

MARCH 2025

GHazette

Official Newsletter of GHA Autism Supports



GHA Autism Supports Foundation Established

In 2023, the GHA Autism Supports Board of Directors appointed a task force to investigate the creation of a separate foundation to support the long-term initiatives and financial stability of GHA Autism Supports. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of the task force with support from the GHA Autism Supports Board of Directors, the GHA Autism Supports Foundation was granted private charity status through the Internal Revenue Service in June of 2024. A separate GHA Autism Supports Foundation Board of Directors was established including members Gina Martin (Chairperson), Beverly Moore, Nadine Bowers, Maureen Morrell and Russ Sharples.

Shortly thereafter and after careful investigation, the GHA Autism Supports Foundation Board of Directors selected the Foundation For The Carolinas (FFTC) to oversee the investment portfolio of the organization. Established in 1958, the FFTC is a civic leader and philanthropic partner with more than \$4 billion in charitable assets across nearly 3,000 charitable funds established by families, nonprofits and businesses. Serving as one of the largest community foundations in the United States, the FFTC supports personal and corporate philanthropy through a range of innovative fund and giving options. “We are thrilled that the GHA Autism Supports Board leadership recognized that the formation of this Foundation serves as a critical move for the future of our nonprofit sustainability,” shared GHA Autism Supports CEO Dawn Allen. For additional information on how to invest in the GHA Autism Supports Foundation, please contact GHA Autism Supports EVP/Chief Development Officer Beth Olivieri at 704-982-9600, ext. 125 or by email at betholivieri@ghainc.org.



When making a gift to the GHA Autism Supports Foundation, please mail all contributions directly to Foundation For The Carolinas at 220 N. Tryon Street, Charlotte, NC 28202. Please always reference the specific GHA Autism Supports Foundation fund number #4356.

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Spotlighting 35 Years of Service



This past January marked the 35th work anniversary for HR Benefits Coordinator Vicki Dennis. Vicki has decided to retire the end of February, a role that has spanned across many departments within the GHA Autism Supports organization. She started as a part-time "secretary" in the Central Office which was located at 1519 East Main Street at the time. Vicki's first office was located upstairs with the Marie G. Smith Children's Home located downstairs. Soon thereafter, Vicki became an Administrative Assistant involved in personnel matters, payroll processing and billing for services. As the organization grew,

Vicki's path continued in the Human Resources Department where she remained for the rest of her career at GHA. When asked to reflect upon what she has enjoyed the most, Vicki shared, "I have loved working directly with all of the employees and especially watching our direct care staff make a positive impact on the people we serve."



Community Groups Treat Residents to a Night Out



Individuals we support at GHA Autism Supports danced the night away at both the Night to Shine in Wilmington and the Annual Sweetheart Dance in Albemarle. The Night to Shine is sponsored by the Tim Tebow Foundation in cooperation with local churches and the Sweetheart Dance is hosted by Pine Grove Methodist Church and Bethany United Methodist Church. We appreciate both hosts and their entire network of volunteers for providing such fun and memorable gatherings for the people we support. From selecting the perfect outfit to hair and makeup, individuals were all dolled up for these special events where many danced the night away! A special thank you to the direct support staff that helped our individuals shop and select their finest wear and accompany them to these wonderful events. We also appreciate students at Stanly Community College's Cosmetology Program for providing services for hair and nails. The Night to Shine and the Sweetheart Dance added to the quality of life for many and serve as a time to reconnect with old and new friends each year! Check out scenes from events on page three. We look forward to continuing these partnerships in 2025!



A vibrant collage titled "SCENES FROM NIGHT to Shine" celebrating a Valentine's event. The collage features a large gold star in the top right corner and a string of pink hearts at the top left. The central text "SCENES FROM NIGHT to Shine" is prominently displayed. Below the title, there are several photographs of people at the event. One photo shows a group of people, including a man in a wheelchair, posing together. Another photo shows a man in a red shirt dancing. A third photo shows a man in a red shirt and a woman in a red dress. A fourth photo shows a man in a red shirt and a woman in a red dress. A fifth photo shows a man in a red shirt and a woman in a red dress. A sixth photo shows a man in a red shirt and a woman in a red dress. A seventh photo shows a man in a red shirt and a woman in a red dress. A eighth photo shows a man in a red shirt and a woman in a red dress. A ninth photo shows a man in a red shirt and a woman in a red dress. A tenth photo shows a man in a red shirt and a woman in a red dress. A quote from Beth Olivieri, GHA Autism Supports EVP/Chief Development Officer, is featured on the right side of the collage. The quote reads: "Community partnerships allow us to promote integration, but most importantly aid in enriching the lives of the people we support." The bottom of the collage features a string of pink hearts and a green banner with the text "GHAzette" and "PAGE 03".

**SCENES
FROM**

NIGHT *to Shine*

"Community partnerships allow us to promote integration, but most importantly aid in enriching the lives of the people we support."

