. The Board ruled that Heumann's disability would present a risk to students because she would be unable to evacuate children in her class during an emergency. Heumann sued the Board of Education, which ultimately relented and granted her a teacher's license. Heumann thereby became the first wheelchair-bound teacher in New York City.

Heumann took hope when the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a bill aimed at protecting the rights of the disabled, was passed and signed into law by President Richard Nixon. However, neither the Nixon administration nor that of his successor, Gerald Ford, ever initiated the process of adopting rules that would implement the anti-discrimination language. To remedy the situation, Heumann co-founded an organization named Disabled in Action, a protest group modeled on the work of Black civil rights leaders, the women's movement and anti-Vietnam War protesters.

In the spring of 1977, in an effort to force the administration of President Jimmy Carter to implement the Rehabilitation Act, Heumann and other members of Disabled in Action took their fight to a federal building in San Francisco, occupying the building for 26 days. "We will no longer allow the government to oppress disabled individuals," Heumann told federal officials, "We want the law enforced." The activists ended their protest when the Carter administration agreed to adopt regulations to put the law into effect.

Judy Heumann Passes Away (Continued from page 2)

Even after successful implementation of the Rehabilitation Act, Heumann continued the effort to end discrimination against the disabled. Her work was instrumental in securing passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. In 1993, President William Clinton appointed Heumann to the position of Assistant Secretary of Education, with responsibility for overseeing federal education programs for students with disabilities.

In 2020, Heumann published her autobiography, titled *Being Heumann: An Unrepentant Memoir of a Disability Rights Activist*. The work included words that were fundamental to the way she lived her life. She wrote, "Disability only becomes a tragedy when society fails to provide the things we need to lead our lives — job opportunities or barrier-free buildings, for example. It is not a tragedy to me that I'm living in a wheelchair."

The Games We Play at Merica House by Deirdre Shields

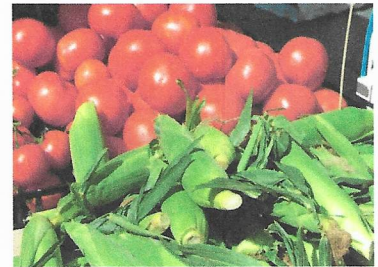
There are three games that I like to play on my Alexa. One game is called "Question of the Day." The second is "Puzzle of the Day," and the third is "Kids Quiz." I also enjoy playing Go Fish, Blackjack, Tic/Tac/Toe Pro, SpongeBob Challenge, and traditional Tic/Tac/Toe. I play all of these games by activating them with voice commands. I also play these games with one of the aides at Merica House and with two Merica House residents, Matthew and Robyn. My sister, Maureen, used to really enjoy playing these same games before she passed away.

Merica House Gourmet

In March of this year, APD board members Christine Metz and Fred Day signed on as gardeners at the Hogge Park Community Garden in Falls Church. Located at the corner of Glen Carlyn Road and Magnolia Avenue in Falls Church, the Community Garden offers gardeners the opportunity to cultivate crops on plots measuring approximately 48 square feet. Chris and Fred went heavy on cherry tomatoes and added a few cucumber plants, as well as basil, rosemary and parsley. The vegetables and spices began to emerge in June and have been plentiful. The next step was to compose a recipe that would incorporate the vegetables and spices being harvested. That task fell to Chris. The result was a tasty cucumber pasta salad, which has been selected as the Merica House Gourmet dish for this issue of the newsletter. The salad is easy to prepare and features a tangy dressing, which has been a big hit at Merica House. We hope you will try it!

Ingredients

12 ounces rotini or orecchiette pasta
1 medium cucumber, with seeds carved out and thinly sliced
1 pint cherry tomatoes, each sliced in half
1 cup thinly sliced red onion
1/2 cup chopped basil, rosemary and dill
1 cup mayonnaise
3 tablespoons white vinegar
1 teaspoon sugar
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon ground pepper



Directions

1. Cook pasta for approximately nine minutes until firm but not crunchy. Rinse with cold water and drain.
2. In large bowl, combine cucumber slices, pasta, tomatoes and onion.
3. Mix in basil, rosemary and dill.
4. Whisk mayonnaise, vinegar, salt, sugar and pepper in a small bowl. Add to the pasta mixture and toss to coat pasta.
5. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes before serving.

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Happening Now at Merica House

- In August our favorite rescue dog, Scruffy, paid a visit to Merica House to check for bedbugs. With more than 200 million scent receptors in his nose, Scruffy is uniquely qualified for the job. For the second consecutive year, Scruffy found no evidence of bugs. Merica House residents rewarded Scruffy with doggie treats after he completed his work.
- APD will soon embark on a major renovation of the kitchen areas. It has been 15 years since the last significant renovation and there is substantial work to be done to the flooring and eating area. We would welcome donations for this purpose from any members of the Northern Virginia community who may have the capability to help.
- APD continues its search for a volunteer who is willing to join the Board of Directors and fill the position of Treasurer. Our long-time Treasurer, Mitch Opalski, is departing to pursue other opportunities. The position requires approximately 4-5 hours per month. Familiarity with general bookkeeping principles would be useful. Accounting expertise is not required.
- In November of this year, the APD will submit its application for a biennial grant from the Fairfax County Consolidated Community Funding Pool (CCFP) program. We are seeking to hire a professional grant writer to assist in preparing the grant application. We ask that interested individuals kindly call our resident services coordinator, Roxane Burkhart, at (703) 671-7991 or email her at rsc@theapd.org.
- The Merica House residents have adopted a pet squirrel (shown below). His name is Jeffrey. He enjoys eating Cheese Nips. Recently, on a day when Cathy neglected to put out the Cheese Nips, Jeffrey lay on top of the patio wall and pouted (below right). Flowers and plants on the patio are courtesy of Martin, one of our dedicated volunteers.

