

# Merica House Moments

Winter 2025-2026

## Holiday Scenes from Merica House



Top left: Resident David Campanella; Top right: Resident Cathy Parr with her mother, Sonja Parr Jarvis; Bottom left: Residents Robyn Schueler, Deirdre Shields and Matthew Renfro; Bottom right: Santa Claus and Christmas Eve helpers

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## Cathy Parr Honors Veterans at Arlington National Cemetery on National Wreaths Across America Day

Cathy Parr woke early on the morning of Saturday, December 13, 2025. She had things to do and places to go. It was National Wreaths Across America Day. Cathy would journey from Merica House to Arlington National Cemetery to join more than 30,000 other volunteers in honoring the veterans interred at the National Cemetery. This year's Wreaths Across America Day was particularly meaningful for Cathy. The event was a special way to honor her father, Barry L. Parr, who served in Vietnam with the United States Army as an E-6 staff sergeant. Cathy's father had passed away on August 6, 2025. During his service in

Vietnam, Sergeant Parr was injured during combat and was awarded both the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star for valor.



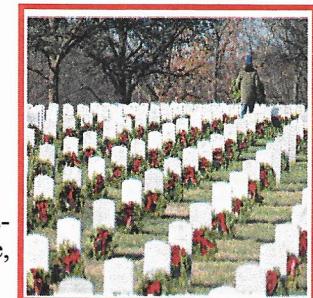
Cathy Parr, with canine Sparky and Sparky's military handler

Altogether, Cathy and her fellow volunteers placed wreaths on more than 265,000 gravesites at Arlington National Cemetery. Volunteers at other locations across the country placed more than 3 million wreaths at the gravesites of military veterans. Organizers emphasize that placing wreaths on the gravesites serve three fundamental purposes: *first*, to remember fallen soldiers; *second*, to honor those who serve; and, *third*, to teach others the value of freedom.

When placing a wreath at the site of a fallen soldier's grave, the volunteers say aloud the name of the veteran who is buried at the site. This act ensures that memory of the soldier being honored will live on in the hearts of others and that, far from being nameless, the soldier and his contributions to the country will be remembered for years to come. Further, there is a distinct symbolism to the fresh evergreens that comprise each wreath: the evergreens form a living tribute, one that is renewed each and every year during the holiday season.



Sergeant Barry L. Parr



## Notable Passings in 2025

Jim Lovell (1928-2025) • Jane Goodall (1934-2025) • Lenny Wilkins (1937-2025)  
Robert Redford (1936-2025) • David Lynch (1946-2025)



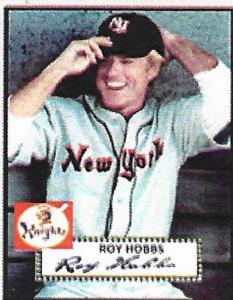
Jim Lovell, astronaut:  
"We do not realize what we have on Earth until we leave it."



Jane Goodall, primatologist and wildlife defender: "The longer I was in East Africa, the more like us I saw that the chimpanzees were."



Lenny Wilkins, pro basketball player and coach: "The American Dream, to me, means having the opportunity to achieve, because I don't think you should be guaranteed anything other than opportunity."



Robert Redford, actor, director and conservationist:  
"When I was growing up, the only real hero I had was Ted Williams. I wanted to be a professional ballplayer."



David Lynch, filmmaker, actor and musician:  
"Ideas are like fish. If you sit quietly, like you're fishing, you will catch ideas. The real beautiful big ones swim kind of deep down there."



## A PRAYERFUL PAIRING

[Editor's Note: Over the years, Merica House has been the backdrop for an abundant collection of compelling stories. One such story involves the relationship between a Catholic priest, Rev. Matthew J. DeForest, and a former resident named Sean Wawrzaszek. The relationship between Father Matthew and Sean was the subject of a chapter in a book titled *Of MICE AND MIRACLES*, which was published by 2Donn Books in 2014. The account that follows is based on the chapter from *Of MICE AND MIRACLES*.]

In the Fall of 2011, Rev. Matthew J. DeForest, then assigned as a parochial vicar at St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church in Falls Church, Virginia, took interest in a gentleman named Sean Wawrzaszek, a 45-year-old resident at a facility for disabled adults known as Merica House. Sean was afflicted with cerebral palsy. His disability prevented him from articulating words or manipulating his fingers; he depended on a touch-sensitive computer linked to a speech synthesizer to convey his thoughts. For Sean, forming words on his computer was an arduous task. He 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.



