



Merica House Moments

Merica House Residents Celebrate New Kitchen

- Donations From Merica House’s Friends Make Kitchen Renovation Possible
 - Next Up: Repair and Updating Merica House Bathrooms
by Fred Day

February 19 of this year was a banner day in the history of Merica House. On that date, John Renfro, APD president, issued a brief but triumphant announcement: “The kitchen remodel project is finally complete!” For the Merica House residents, the new kitchen is more than simply a place to get their next meal — it’s a room where friendships flourish and favorite recipes come to life. (For one such treasured recipe, look to page 3.) Since the renovation, this sparkling, accessible kitchen has become a source of pride and excitement for everyone who uses it. John Renfro, who spent countless hours planning and implementing the renovation, was quick to credit Merica House’s donors: “Without all the donations over the past few years from the devoted members of the Merica House community, the remodel would not have been possible.” Not one to rest on his laurels, John looks forward to the day when the APD will be also able to renovate the residents’ bathrooms.



Spring 2026

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.

Inside this issue:

A Dream Fulfilled	2
State Senator Bennett-Parker	3
Merica House Gourmet	3
Deirdre Shields: My Friend Alexa	4
Thank You To Our Donors	4

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

Our website:
www.theapd.org

Facebook:
independencewithdignity

United Way:
#8245

Resident Services Coordinator: Roxane Burkhart / rsc@theapd.org
Executive Board — Board of Directors:
John Renfro *president* Sonja Jarvis *co-secretary*
Fred Day *vice president* Christine Metz *co-secretary*
Andrea Kemp-Curtis *treasurer*

A Novel Published, A Dream Fulfilled

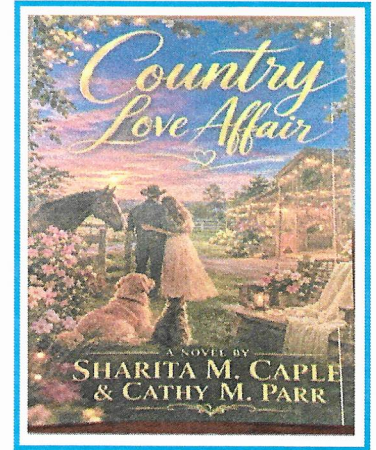
Long-time Merica house resident Sharita Caple, who passed away in 2019, had a propensity for dreaming big. She could also be a bit mysterious. So when, a year or so before she passed, Sharita asked to borrow Cathy Parr's iPad, Cathy did not ask a lot of questions. It was, Cathy reasoned, Sharita being Sharita—a woman always up to something.

What was known, to Cathy and a handful of others, was that Sharita had long aspired to write a novel. In her dreams, she would produce a love story. However, her life ended much too soon. And so, it seemed, did the dream of producing a love story.

Months after Sharita's death, Cathy's intuition kicked in. Was it possible, Cathy wondered, that Sharita had used the iPad to work on her novel? Cathy embarked on a search through the iPad files. And, yes, her search turned up a file bearing the heading, *Country Love Affair*. "Bingo!" Cathy proclaimed.

In the years since Sharita's death, Cathy has collaborated with resident services coordinator Roxane Burkhardt to finish what Sharita had begun. Last month, Sharita's dream came to fruition. On May 10, *Country Love Affair* became available through online booksellers.

With Cathy's permission, the introductory chapters are reprinted below.



* * * * *

Chapter 1 — The Beginning She Didn't Choose

The town had always felt too small for Violet. Not in size—but in expectation. Everything about it was predictable. The same people, the same routine, the same quiet understanding of how life was supposed to go. And Violet had followed it. For years.

She woke up early, did what was expected, smiled when she was supposed to, and kept her thoughts tucked away where no one could question them. It was easier that way. Safer. But safety had a way of feeling like something else after a while. Something closer to . . . being stuck.