BETH OLIVIERI,
GHA AUTISM SUPPORTS
EVP/CHIEF DEVELOPMENT
OFFICER

GHA Autism Supports gratefully acknowledges the following individuals who made memorials and honorary gifts between December 1, 2024 and February 28, 2025. Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this list. If you feel an error has been made, please contact the Development Department at 704-982-9600, x125.

In Honor of Dawn Allen
Paul & Brooke Childress
Merlin Amirtharaj

In Honor of Lori Ivey
Brenda Cox
Alice Crowell Circle, United
Methodist Women

In Honor of
Martin Home Staff
Sue Martin

In Honor of Marlinda Bergdoll
Laura C. Brown

In Honor of
Eric & Judy Johnsen
Susan Stokes

In Honor of Eric Mihalyi
& Carolina Farms
Home #3 Staff
Rich & Lyda Mihalyi

In Honor of
Mike & Sue Bohnsack
Dr. & Mrs. John Kilde

In Honor of Drew Julian
Gordon & Ruby Johnson
Howard & Frances Montague

In Honor of Justin Morrell
Sandra DeAngelis Peace
Van & Tali Denton
Jane FitzGerald
Tom & Patty FitzGerald
Katherine Hall
Bill & Susan Hodges

In Memory of
Christopher Cook
Rev. Dr. Cathy Cook

In Memory of
Mildred & Henry Julian
Phil & Brenda Julian

In Honor of Sam Cronin
Mr. & Mrs. Ronald Simons

In Memory of Reuben Klammer
Beatrice Pardo

In Honor of Maureen Morrell
Tom & Patty FitzGerald

In Honor of Deb Denton
Greta Swain

In Honor of Charlie Lawrence
Winifred Helton

In Honor of the
Morrell Family
Mary Gearino

In Honor of Seth Dickinson
Debra Bowers

In Honor of Lindsay Leggett
John & Taryn Williams

Sara Grace
Heidi Kippenhan
Kathleen O'Brien
Josip & Lauren Vukina

In Honor of Robbie Gardner
Rod & Nancy Rich

In Memory of Ashley Lowder
Ronnie Michael

In Honor of GHA Staff
Henry & Jocie Cremisi

In Honor of Travis Luxenberg
Jim Gibbons

In Honor of
Mark Gladstone & Staff
Betty Gladstone

In Honor of
Jonathan Martin
Kathryn Kulp

In Memory of
Dr. Rob Morrell
Emily Balance
Tom & Patty FitzGerald
Jodi & Tom Kelly
Jack & Kathleen McMackin

In Honor of Greg Gurski
Joyce Palmer-Fortune

(Continued from page 4)

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In Honor of
Dr. & Mrs. Tom Norwood
Susan Stokes

In Memory of
Michael E. Snyder, Sr.
Margaret Snyder

In Honor of Beth Olivieri
Merlin Amirtharaj

In Memory of
Edward J. Snyder, Jr.
Margaret Snyder

In Memory of
Mary Ann Ponder
Phil Ponder

In Memory of
Nola Dean Southerland
Thomas & Marie Southerland

In Memory of
Caine Russell
Mary M. Russell

In Honor of
Thomas C. Southerland
Thomas & Marie Southerland

In Memory of
David Sadowsky
Beatrice Pardo

In Honor of Nicky Sundquist
Richard & Mary Jen Mason

In Honor of Sam
Gerald & Margaret Stuart

In Honor of
Ron & Beth Swanner
Susan Stokes

In Memory of Jane Scheer
Tony & Martha Lowder

In Honor of Emily Whichello
Owen & Betty Calloway

In Memory of Marie G. Smith
David & Carroll Holbrook

In Honor of Karen Snyder
Margaret Snyder

In Honor of Lake Snyder
Margaret Snyder

CARF Accrediting Body to Conduct Review Soon

This spring, GHA Autism Supports will undergo a rigorous peer-review process to determine if its programs and services meet defined international standards of quality in health and human services. This accreditation process promotes active, dynamic planning focused on impact and outcomes. Achieving accreditation demonstrates our commitment to delivering the highest level of safe and effective services, ongoing performance improvement, and the satisfaction of the persons served.

Established in 1966, CARF International annually accredits more than 68,000 programs, representing more than 13 million persons served, on 5 continents. CARF conducts on-site surveys, requires internal and external audits, reviews policies and records, and interviews individuals, staff, guardians, board members and other stakeholders to determine if providers demonstrate value and quality in their provision of services. GHA is excited for this opportunity to distinguish ourselves as an effective service provider and an innovative leader in the industry. Go team GHA!



CARF® International is an independent, nonprofit accreditor of health and human services. Through accreditation, CARF assists service providers in demonstrating value by the quality of their services and meeting internationally-recognized organizational and program standards.



Need a Program--We Love to Tell Our Story!



Our organization loves an opportunity to share information about our programs and engage with members of the community. Most recently, GHA Autism Supports was honored to be invited to speak to the “Special Agents” at the Special Needs Family Dinner hosted by West Albemarle Baptist Church in Albemarle. Dee Pankey Thompson, GHA Autism Supports EVP/Chief Quality Officer, served as the guest speaker. She offered an overview of the programs GHA provides and shared insights into future service planning.

