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# THE BRIDGE

## *Bridging Generations with Ageless Friendship*

Friends Across the Ages  
Nursing Home Volunteer Network

### ***Friends Across the Ages Reboot—Can You Help?***

In March, we passed the second anniversary of the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Our friends at the nursing home have been hit hard by Covid, and by loneliness due to lingering lockdowns. With each new surge, visitors can be limited again, and residents might be confined to their rooms for weeks at a time. Life can look a little different from one facility to the next, depending on the number of cases in the building, and also on the policies for handling those cases, but a common thread remains: isolation is a real problem.

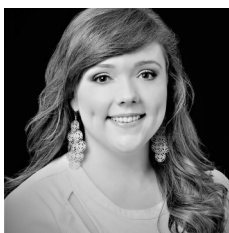
As an organization, we have been discerning what our role might be moving forward. It is hard to plan, and hard to foster new volunteers when we are never sure what might be happening from one week, one month to the next. With this in mind, our board is currently entering a process of strategic planning.

We are asking many questions, including: what should our role be now? How can we best



foster nursing home volunteerism in our community? How can we rebuild and reboot our organization? How should we connect with and support new members? We welcome any who would like to participate in this creative planning process. Please contact us at [info@acrosstheages.org](mailto:info@acrosstheages.org).

One thing is for certain: caring volunteers to visit people in nursing homes are more needed now than ever. As we slowly resume regular visits, we see that need in the residents' eyes and hear it in their voices. We are more committed than ever to our mission of "bridging generations with ageless friendship."



#### **President's Message**

**Cassie Cooper**

The Saturday before Easter, Allison and I had the opportunity to give out homemade Easter cards and small succulent plants in hand-decorated pots to the residents of Gainesville Health and Rehab (fka Signature Healthcare). These crafts were thoughtfully made by board members and other volunteers at our annual Volunteer Appreciation Event that took place the week before.

While we were there, Allison and I enjoyed our time talking with residents, many of whom we had never met. As our organization continues in its efforts to rebuild post Covid, and as we begin to facilitate more regular visits within our local facilities, new volunteers will be essential. Please contact FATA for details on volunteer opportunities.

To all board members, volunteers, and donors—we sincerely thank you for your support of *Friends Across the Ages*. We look forward to all the new friendships 2022 has to offer!

# Volunteer Memorial: Betsy Thewes

*Friends Across the Ages* recently lost one of its most vibrant volunteers. Betsy Thewes passed away in January after a two year battle with cancer. She was 79.



Betsy joined *Friends* in January of 2015, volunteering each Wednesday at Parklands Care Center. From the beginning, she had an instinct for finding those residents who had no visitors, and finding ways to connect with them. From time to time she would introduce us to someone new, saying “Here’s Jack, he’s from Hawthorne. He really likes to listen to hillbilly music.” Or, “Here’s Sally, she loves to crochet, so I brought her some yarn and crochet needles.”

Betsy also had a knack for getting items donated for *Friends* events. We were surprised and amazed when one day she walked into Wal-Mart—not exactly a small place to conquer—and walked out with a huge sheet cake, free of charge, to bring to our monthly birthday celebration. She also was able to get food donated from Fresh Market and Lucky’s, plus craft items from various places. Steve Blay said, “We would ask her how she got the stuff, and she said she would just ask the store manager, and would walk out with fifty cupcakes or whatever. Store managers were powerless against her!”

One resident she visited, Leslie Radford, later became a *Friends* volunteer after she got out of the nursing home. Remembering those early visits with Betsy, Leslie said, “Betsy was so sweet. I couldn’t wait for Wednesday mornings for her visits. Not only would she bring me treats, she would make me laugh.” Robbie Curry, another long-time volunteer, also remembers Betsy fondly: “She never came to a visit without bringing something for the residents. She loved volunteering.”

One December, Betsy organized a big holiday craft event for the residents of Parklands. She brought in all the supplies to make tissue paper wreaths, foam snow people, sock Santas, and holiday cards. It must have taken hours of work to organize all those supplies (and get a lot of them donated). The residents really enjoyed having the opportunity to make gifts for other special people in their lives.