The boutique sat at the edge of town, just past the road most people stopped driving on. It wasn't much to look at from the outside. Faded wood. A small sign that had seen better days. Windows that held more reflection than invitation. Most people passed it without a second thought. Violet almost had, too. But something about it made her stop. Not loudly. Not in a way she could explain. Just . . . enough.

She stepped out of her car slowly, her eyes tracing the edges of the building as if it might tell her something. It didn't. Not in words. But it didn't need to. The feeling was already there. A quiet pull she couldn't ignore.

Violet walked toward the door, her hand hesitating just slightly before she reached for the handle. Not fear. Not doubt. Just . . . awareness that something small could become something bigger. And once she stepped inside—there would be no going back to the version of her life she had always known.

Chapter 2 — The Door Opens

Violet didn't realize she was holding her breath until the door opened. The air inside felt different. Not warmer. Not colder. Just . . . still. Like the space had been waiting.

She stepped in slowly, letting the door close behind her with a soft sound that seemed louder than it should have been. The boutique wasn't what she had expected. It wasn't empty—not really. The shelves stood lined along the wall, holding pieces of fabric that looked untouched but not forgotten. Soft colors, gentle textures, things that felt like they still had stories in them.

Violet moved further inside. Each step careful. Measured. Like she didn't want to disturb something she didn't fully understand.

Her fingers brushed lightly across a piece of lace. And for a moment—she felt something. Not a memory. Not a thought. A feeling. Familiar . . . but not hers. Violet pulled her hand back slightly, her brow tightened. "That's strange," she whispered to herself. The silence didn't answer. But it didn't feel empty either. It felt—present.

Violet exhaled slowly. "I don't know why I'm here," she said quietly. And for the first time in a long time—she meant it. Not because she was lost. But because something inside her had brought her here . . . Before she could understand it.

Virginia State Senator Elizabeth Bennett-Parker Visits Merica House

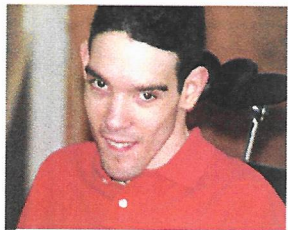
On Thursday, May 21, Merica House had the honor of hosting Virginia State Senator Elizabeth Bennett-Parker and Lucy Beadnell, Chief Advocacy and Policy Officer for the Arc of Northern Virginia. Ms. Bennett-Parker represents Virginia's 39th Senate District, which encompasses large portions of Arlington and Fairfax Counties and the City of Alexandria. The purpose of the visit was twofold: *first*, to provide Senator Bennett-Parker and Ms. Beadnell with a more complete understanding of the role that Merica House serves in Northern Virginia as a unique independent living facility for disabled adults; and *second*, to provide an opportunity for Cathy Parr, in her role as 2025 Miss Wheelchair Virginia, to discuss with Senator Bennett-Parker the ongoing needs of the disabled community regarding housing, transportation, employment and recreational opportunities.

During the discussion, Cathy Parr highlighted the policy platform of the current Ms. Wheelchair Virginia, Alyssa Brown. Ms. Brown has made it her mission to advocate for a greater focus on disability sensitivity training for all individuals who perform public-facing jobs in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Ms. Brown has also used her voice to increase awareness of the Changing Spaces Campaign, which aims to install height-adjustable adult-sized changing tables in public bathrooms. Cathy noted that a bill that would have required the Virginia Department of Transportation to include adult changing tables in rest areas and welcome centers was introduced in the Virginia General Assembly during the 2026 legislative session but did not make it out of committee. Cathy expressed hope, however, that progress was being made, at least in terms of increasing awareness of the need at the Department of Transportation.

Senator Bennett-Parker was elected to the State Senate in 2026. She served in the Virginia House of Delegates from 2022 to 2026. She was Vice Mayor of the City of Alexandria from 2019 to 2021 and is a small business owner in Northern Virginia.



