



# Merica House Moments

## 50 Years Young: Deirdre Celebrates a Milestone

by Fred Day

On Saturday, March 15, a festive group of family members and friends of resident Deirdre Shields gathered at Pistone's Italian Restaurant in Falls Church to celebrate Deirdre's 50th birthday. The event featured a sumptuous buffet of Pistone's best dishes, a heartfelt presentation by Deirdre's mother, Kathy, and an abundance of laughter from Deirdre and the approximately 40 guests.

Deirdre was born on March 14, 1975 in Bronx, New York. From her earliest years, she has displayed a deep level of care and concern for others – a trait that helps to account for her wide swath of friends.

Years ago I witnessed a stunning display

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### Remarks by Kathy Shields

"In God's divine plan, He enables us to grow physically, spiritually and mentally through the journey of life. As Deirdre reaches a half century, know that it is through your kindness, time and care that this has been made possible. Each one of you has served a meaningful purpose in her life."

## Spring 2025

### 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.



We currently have a vacant room at Merica House that will accommodate a single resident, either male or female. An incoming resident must be between the ages of 18 and 49 and must be capable of functioning in an independent living arrangement. For more information, contact our Resident Services Coordinator, Roxane Burkhart, at (703) 671-7991.



Alliance for the Physically Disabled, Inc. (APD)  
3705 S. George Mason Drive, Apartments 105 and 106 South  
Falls Church, Virginia 22041  
Office Phone: (703) 671-7991

Resident Services Coordinator: Roxane Burkhart / [rsc@theapd.org](mailto:rsc@theapd.org)

Executive Board — Board of Directors:

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Fred Day *vice president*

Andrea Kemp-Curtis *treasurer*

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Our website:  
[www.theapd.org](http://www.theapd.org)

Facebook:  
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of camaraderie and teamwork in the family room at Merica House. Three of our residents were involved: Sean Wawrzaszek, Deirdre, and Deirdre's sister, Maureen. At that stage of his life, Sean was no longer capable of verbalizing his thoughts. He relied on a laptop connected to a text-to-voice generator to converse with others. Sean would input text into his computer and then, on command, the voice generator would emit machine-produced sounds, combining syllables into words and phrases.

On the day of my visit, Sean's computer was in the repair shop, depriving Sean of the ability to communicate with others. His physical disability notwithstanding, Sean was naturally endowed with the gift of gab. He loved to share ideas with others, often offering thoughts that were at once simple and profound. So, when forced into silence by computer problems, it was a cause of great distress for Sean. It was as if his identity had been lost.

Knowing the distress that Sean was feeling, the Shields sisters sprang into action. They took turns loudly pronouncing, in sequence, the letters of the alphabet, beginning with "A". When they pronounced a letter that Sean needed to form a desired word, Sean would tap the foot support on his wheelchair with his heel. Character by character, Deirdre and Maureen enabled Sean to spell the words that he needed to express a thought. In this manner, "A - B - C - D . . ." turned into a question, "W - H - A - T • A - R - E • Y - O - U • E - A - T - I - N - G • T - O - N - I - G - H - T?" More questions and thoughts from Sean followed: "I • A - M • G - R - A - T - E - F - U - L • F - O - R • F - R - I - E - N - D - S." Remarkably, the trio had created their own version of Morse Code.

The process was not easy. It required a large dose of ingenuity, a ton of patience and an equal amount of compassion. Fortunately, ingenuity, patience and compassion have always been second nature to Deirdre. The same could be said of her sister, Maureen.

And so, as family members and friends gathered at Pistone's to celebrate Deirdre's birthday, it was also an opportunity to celebrate all the attributes that make Deirdre such a special individual, not the least of which are her ingenuity, patience and compassion.