On one occasion, Sean, a practicing Catholic, was particularly distressed. He believed that some individuals were trying to discourage him from participating in the Sunday Masses at his favorite church. Upon learning of the situation, Father Matthew paid a visit to Merica House. Talking through the situation, Sean asked Father Matthew if it would be okay for him to change religions. It was a question that Sean did not pose lightly; his family was steadfastly Catholic. Family tradition notwithstanding, Sean wanted a church that would welcome his presence at religious services. Father Matthew spoke with Sean at length, with words designed to soothe the anger. After a time, Father Matthew proposed a simple solution. "You know," he told Sean, "we could do Masses right here at Merica House." With that simple gesture of caring, a glorious smile came over Sean's face, a smile that spoke volumes.

In the months that followed, the Masses celebrated by Father Matthew became a staple at Merica House. The "congregation" included Sean as well as fellow Merica House residents Cathy Parr, Deirdre Shields and Maureen Shields. On each occasion, Father Matthew delivered a stirring homily for the Merica House residents, with messages uniquely tailored to the circumstances of the "congregation." Father Matthew liked to say that "homily material is all over the place." On any given weekend, his homilies might draw from Thomas Aquinas or Mother Teresa but were equally likely to be inspired by former New York Yankees second baseman Bobby Richardson or by the grace with which Sean accepted his physical limitations. Father Matthew encouraged the residents to "look to the Cross" for inspiration. Echoing the advice once given to him by the rector at his seminary, Father Matthew would remind his audience, "When you are out and about, remember to smile." It is possible, he would say, to change the world "one word, one footprint, one burden at a time!"

Sean Wawrzaszek passed away in August 2013. Father Matthew DeForest continues to tell Sean's inspirational story to others.

### Featured Recipe: Chicken with Apricots and Spinach

Recipe Preparation and Review by Board member Christine Metz



#### Ingredients

- 2 tbsp. whole wheat flour or all-purpose flour
- 1 cup chicken broth, low sodium
- 2 tbsp. honey
- 1/3 cup fresh lemon juice
- 1 tsp. poultry seasoning
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- 1 tsp. dried basil
- Two 4-oz. skinless, boneless chicken breast halves
- 10 oz. package fresh baby spinach, well washed, stems removed, cut into 1/2-inch strips
- 1 15-oz. can unsweetened apricot halves, drained



#### Directions

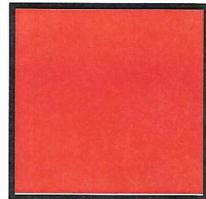
In a nonstick skillet, whisk flour with 1/3 cup of the chicken broth to make a paste. Whisk in the remaining broth and the honey. Cook over low heat for about 4 minutes, whisking constantly, until sauce is smooth and thickened. Stir in the lemon juice, poultry seasoning, oregano and basil. Arrange the chicken breasts in the sauce. Bring contents to a simmer, reduce heat to low, and gently cook, covered, for 15 minutes, or until the chicken breasts are firm.

Place spinach on a serving platter. Set chicken breasts on top of the spinach, and pour some of the sauce over the breasts. Pour remaining sauce into a sauceboat to pass at the table. Arrange apricot halves around the chicken and on top of spinach. Serve immediately.

Christine's comments: Judy Collins' *Cook with Honey* has been a favorite song of mine since my college years. Judy sings, *I always cook with honey to sweeten up the night*. Maybe that's why I am attracted to recipes that include honey. This recipe includes honey and apricots, another favorite, in a healthy dish that's quick and easy. My only tips are to chop the spinach well and make sure the sauce is nice and hot, allowing the spinach to wilt nicely. For me, I like to cook the spinach a little so it's less crispy. Add a biscuit and listen as Judy sings, *How's your appetite for sweet love?*



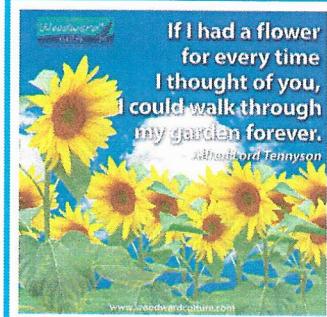
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### *Endearing Thoughts From the Skyline Plaza Video Display*

*If I had a flower  
for every time  
I thought of you, I  
could walk through my  
garden forever.*

— Alfred Lord Tennyson



*Sometimes a hug is  
all that you need.*

— Avijeet Das

### **Thank You 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 recent donations from the following individuals and organizations:

Joan and David Connolly  
The Dayton Foundation Depository  
Lourdes Dillon  
Tracey Hammer  
Norman Hicks

Deborah Knowlton  
Carol and Charles Moser  
Elizabeth Moya  
Sean Mullaney

Christine D. Noonan  
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Evelyn Swart  
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Shari and John Zamarra

# MERICA HOUSE

Alliance for the Physically Disabled, Inc.

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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.*

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