



Medical Treatment • Research • Rehabilitation

# Shepherd

## Center Spinal Column®

# Custom-Made Care

Shepherd Center supports patients' overall wellness with care tailored to each individual.

Also Inside

Innovative Partnerships Give Patients Tools for Wellness | Alesha Savannah Says "Yes!" To Adventure | Patient and Family Dinners Build Community

[news.shepherd.org](https://news.shepherd.org) | Spring 2024

**Shepherd Center**  
2020 Peachtree Road NW  
Atlanta, Georgia 30309  
404-352-2020  
magazine@shepherd.org  
news.shepherd.org

**Editor**  
Ruth Underwood

**Design**  
Soloflight Design

**Contributing Writers**  
Damjana Alverson, Sara Baxter, Courtney Harris,  
Phillip Jordan, Kerry Ludlam, Lindsey Rieben,  
Erica Spurling, Shanna Thorpe, Ruth Underwood

**Contributing Photographers**  
Naomi Alexis, Louie Favorite, Kandelyn Green,  
Bita Honarvar, Atta Junior, Jillian Luther, Ben Rose,  
Forrest Smith, William Twitty, Joann Vitelli

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**About the Cover**  
Cathy May takes charge of her health with help from the Eula C. and Andrew C. Carlos MS Wellness Program. Here she throws punches while instructor Meghan Santander, EP, offers tips and support. *Photo by Bita Honarvar*

## Letter from Sarah Morrison



Dear Readers,

At Shepherd Center, we approach our mission as a collective. At the same time, we see and treat each person who becomes a patient here as an individual. And that means addressing the whole person — customizing care to reflect everyone’s mental, physical, and spiritual needs.

We do our best to create an environment where our patients feel safe and supported as they put in the hard work required for rehabilitation. That starts with family housing, so patients can have their loved ones nearby, and continues through programs like peer support and patient and family support groups, as well as providing access to psychological services. Patient outings help instill confidence in navigating new places while surrounded by supportive staff and fellow patients.

We want our patients to feel prepared for their lives beyond Shepherd. In this issue of *Spinal Column*, we explore some of the ways customized care helps the whole patient grow stronger.

On page 4, you can read about how Shepherd’s innovative partnerships with companies like Aetos Imaging and burnalong® help us further tailor services to each patient, boosting confidence and wellness by meeting patients where they are — literally and figuratively.

Beginning on page 6, we feature three patients who have found strength, support, and connection at Shepherd in different ways, including Anna Katherine Spangler, who, along with her family, found support for her faith practices in Shepherd’s chaplaincy program.

On page 16, you will meet Alesha Savannah, who participated in inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation at Shepherd Center. Since discharge, she has joined many recreation therapy outings and says “yes” to as many adventures and opportunities for growth as she can.

A sense of well-being and connection to the community is integral to mental health and wellness. We want every patient to leave Shepherd with the practice and resources to reintegrate into their respective communities so they can return home and thrive.

Warm regards,

*Sarah Morrison*

Sarah Morrison, PT, MBA, MHA  
Chief Executive Officer of Shepherd Center

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Photo provided by Cathy May



Cathy May visited Stonehenge with her daughter, Robyn, during a recent visit to Robyn’s home in England.



See [news.shepherd.org](https://news.shepherd.org)  
for additional online content.

## Gifts of Generosity

If you would like to make a gift to support the work you have read about, please contact Sarah L. Batts at the Shepherd Center Foundation at **404-350-7305** or scan the QR code.



## Construction Update

Construction continues on schedule at the Arthur M. Blank Family Residences construction site, (*pictured, near right*) and the tower crane has been removed. Brasfield & Gorrie's construction crews are installing exterior glass units and working on interior features, including installing mechanical, electrical, and plumbing; framing walls and ceilings; installing elevators; tiling bathrooms; and hanging interior doors. The 16-story tower is scheduled to open this fall.

Construction of the Marcus Center for Advanced Rehabilitation (MCAR) on Shepherd Center's main campus also remains on schedule. Choate Construction crews have poured concrete for all five parking deck levels and begun pouring

the floors for the patient-serving space. Plumbing and overhead mechanical installation has begun on the building's lower levels.