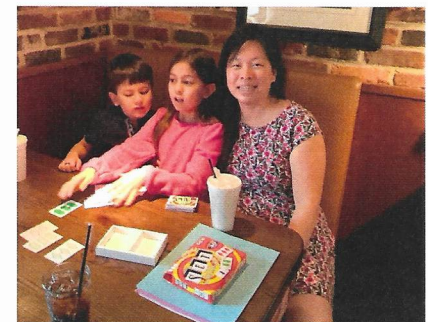
Identification of Birthday Party Guests Pictured In Photographs (at right)

Top photo: Mike McNerney, Jackie Moncrief, Katie McNerney, Christine Metz

Middle photo: Debra Johnson, Deirdre, Andrew Shields

Bottom photo: Wesley Shields, Kiera Shields, April Shields

**Birthday Party Pictures**



*APD Undertakes Kitchen Renovations*

The main kitchen at Merica House is showing its age. The appliances are tired. After many years of heavy traffic, the flooring is worn and has lost its shine. In keeping with its responsibility to provide residents with a safe, comfortable and convenient facility, the APD board of directors has decided to undertake a significant renovation of the kitchen area. The anticipated changes include replacing the refrigerator and stove, installing new cabinets, replacing the flooring, redesigning the pantry, and widening the door way to better accommodate wheelchairs. Please consider helping out some



very good people who have some very big hearts. The APD is a 501(c)(3) tax deductible organization. We deeply appreciate all donations.

*Did You Know?*

There are many butterfly and moth species that have developed what appear to be extra eyes. These distinct wing markings are often referred to as eyespots or false eyes and come in a variety of colors and sizes.



*Common Buckeye Butterfly*

The Common Buckeye Butterfly is one such species.

The false eyes are a defense, either intimidating predators or confusing them as to the location of the butterfly's head.

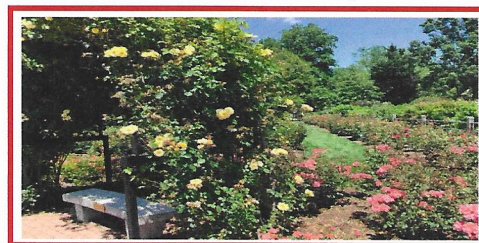
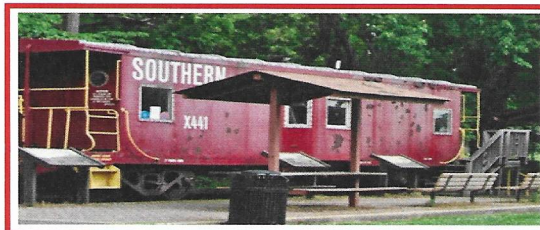


### The Marvel of Arlington County's Twin Parks

The adjacent areas of Bluemont Park and Bon Air Park form a well-hidden marvel in Merica House's neighboring community of Arlington, Virginia. Bluemont Park consists of 51 acres of land devoted to tennis courts, playing fields, picnic pavilions, playgrounds and natural areas. Bon Air Park, located just a short walk from Bluemont Park, features 120 different varieties of roses and more than 2,500 plants, plus a unique assortment of bees and butterflies.

Bluemont Park occupies a stretch of land that previously housed Bluemont Junction, a part of the Washington and Old Dominion Railway. Bluemont Junction served as a transfer point for rail passengers traveling from Alexandria, Virginia and Georgetown to Bluemont, which was once a popular resort in the Blue Ridge Mountains. In the peak years for Bluemont Junction – roughly from 1912 into the 1920s – passenger trains passed through Bluemont Junction every 10 to 20 minutes. The passenger trains were discontinued in 1951.

Bon Air Park consists of 24 acres. The crown jewel of Bon Air Park is the Bon Air Memorial Rose Garden. The rose garden was the brainchild of Nellie Broyhill, who moved to Arlington County in 1937. As World War II was drawing to a close, Nellie wanted to create a special memorial to the servicemen from Arlington who had died in the War. Nellie opened the rose garden in 1951. She passed away in 1977. The Memorial Garden was featured in a recent article in *Arlington Magazine*. When asked what Nellie would think of the legacy she had left behind in the form of her garden, the magazine editors speculated that she would be “tickled pink. Or red, yellow, or purple.”