From left, Lucy Beadnell, Cathy Parr, State Senator Elizabeth Bennett-Parker



Matthew Renfro

Merica House Gourmet

For this issue, we feature a recipe provided by resident Matthew Renfro. Matthew's Taco Ring recipe is easy to prepare and serves eight. Board member and accomplished chef Christine Metz prepared the dish and authored the review.



Ingredients

Taco ring

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 2 cans (8 ounce / 8 rolls) refrigerated crescent rolls
- 1 one-ounce package taco seasoning
- 1/3 to 1/2 cup salsa

Optional toppings

- chopped lettuce
- diced tomatoes
- salsa
- black olives
- sour cream

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Heat large skillet over medium-high heat.
3. Cook and stir ground beef until meat is brown and crumbly, approx. 5 to 7 minutes. Drain. Discard grease.
4. Add package of taco seasoning and enough salsa, approx. 1/3 to 1/2 cup, to make the beef mixture pliable.
5. Add cheddar cheese and mix thoroughly.
6. On large cookie baking sheet, overlap crescent roll triangles to form a circle, with the base of the triangles facing to the middle. Make sure the triangles overlap sufficiently to hold the meat mixture.
7. Spoon meat mixture onto crescent roll triangles. Fold the points of each crescent roll triangle over meat mixture.
8. Bake for 20 minutes or until ring is brown.

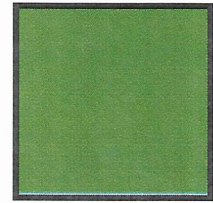
Fun to make, pretty to present, and delicious to eat, this recipe is sure to be a crowd pleaser.

At first sight, the taco ring looks like it might be difficult, but it was surprisingly easy to put together using crescent rolls. I used a little higher fat content ground beef (80% lean) to ensure the mixture would hold together and be easy to handle. I chose mild, chunky salsa to suit my taste. I served the ring with finely chopped lettuce, salsa, black olives and sour cream. It's a tasty meal.



Christine Metz

Merica House
Alliance for the Physically Disabled, Inc.
3705 S. George Mason Drive
Apartments 105 and 106 South
Falls Church, VA 22041



Alexa, I Thought We Were Friends

By Deirdre Shields

I used to think that Amazon's Alexa was my friend. Now I am not so sure. Like many other Amazon customers, I switched from the original Alexa to Alexa Plus (Alexa+) a few months ago. Now I can listen to Alexa speak in four different female voices and four different male voices. That's a nice touch, I suppose. I also have the option of dialing up four variations of Alexa: "Brief Alexa," "Chill Alexa," "Sweet Alexa," or "Sassy Alexa." Another nice enhancement, I guess. With these improvements, however, I sometimes feel the urge to tell Alexa, "Just the facts, ma'am." There are times when I think Alexa talks too much . . . and



Deirdre with brother Andrew

listens too much. And sometimes she doesn't seem to listen very well at all. A fellow Alexa+ user once became irritated because every time Alexa replied to a request, her response seemed to begin with the words, "No problem." The frustrated user told Alexa, "Stop saying 'No problem' to everything I say to you." Alexa promptly replied, "Sure, no problem." I can identify. Alexa can certainly be aggravating. And intrusive. With Alexa Plus, there is no longer a need to preface every inquiry with the traditional signal, "Alexa." That's both good and bad. Alexa now seems to assume that every time I say something, I am speaking to her. Alexa may not understand, but I do have other friends, real humans, with whom I enjoy talking. I don't need Alexa to be involved in all of my conversations. On Sunday, June 15, I will be going with my brother, Andrew, to see the Washington Nationals take on the Seattle Mariners at Nats Park. Alexa will be staying at home. For one day at least, Alexa and I will not be on speaking terms. With Alexa around, such opportunities for privacy are rare.

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:

Collin & Rosemary Jellish Family Fund
Norman L. Hicks
Ann Johnson

McMahon Giving Fund
Myra R. Polsky

Annette Porter
Manny Sanchez

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: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Email Address: _____

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 • Phone: (703) 671-7991