Construction of the bridge connecting the MCAR building (*pictured, far right*) to the existing Marcus-Woodruff building is well underway. The bridge design includes a symbolic representation of the 33 vertebrae in the spine. Shepherd Center anticipates topping out for the building this summer.



## Shepherd Receives Grant from The Imlay Foundation

In December 2023, Shepherd Center was awarded a \$500,000 grant by The Imlay Foundation to expand outpatient mental health services. The funding will allow Shepherd to increase access to much-needed mental health resources for patients and families participating in Day Program and outpatient services.

"We're excited about the many ways this generous grant from The Imlay Foundation will allow us to increase and expand our care," says Laurie N. Baker, Ph.D., ABPP, director of psychology at Shepherd Center. "These funds will allow us to hire a new counselor, increase access to mental health care for our Spinal Cord Injury Day Program patients, expand community access for outpatients at our rehabilitative medicine and specialty clinics, and provide

training and education for community mental health providers. Our patients often lack insurance coverage for mental health care or cannot afford expensive copays in addition to all their other medical costs."

The Imlay Foundation has supported Shepherd's mission in many ways over the past 30 years, including grants supporting recreation therapy, assistive technology, and family housing.

"The Imlay Foundation is pleased to support Shepherd Center with its recent grant. Shepherd's inpatients receive excellent physical and mental health care during their stays at the hospital, so it is very important to Imlay Foundation

board members that vital mental health services, which are critical as patients re-enter the community, continue uninterrupted as they adjust to their post-inpatient lives," says Mary Ellen Imlay, chairman and president of The Imlay Foundation.



## Accolades for Shepherd Center Staff

**Shari McDowell, PT, DPT, Selected as a Fellow of ASIA**

Shari McDowell, PT, DPT, program director of Shepherd Center's Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program, was selected as a Fellow of the American Spinal Injury Association.

Fellowship in the American Spinal Injury Association (FASIA) is bestowed to individuals who exemplify distinguished accomplishments in spinal cord injury research, clinical practice, education, and advocacy and for a long-standing membership of service to the society. The designation of FASIA recognizes prominent contributions to and in support of ASIA's policies, practices, operations, and goals, which advance its organizational mission.

**Brad Willingham, Ph.D., Receives Innovations in Well-Being Award**

In December 2023, Brad Willingham, Ph.D., a clinical research scientist at Shepherd Center's Virginia C. Crawford Research Institute, was named one of the International Progressive MS Alliance's Innovations in Well-Being Award recipients. The highly competitive award funds the first phase of a large-scale program of research to identify and implement solutions to some of the most challenging symptoms that people with progressive MS experience, with the potential for further funding based on results to be reported in mid-2025.

Dr. Willingham is using data collected from wearable sensors to allow clinicians to monitor symptoms in people with progressive multiple sclerosis. Clinicians can use the data to improve treatment plans for patients remotely, in real-time.

**Pete Anziano Named to American Trauma Society Board of Directors**

Pete Anziano, peer support manager and Trauma Survivors Network (TSN) coordinator at Shepherd Center, was named to the American Trauma Society's (ATS) board of directors. As a director-at-large on the board, Anziano is responsible for maintaining the commitment to the ATS's mission, maintaining strategic direction, ensuring compliance with all applicable legal requirements, and maintaining organizational financial well-being.

Since its founding in 1968, the ATS has led the fight for nationwide quality trauma care with goals to prevent injury and trauma; and when trauma does occur, to ensure the injured are cared for by the "right people, in the right place, at the right time."

**Shepherd Team Secures Grant from the Templeton Religion Trust**

Congratulations to Ben Rose, M.Div, BCC, Dave Wethington, M.A., BCC, Ford Vox, M.D., Nicole Thompson, MPH, Laura Bosque, MPH, and Brick Johnstone, Ph.D., for successfully securing a grant of more than \$250,000 from the Templeton Religion Trust to study "The 'Sense of Self' as a Construct to Unite the Sciences and Religion," spanning from 2024 to 2026. This funding will empower Shepherd Center to investigate the intricate dynamics of how disability type/severity, religious beliefs, and chaplain services intersect and how those beliefs and services enhance physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being.