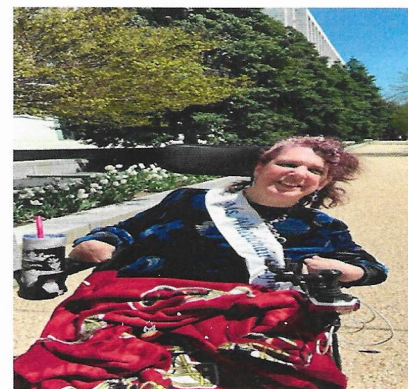


### Highly Recommended

When the Covid-19 Pandemic struck Northern Virginia early in 2020, retired optometrist Robin Rinearson found that her nephew, Jake, was out of a job. Jake suffers from cerebral palsy; as Rinearson says, Jake is “differently abled.” Rinearson decided to invest her time and funds in a business that would employ Jake and other “differently abled” persons. Jake’s Ice Cream shop soon became a reality. Located at 6353 Columbia Pike in Falls Church (Barcroft Plaza Shopping Center), Jake’s offers a unique assortment of gourmet ice creams, all produced on site. Favorite flavors include bourbon ice cream with Amarena cherries, lucuma (a Peruvian fruit), and cherry vanilla with blueberry swirl. Please stop by and visit our friends at Jake’s.

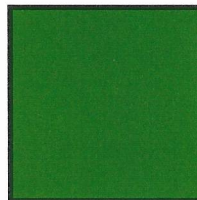
### Ms. Parr Goes to Washington

Resident Cathy Parr is no stranger to Capitol Hill. Cathy often supports the lobbying efforts of the Arc of Northern Virginia, an association that represents individuals who have intellectual and developmental disabilities. On April 9, 2025, billed as “Advocacy Day,” Cathy visited the halls of Congress to lobby Congressional offices in support of Federal funding for Medicaid. Cathy met with aides for Senator Dave McCormick of Pennsylvania and with other offices.

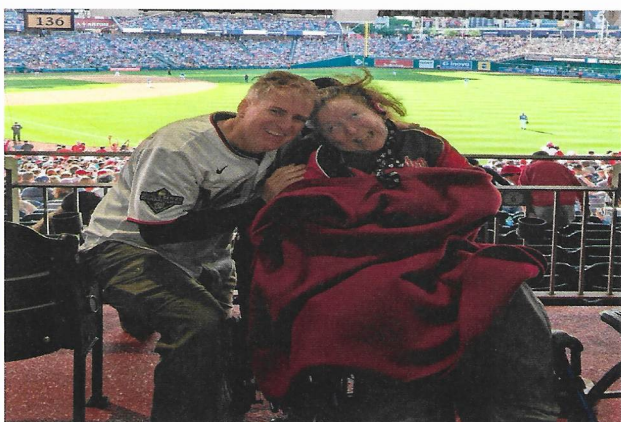




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*Live From Nationals Park with Deirdre and Andrew*



Deirdre and her brother Andrew were among the 36,873 fans who watched the Washington Nationals shut out the San Francisco Giants, 3 to 0, on Saturday, May 24. Deirdre and Andrew witnessed a stellar performance by Nats starter Jake Irvin, who gave up only three hits, all singles, over eight innings. Nats manager Davy Martinez pulled Irvin from the game after 96 pitches, even though Irvin lobbied vigorously to stay in the game. According to Martinez, "He was a hell of a lawyer. He tried to go back out in the ninth. And I'm a better judge." Jorge López retired all three batters he faced in the ninth inning to complete the shutout. James Wood provided all the runs the Nats would need with a first inning home run. When asked about Jake Irvin's performance, Deirdre said, "Very impressive!" When asked whether she would have allowed Irvin to go back out for the ninth inning, she replied, "Yes, of course!"

**A Heartfelt Thanks to Our Donors**

The Alliance for the Physically Disabled truly appreciates the continuing generosity of all members of the Merica House community. We wish to acknowledge the donations received recently from the following individuals and organizations:

Larry Banks  
Benevity Community Fund

Antrell Davis  
Andrea Kemp-Curtis

Carol and Charles Moser  
John Renfro

# MERICA HOUSE

Alliance for the Physically Disabled, Inc.

**YES! Please accept my donation for Merica House and its mission of providing independence with dignity.**

Please make checks payable to **The Alliance for the Physically Disabled, Inc.** and mail with this form to The Alliance for the Physically Disabled, 3705 S. George Mason Drive, Apt. # 105 & 106 South, Falls Church, VA 22041.

Credit card donations can be made through our secure link found at <http://www.theapd.org>.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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*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. APD's core mission is to operate and maintain Merica House. APD is a 501(c)(3) organization. All donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.*

Email: [rsc@theapd.org](mailto:rsc@theapd.org) • Phone: (703) 671-7991