Besides all of this, Betsy also had a talent for art, and won a competition for the design for the *Friends Across the Ages* 20th Anniversary T-shirt back in 2019. It was a beautiful drawing of a younger hand holding an older one.



Betsy lived with her sister, Mary Jo (pictured with Betsy at right). When Betsy got sick, Mary Jo became Betsy’s caregiver. Thanks to Mary Jo’s wonderful care, Betsy was able to stay at home until the very end. Recently, Mary Jo shared, “Spring has been hard, because Betsy loved it so much, and would spend much of her time out in the yard working. But when I go out and see her flowers, I smile. She also loved working with *Friends Across the Ages*.”



We all miss Betsy very much, but will do our best to carry forward her legacy of seeking out lonely residents, having a tenacious, can-do attitude, and nurturing the garden of friendship.

## Spring Festivities

This April, we were able to bring back a small version of our annual Spring Festival, after a two year hiatus due to Covid. We held two special events at nursing homes, and finished up with a special party for volunteers. Also, later in April we were able to introduce a new event, which will be occurring regularly moving forward.

The first event of the Spring Festival was a Trivia Party at Plaza Health and Rehab. This was something we have tried in the past and has been a fun way for residents to engage in a more active way than the usual Bingo games they play so often. We divided into two teams with residents and at least one volunteer and one staff person on each team. Steve Blay was the game host and he offered many multimedia questions, such as pictures of famous people and clips of famous songs for the residents to name. As enjoyable as the trivia was, the best part was after the game when Peter Blay started playing Frank Sinatra's "New York, New York" on the piano and everyone sang and danced as they were able. (See picture at right.)



The second event, back by popular demand, was a reprise of our "Spring Break in Las Vegas" event at Parklands. We set up different stations around the dining room for the residents to play black jack, roulette, and poker. Prizes were awarded to the winners of each game.

At our Volunteer Appreciation Party, held at the clubhouse of Heather and John Benton's neighborhood, we celebrated our volunteers with pizza and treats, but also put them to work! We decorated small clay pots in which to put succulents. We gave these to residents for Easter/Spring. (See picture at left of volunteer Sophia giving a potted succulent to resident Brenda.) We also made colorful homemade cards and tissue paper flowers.

Finally, a couple of weeks later, new volunteer Tammy Bleeker put together a special event for the residents of Palm Garden: a faith-based drum and limited movement class. Tammy (pictured at right) is a certified revelation wellness instructor. She made it fun for the residents with tunes like Dolly Parton's "Nine-to-Five" and Otis Redding's "Sittin' On the Dock of the Bay." She brought drum sticks and pads for each resident. Next time, she plans to add other rhythm instruments as well, plus pool noodles for those who have difficulty grasping a drum stick. Tammy put so much thought and care into the planning of this event, and the response was amazing—residents just kept coming in till we had over 20 participating by the end. Tammy plans to continue this event on a regular basis moving forward, at least once a month, or perhaps as often as every couple of weeks, depending on scheduling and interest.

It feels good to be able to gather with our friends at the nursing homes and with one another in various ways, and we are looking forward to building on this through the summer and fall!





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For more information about  
*Friends Across the Ages*, visit our  
website:

**FriendsAcrosstheAges.org**

or contact us at:

**info@acrosstheages.org**

## Book Update

The process of publishing the Friends Across the Ages book has taken much longer than we anticipated, but we have learned so much along the way. We have received much helpful advice and support, which has made it a better book. We are moving forward with the publishing process and expect it will be released early next year.

In the meantime, we will be building our network and social media presence in order to better position ourselves to participate in the national conversation about nursing home volunteerism. If you are interested in hearing more about this or helping with this project, please contact us. Thank you for your support!



## Volunteer Anniversaries

Winter and Spring 2021

*15 years*

Robbie Curry—Parklands

*14 years*

Kim and Andrew Mitchell—  
Signature

*6 years*

Cassie Cooper—Signature

*3 years*

Leslie Radford—Parklands

## Thank You New Volunteers!

Tammy Blecker—Palm Garden  
Darragh Kelly—Parklands  
Sophia Festejo—Parklands