## Shepherd Center Welcomes New Vice President and Chief Information Officer Atul Kanvinde, CHCIO, CDH-E



In December 2023, Atul Kanvinde, CHCIO, CDH-E, joined Shepherd Center's leadership team as vice president and chief information officer. In this role, he provides tactical leadership of all Shepherd Center information services and strategic technology planning for the organization. He also serves as a member of the senior management team.

Kanvinde incorporates a deep technological background with broad healthcare experience. His information technology career spans more than two decades across various technology platforms and certifications.

An industrial engineer by training and practice before transitioning into software design, technology, and healthcare delivery, he is a dedicated advocate for efficient, sustainable, human-centered design and believes that the patient experience and usability should be at the forefront of all decisions.

# Partnering to Improve Patient Care

Innovative partnerships give patients access to their communities, tools for wellness

By Lindsey Rieben and Ruth Underwood

Innovation has always been at the core of Shepherd Center's culture. Strategic collaboration with industry, academic, and technology partners is one way Shepherd clinicians and researchers improve patient care and smooth the transition to a fulfilling life beyond Shepherd's walls after a patient returns home.

"We're positioned as an innovation hub because we are leaders in the field. The Innovation Institute is a natural extension of that – giving us more capabilities, space, and resources to foster ingenuity," says Deborah Backus, PT, Ph.D., FACRM, Shepherd Center's vice president of research and innovation. "We collaborate with like-minded partners to advance rehabilitation medicine and find better, more efficient ways of delivering care to improve the lives of the people we serve."

The new 30,000-square-foot Innovation Institute, which will occupy the top floor of the Marcus Center for Advanced Rehabilitation on Shepherd Center's main campus and is slated to open in 2025, will be a hub for collaboration, allowing Shepherd researchers to form more of these robust partnerships to advance patient care. The following are just a few of Shepherd's partnerships that are improving patients' and their families' lives.

## Virtual Visits

In 2020, Shepherd Center's Recreation Therapy Program partnered with Aetos Imaging, a technology company that takes scans of real-world locations such as restaurants, stores, and stadiums. Then, they create a 3D digital replica of the location. Shepherd's recreation therapists label the scans, flagging potential barriers that people using wheelchairs, for instance, may need to consider when visiting the venue — including locations of accessible entrances, table or counter height, or type of flooring. The scans are invaluable for patients and care partners who are anxious about navigating life outside Shepherd. Therapists also use the images as a follow-up after an outing to cover anything a patient or caregiver might have missed during training sessions.

Kelly Edens, CTRS, recreation therapy manager at Shepherd, compares the experience to playing a video game.

"It's a tool to provide education for patients and families to get from A to B on outings to places like a doctor's office, a library, a church, or a stadium. Reviewing the scans lets patients sharpen problem-solving skills, prepare for outings, and even advocate for themselves. We never want a former patient to avoid going somewhere just because they use a wheelchair. We want them to have access to their community," she explains.

Connor Offutt, CEO of Aetos Imaging, says that working with Shepherd Center to help patients rebuild their lives resonates with the company's core values and allows Aetos to explore a different application of the technology.

"People are increasingly using the Aetos Operate platform to reintegrate within their communities and gain confidence in the real world. Like Shepherd Center, it's our hope — and responsibility — to utilize technology in ways that benefit our neighbors," he says.

(Below) In this Aetos scan of a drug store, the highlighted circles on the floor designate a spot where patients can place themselves virtually within the scan, allowing them to see the location from different perspectives. Red tags indicate that the information is most relevant to patients with acquired brain injuries (ABI), and the teal tags contain information most relevant to patients with spinal cord injuries (SCI).



Scan courtesy of Aetos Imaging

## Accessible Wellness Content

Another innovative partnership that builds community and allows Shepherd clinicians to reach patients after they return home is Shepherd's partnership with burnalong®, an online platform that offers on-demand health and wellness tools. The hospital and the online wellness platform are collaborating to create and distribute specialty programming that makes wellness accessible to all.