A Two-Way Learning Street

GHA Autism Supports has had the pleasure of working with two college interns this semester. Oakboro, North Carolina resident Addie Barbee is a graduate of West Stanly High School, and she is currently a senior at the University of NC at Wilmington where she is majoring in Exercise Science with an Allied Health concentration. She has spent time alongside the individuals we support at Port City Academy, the GHA Autism Supports licensed day services program in Wilmington. Once she completes her studies at UNCW, Addie hopes to become a certified radiologic technologist. “The staff and individuals within the site are a joy to be around and have allowed me to experiment with different exercises to help the individuals stay active and thriving,” shared Addie. “I am loving my time spent here so far, and am looking forward to the future!”



Addie Barbee



Sophia Bulla has spent her time shadowing our staff in a number of different programs in the Albemarle operations area. Originally from Statesville, North Carolina, she graduated from West Iredell High School and is currently a senior at the University of NC at Charlotte where she is pursuing degrees in Health Systems Management with a minor in Gerontology, as well as a degree in Interdisciplinary Studies with a concentration in Health and Medical Humanities. Sophia currently works for Bayada Habilitation part-time where she works with the special needs population. “I have been getting to spend some quality time with the residents at Starr Apartments where I have enjoyed doing artwork, watching movies, and playing games with the residents,” shared Sophia. While these interns have gained hands-on experience, GHA has benefited from engaging with the next generation of talent!

Sophia Bulla

“Mentoring interns also assists our employees in developing leadership skills and gaining new insights into how younger generations view technology, communication, and workplace dynamics. This exchange fosters a culture of continuous learning and adaptability.”

DEE PANKEY THOMPSON,
GHA AUTISM SUPPORTS
EVP/CHIEF QUALITY
SERVICES OFFICER





CEO MESSAGE

From the Desk of Dawn Allen

“

As we navigate the evolving healthcare landscape, I want to take a moment to address a matter that many of our families have expressed as very concerning to them regarding their loved one's Medicaid coverage. At GHA Autism Supports, we are deeply committed to supporting those who rely on Medicaid for essential service delivery. I have personally been involved in statewide work groups to ensure that those in need continue to receive the care they deserve.

Now more than ever, it is crucial to stay informed. As we continue monitoring and as the information becomes available, we will certainly share any policy developments.

First and foremost, we are committed to explore ways to put the individuals that we support first and continue exploring the best ways to provide stability in their lives. Thank you for your dedication to our mission and for making a meaningful impact every day.”



second^{2ND} street
SUNDRIES
Coffee & Cafe

Celebrates
10th
Anniversary



After ten years of serving thousands of customers, Second Street Sundries is a shining example of how a local Stanly County business can create lasting change. Through inclusion, advocacy and unwavering support, the cafe and coffee shop has helped to shape a community where individuals with autism are empowered to reach their fullest potential. The recent 10-year anniversary in January was marked by two weeks of daily prize drawings for customers. We appreciate the solid leadership team at Second Street Sundries that have worked tirelessly to provide exceptional customer service and who have supported our mission to provide employment opportunities for individuals with autism!

10th
ANNIVERSARY



Don't "Duck" a Chance to Win \$3,000!



Make plans to join the fun at the 17th Annual GHA Autism Supports Rubber Duck Derby on Saturday, May 17th at the Stanly County Family YMCA Park in Albemarle! Most importantly, adopt your rubber ducks now for a chance to win \$3,000 and numerous other exciting prizes. All ducks sold will plunge into the YMCA pool on event day at 1:00 pm. A complete list of prizes and event rules can be found at www.ghaautismsupports.org. Purchase your ducks by visiting the website or by calling (704) 982-9600, ext. 125. Grab a duck nest, flock, flotilla or invasion now before they are going, going gone!

GHA Receives Support From Speedway Children's Charities

GHA Autism Supports received a Speedway Children's Charities grant again this year to enhance our children's and adolescent's homes, the Smith and Thompson Residential Programs. The Thompson Home residents will enjoy a new massage chair, while the children at the Marie G. Smith Home will be receiving new iPads! The GHA Development Team volunteers during the year at Charlotte Motor Speedway events to raise funds that were distributed to 67 organizations serving children in the region. Lori Ivey accepted the grant on behalf of GHA Autism Supports during a ceremony in December at the Charlotte Motor Speedway.



STAY CONNECTED

Follow our programs on social media outlets including the Facebook and Instagram pages for GHA Autism Supports and Second Street Sundries!



Instagram

Sign up and encourage others to enroll in the electronic delivery of our GHazette newsletter on our website at ghaautismsupports.org. Complete the Constant Contact form at the bottom of the opening page!



OUR EDITORIAL TEAM

The GHazette Newsletter is released quarterly. For feedback or to share story ideas, contact:

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We put the "A"
in AWESOME at

