

# GHAzette

Official Newsletter of GHA Autism Supports



## Fun in the Sun at Wake the World

What an unforgettable day it was on Lake Tillery at the Wake the World (WTW) Tillery's annual event! From the excitement of boat rides and tubing to the laughter shared on the docks, it was a beautiful reminder of how special this community truly is. Event organizers along with many other volunteers work to secure boaters, in-kind donations as well as monetary support to help make the day successful. We are so thankful for the Lake Tillery boating community that came together to provide such a wonderful experience for youth and adults! Your kindness, time, and energy created a day full of joy and memories that will last a lifetime. WTW is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that provides watersport opportunities to youth and adults with developmental disabilities, as well as abused and neglected children and wounded warriors. The first Wake the World event in the US started in 2008 with eight families providing a day on the lake for residents of a local children's home. Today WTW is the largest all-volunteer event of its kind with more than 500 volunteered boats worldwide. Lake Tillery WTW started in 2014. Special thanks to volunteer organizers Robin and Melissa Lemons for all of their efforts in bringing smiles to countless faces of GHA residents. Check out event photos on page two!



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# WAKE the WORLD

SCENES  
FROM Lake Tillery



**"Wake the World Lake Tillery is a shining example of how powerful partnerships can be--bringing joy, adventure, and connection that truly enhances the quality of life for the individuals we support."**

**DAWN ALLEN, CEO  
GHA AUTISM SUPPORTS**





**GHA Autism Supports gratefully acknowledges the following individuals who made memorials and honorary gifts between June 1, 2025 and August 23, 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, x 125.**

**In Honor of Denise Drye**  
Thomas & Marie Southerland

**In Honor of**  
**Thomas C. Southerland**  
Thomas & Marie Southerland

**In Memory of Dru Martin**  
Betty Lou Brittain  
John's of Red Springs, Inc.  
McNeill Jewelers  
Robeson County  
Sheriff's Office Staff  
Rodney Stone



## Uwharrie Bank Interns Make a Lasting Impact at GHA

This summer, GHA Autism Supports was fortunate to welcome four interns from Uwharrie Bank—Allie Eury, Gage Dennis, Ashlynn Peralta, and Daniel Obinna—who brought fresh energy, creativity, and teamwork to our organization. With the support of Uwharrie Bank, the interns took on a special project researching innovative ideas for a future initiative at GHA that has the potential to further enhance opportunities for the individuals we serve. Their research and recommendations offered a new perspective and will help guide conversations about what's possible moving forward. In addition to their research, the interns rolled up their sleeves to spruce up and organize different areas across the agency. From refreshing workspaces to helping streamline resources, their contributions made a tangible difference in creating welcoming and functional environments for staff and individuals alike. We are grateful to Uwharrie Bank for fostering this partnership and to Allie, Gage, Ashlynn, and Daniel for their hard work and enthusiasm. Their efforts reflect the power of collaboration and community support in helping GHA continue its mission of enhancing the quality of life for individuals with autism.



**“We deeply value the opportunity to work with interns who bring fresh ideas, energy, and a spirit of service to our mission. Our partnership with Uwharrie Bank strengthens the connection between community, business and non-profit work.”**

BETH OLIVIERI,  
EXECUTIVE VICE  
PRESIDENT/CHIEF OF  
DEVELOPMENT  
GHA AUTISM SUPPORTS



**GHA and Uwharrie Bank staff gathered to hear the final presentation from the summer interns. Pictured from left to right are (front row) Lori Ivey, Ashlynn Peralta, Brooke Senter, Michelle Carver and (back row) Beth Olivieri, Daniel Obinna, Gage Dennis and Allie Eury.**

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# GHA Blooming Artists and Art Show Loading



We were excited to host two days of painting workshops with local Stanly County artist Rebekah Crisco. We received a matching Grassroots Grant from the Stanly County Arts Council to help fund these workshops. Rebekah offered six different workshops over two days where individuals painted a Georgia O'Keeffe inspired flower using acrylic paints on canvases. Rebekah sketched the flowers, and our individuals were creative in making their painting unique to their preferences. The beautiful flowers were bursting with colors. Our "blooming artists" created beautiful pieces of artwork featuring peonies, poppies, zinnias, sunflowers, forget-me-nots, and purple coneflowers. In addition to the painting workshops, the Development Department put together art kits for Cupcake Paper Flower Art. Kits were distributed to our residential and day services programs in Albemarle and Wilmington. The artwork features beautifully crafted flowers in a variety of colors and patterns using paper and cupcake liners. We are proud to feature Blooming Artwork by GHA Artists at the GHA Art Show Reception on September 10, 2025 from 1 – 3 p.m. at First Presbyterian Church located at 126 W. North Street in Albemarle. We hope you will join us and celebrate our artists and their work!





