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# THE BRIDGE

*Bridging Generations with Ageless Friendship*

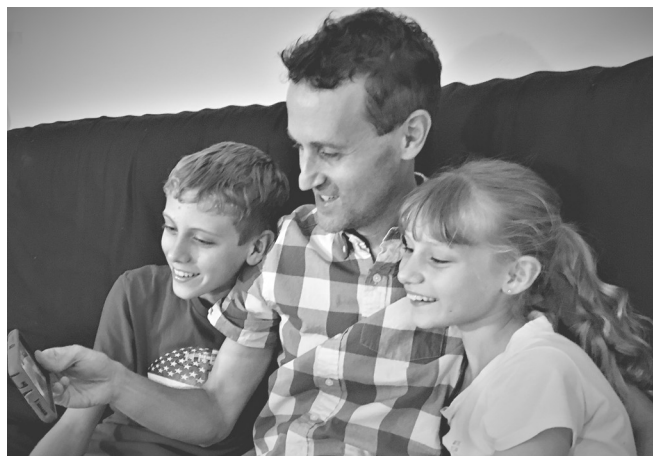
Friends Across the Ages  
Nursing Home Volunteer Network

## Bridging the COVID-19 Divide

In these strange and unexpected times, many of us are learning how to do things differently, and from a distance. Nursing home volunteering looks quite different during coronavirus days as well. Our last in-person visit to any of the facilities we serve was March 11 (see related article inside). Since then, we have been looking for ways to bridge the COVID-19 divide, to let our friends at the nursing home know that that we love them, that they are not forgotten, and that they are not alone.

It is not easy to connect with them, and it certainly is not the same as being able to see them in person. But, like everyone else, we are doing the best we can, and we trust it is better than nothing. Here are a few examples of ways we have been reaching out:

- Heather and John Benton paid a seamstress to make face masks for residents and staff at North Florida Rehab, and dropped off some snacks and cards for the residents along with the masks. (See related article inside.)



- With the help of Allen Alexander, Activity Director at Parklands Care Center, the Blay family has been able to arrange a couple of video chats with several of the residents. (See picture above.) There is not a lot of technology inside the facility, so Allen has been kind enough to let the residents talk via his personal phone. It has been so good to see their faces and to hear our friend Bernice sing!

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### President's Message

Andrew Mitchell

Hello to all of our quarantine friends!

As everyone knows, this unprecedented time is having a large effect on every aspect of our lives. That is no different for our wonderful organization.

Early in March, we contacted all of our volunteers to let them know they were welcome to suspend their visits for awhile if they were not comfortable. We asked those who continued visiting to be extra careful. Soon after,

all of our facilities decided to stop all non-essential visitors.

Even though we cannot be with our friends in the facilities, our hearts are still with them. We have been keeping in touch through letters and phone calls when available. (See article above.) Please use this time as an opportunity to find creative ways to help the residents who are likely feeling very confused and lonely right now.

Thank you all for the dedication that you have shown. A special thanks to all of our volunteers and supporters who are working in care facilities to provide the necessary services. Be safe and we hope to be able to see everyone soon.



## Thank you, Laura! Welcome, Lauren!

We want to extend our heartfelt appreciation to Laura Londono (left), who has volunteered with *Friends Across the Ages* since 2017. She has served as a board member and the coordinator of our volunteer group at Park Meadows for the past 2.5 years. Laura is moving to Washington D.C. to begin medical school at George Washington University. She has also been accepted to the Navy Health Professions Scholarship program, and will serve as a Naval officer after med school. She hopes to volunteer in D.C. area nursing homes during her time there. While we will miss her smile and her helpful, steady presence, we wish her all the best, and are sure she will be a wonderful doctor. She has demonstrated such compassion to all the residents and volunteers with whom she has worked.

A warm welcome to Lauren Goldstein (right) to the position of Park Meadows coordinator, and to our board of directors! Lauren is a UF senior from Parkland, FL, studying biology, etymology, and agricultural communication. She is currently applying to graduate programs in etymology (and hopes to continue at UF). Lauren has been a wonderful member of the Park Meadows group over the past year, and we feel lucky to have her serving in these new leadership roles, beginning this fall.



## Last Pre-Quarantine Visit

By Allison Blay

On March 11, our volunteer crew at Parklands Care Center arrived for the usual Wednesday visit. The main difference from the week before was a new log book, with questions for each visitor about recent travel and any current symptoms. Aside from that, and extra hand sanitizer stations, everything seemed normal.

The week before, we had sent an email to our volunteers, letting them know it was fine to stop visiting until the coronavirus situation passed. We asked those who did choose to continue to be extra careful about handwashing, and to please stay home if they had any doubts about symptoms or exposure. So we were not sure who would be there, but about two-thirds of our normal group did choose to attend.

On the second Wednesday of the month, we usually do a little poker game with the residents (no real money involved!). The weather was nice that day, and we felt safer in the open air, so we decided to gather on the back porch of the facility. Everyone seemed to enjoy the game, but especially Ms. Eliza, who seemed much more engaged and alert than usual. She was one of the very first residents Steve and I met when we started 21 years ago, and we were so pleased when she won! (Thank you to volunteer John Hobbs for assisting her.)

After the poker game, we went around for some individual visits. I checked in on my friend Ms. Audrey, and was pleased to see her, since she'd been away at



Ms. Eliza:  
Parklands  
Poker  
Champion!

(Note the  
"poker  
trophy" on  
the left.)

the doctor's the week before. Unfortunately, I had forgotten the Girl Scout cookies I had promised her, but assured her I would bring them next week.

Sadly, there was not to be a visit the next week. The following day we learned that all of the facilities we serve were no longer allowing visitors, not even family. (However, I was still able to drop off the Girl Scout cookies to Ms. Audrey—after wiping the box with alcohol.)

We miss our friends at the nursing home so very much. We have been doing our best to find ways to reach out to them during this time of quarantine (see related story), but it is definitely not the same. We hope they know how much they are loved, and how we can't wait to come back and visit—and maybe see if Ms. Eliza can defend her championship trophy.

In the meantime, we will never forget her smile, or the smiles of all of our friends at the nursing home. This experience has reminded us more than ever to cherish every visit, for we never know when it will be the last.

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- Upon hearing that the residents were really missing the comfort food they would normally buy from vending machines which currently cannot be restocked, Susie Breier and Steve Boissoneault bought a large quantity of snacks—enough that we were able to bring a good share to two different facilities.
- The Mitchell family—Kim, Andrew, and 4-year-old Will—made cards and bead bracelets for several of their friends at Signature Health Care. Andrew dropped them off along with some Krispy Kreme donuts, and a note of appreciation for the staff.
- Many of our volunteers have begun writing letters to the residents, and some are starting to take advantage of our new “Ink Cards” app to send postcards via U.S. Mail as well. Below is a picture that volunteer Jim Wright included with his Ink Card postcard—wearing Easter bunny ears from his granddaughter.

We appreciate the ways our volunteers are reaching out to the residents. We are deeply grateful for the staff who are putting their own lives at risk in order to care for the residents. If you are interested in finding imaginative ways to support both staff and residents, please contact us at [info@acrosstheages.org](mailto:info@acrosstheages.org), or call 352-335-0655.



Allison Blay with the snacks that Susie Breier and Steve Boissoneault dropped off at her front door to distribute to the nursing homes for the residents.



At left is volunteer Jim Wright sporting bunny ears from his granddaughter in a picture postcard he sent to his friends at Parklands.



Above are some of the homemade cards and bracelets the Mitchell family dropped off for their friends at Signature. At left is Andrew Mitchell with Krispy Kreme donuts and a note for the Signature staff.

## Calling All Sewers—Facemasks Needed!

Facemasks are needed everywhere right now, especially in hospitals and nursing homes. Sewers everywhere have been stepping up to the plate to make them for hospitals, but nursing homes have sometimes been forgotten. Nursing home staff need them, of course, as they risk their lives to care for the residents. Residents could use them as well, especially those who are new to a facility.

At the right is volunteer Heather Geidel—who is also an OT at a local facility—modeling a homemade mask. If you would like to help make masks or donate funds for materials, contact [info@acrosstheages.org](mailto:info@acrosstheages.org), or 352-335-0655.





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## Thank you, Dianne!

You may notice our newsletter has a different look this time. Since 2007 (or maybe earlier!) Dianne Walsh has volunteered to do the layout for all of our editions of *The Bridge*. Her patience, professionalism, and eye for beauty cannot be matched. She decided to finally retire from this job when the computer she had been using for this was no longer usable. We will miss her help, but she has certainly earned a break! While we can never match her elegant style, we have learned a lot from her, and hope that this new



layout honors the excellent tradition she has established for us. We love you, Dianne!

## Volunteer Anniversaries

Winter and Spring 2020

*13 years*

Robbie Curry—Parklands

*12 years*

Kim and Andrew Mitchell—  
Signature

*5 years*

Betsy Thewes—Parklands

*4 years*

Cassie Cooper—Signature

*2 years*

Dominika Burbul—Terrace

*1 year*

Shaynice Brown—Park Meadows

Leslie Radford—Parklands

Vernika Williams—Park Meadows

## Welcome New Volunteers!

*Winter and Spring 2020*

Elizabeth Deely—NFRSC

Josie Kilburn—Signature

Lauren Kilburn—Signature

Kassidy Schaeffer—Park Meadows

## Board of Directors

Andrew Mitchell—President

John Hobbs—Vice President

Heather Benton—Secretary

Steve Blay—Treasurer

Allison Blay—Network Facilitator

John Benton

Cassie Cooper

Robbie Curry

George Hamilton

Laura Londono

Kim Mitchell

For more information, visit our website:

**FriendsAcrosstheAges.org**

or contact us at: **info@acrosstheages.org**