# GHA Athletes Compete at States

More than 1,300 Special Olympics athletes competed at the 2025 Special Olympics North Carolina Summer Games May 30 – June 1! Taking place in Triangle region, the Summer Games were the largest state-level event for Special Olympics North Carolina featuring competition in seven different sports. Special congratulations to the following GHA Autism Supports participants who earned medals and ribbons:

- Michael Francis
  - Bowling
    - 4th place ribbon in the traditional team bowling
- Zach Lowder
  - Bowling
    - silver medal in bowling doubles
- Jonathon Martin
  - Swimming
    - gold medal in 50y freestyle
    - 5<sup>th</sup> place ribbon in 25y freestyle
    - silver medal in 25y backstroke
- Sam Poplin
  - Basketball
    - bronze medal in the 3-on-3 team
- Temika Singletary
  - Bowling
    - 4th place ribbon in the traditional team bowling
- Chris Walsh
  - Swimming
    - gold medal in the 4X25 freestyle relay
    - gold medal in the 25y backstroke
    - silver medal in the 50y freestyle
    - bronze medal in the 25y freestyle



**GO TEAM  
GHA!**



Special Olympics North Carolina held its first Games in 1970 with 400 participants and has since grown to be recognized globally as one of the largest Special Olympics programs in the world. Special Olympics North



Carolina currently has nearly 53,000 registered athletes and Unified partners (people without intellectual disabilities), who train and compete in year-round programs in 20 different sports.



# Get Those Dirty Cars Ready in Albemarle!

We are excited to partner for the fifth year with Tidal Wave Auto Spa of Albemarle for their Annual Charity Day on Friday, September 19, 2025. Tidal Wave donates proceeds from all sales to a selected charity or non-profit group, with a focus on the special needs community. For every car wash that is not part of a monthly membership, GHA Autism Supports will receive 50% of the cost of the wash, while the other 50% will go to their national corporate charity. Founders Scott and Hope Blackstock, who have a son with special needs, have made it a priority to support these organizations since the company's inception in 2004. To date, Tidal Wave's Charity Day has raised over \$1,400,000 in donations. "Each year, our Charity Day event becomes a bigger and more meaningful celebration of community and giving," said founder and CEO Scott Blackstock. "I am filled with pride knowing that Tidal Wave can make a positive impact and help organizations continue the important work they are doing in our communities. Our team eagerly anticipates this special day and the opportunity it brings to support causes close to our hearts."

We would appreciate your support and hope you will save your dirty cars for Friday, September 19th! There will be collection cans located at each self-service vacuum station, where you can donate your spare change as well. Tidal Wave Auto Spa of Albemarle located at 1825 East Main Street in Albemarle will be open from 8:00 AM - 8:00 PM. Hope to see you there!



# Pfeiffer OT Students Partner with GHA to Enhance Autonomy

This summer, students from the Pfeiffer University Occupational Therapy program partnered with GHA Autism Supports at Carolina Farms to complete a meaningful research project titled "Enhancing Autonomy in Neurodevelopmental Disorders: The Role of KAWA in Shaping Client-Centered Care." The project explored the use of the KAWA model—an innovative, client-centered approach that uses the metaphor of a river to represent a person's life journey. By working alongside individuals in the homes at Carolina Farms, the students applied the KAWA framework to better understand each person's strengths, challenges, and goals. Through this collaboration, the students gained valuable hands-on experience in tailoring occupational therapy interventions that promote independence and self-determination. This partnership highlights the importance of academic and community collaboration, reinforcing GHA's commitment to advancing opportunities that enrich the lives of individuals with autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders. Director of Recreation and Safety John Fields and Chief Development Officer Beth Olivieri were on hand to hear the results of the student research presentations on August 11th.





## Motorcycle Ride Fundraiser to Benefit GHA

Rev up your engines for a great cause! On Saturday, September 13, the Millennium Sport Riders and Street Habits MC are teaming up to host a Motorcycle Ride for Autism benefiting GHA Autism Supports. The ride will kick off at the 421 Truckstop at 1610 US Highway 421 N. in Wilmington beginning at 11:00 a.m. The cost is just \$15 per rider, with fees collected via Cash App on the day of the event. Proceeds will support GHA's mission of providing quality services to individuals with autism in the Wilmington region. In addition to registration, organizers are inviting participants and community members to donate sensory items, which will be used to support individuals in GHA's programs. Items such as fidget toys, weighted blankets, stress balls, and other sensory-friendly resources are greatly appreciated. This exciting event is not only an opportunity to enjoy the open road, but also a meaningful way to make a difference in the lives of individuals with autism!



# What's Up Wilmington?



## SUMMER IS FULL OF LOTS OF ADVENTURES!





# SUMMER FUN AT GHA IS THE BEST!



## OUR EDITORIAL TEAM

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