Shepherd's highly trained specialists are developing live and on-demand content geared toward people with spinal cord injury, brain injury, stroke, spine and chronic pain, multiple sclerosis, and other neurological conditions. Currently, Shepherd patients, staff, and Burnalong users can access the classes.

"The great thing is that these classes span across all our specialties and are appropriate for many neurological diagnoses and patients who we serve at Shepherd," says Marina Moldavskiy, ACRP-CP, Shepherd Center's tele-wellness program manager and exercise physiologist.

Among the more than 50,000 classes are yoga, exercise, and financial wellness courses for people of all abilities.

"Alongside the unparalleled range of classes and programs, one of the biggest things that sets Burnalong apart is the social experience. You can see and hear each other live. You can join communities. It ensures people get the support they need," says Daniel Freedman, president of commercial health and fitness, Tivity Health, and co-founder of Burnalong.

"We are always thinking of ways to empower our patients before they return home," Moldavskiy says. "When our patients are at Shepherd, there's always a rehabilitation professional there to guide them or give them information. We hope this platform can help them feel empowered to continue when they leave our walls."

While Burnalong is creating an inclusive community, it also opens opportunities for further research. Shepherd Center's Virginia C. Crawford Research Institute is piloting two studies to better understand the program's benefits. One focuses on people with multiple sclerosis (MS). If you are interested in participating in MS research, scan the QR code for more information.



Shepherd's content experts like Alexandra Juarez, EP, RYT-200 HR certified yoga instructor, curate a variety of virtual classes that subscribers to Burnalong can access live, in real time, or from an on-demand library of recordings that span various wellness categories.



A second study focuses on people who have sustained an acquired brain injury (ABI) and have been discharged from a hospital-based ABI program. The purpose of the study, conducted in collaboration with Moody Neurorehabilitation Institute in Texas, is to evaluate the potential efficacy of tele-wellness delivered through Burnalong.

For more information on ABI research or to volunteer, contact Erica Sutton at 404-367-1305 or [erica.sutton@shepherd.org](mailto:erica.sutton@shepherd.org). \*



Photo provided by the Spangler Family

Photo by Kandalyn Green

# Custom-Made Care

Shepherd Center offers programs that build upon the solid foundation of traditional therapy to support patients' overall wellness and prepare them and their families for vibrant lives back home.

By Phillip Jordan

# Carson West Reaches New Heights through the HiTe Program



Other outings would follow — to a shopping center, the Atlanta Botanical Garden, and more. It was all part of the plan, thanks to the experts in Shepherd Center's High-Tetraplegia Program (HiTe), which is designed specifically for patients like Carson who have high-level (C-1 to C-4) spinal cord injuries. The program includes community outings, specialized support groups, and education to help family members become confident caregivers.

"The needs of patients with high tetraplegia require an extra level of care and education," says Polly Hopkins, MS, OTR/L, CLT, therapy manager in the Spinal Cord Injury

Rehabilitation Program. "HiTe continually evolves to best meet the needs of patients living with high-level injuries and for those who are caring for them."

These specialized services were seamlessly integrated with the Adolescent Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program for Carson, a 14-year-old from Cincinnati, Ohio. In assistive technology sessions, Carson quickly learned how adaptive equipment could help him play his favorite video games. He learned to use an Alexa voice assistant to turn on lights and appliances, make phone calls, unlock doors, and more.

Carson also remembers Shepherd's facility dogs, who gave him a lift during grueling rehab workouts in the gym.

## "Want to go get some burgers?"

Carson West and his mother couldn't quite believe the question. At the time, Carson was a week into his stay at Shepherd Center — and just four months removed from surviving an accidental shooting and sustaining a C-4 level spinal cord injury.

But, yes, Carson was indeed receiving an invitation from Shepherd Center's physical therapy staff to join fellow patients on an outing to a local Steak 'n Shake.

"It felt nerve-wracking even to consider," says Carson's mom, Alexis Schulze. "It was only a few months since we'd been facing emergency surgeries, collapsed lungs, so much. He had just gotten off a ventilator and still had his trach in.

"But the staff had it handled. They took all the supplies he needed and prepped us for everything. I think they knew it was something he needed. We'd seen nothing but hospital walls, and he needed to get out. To see that he could do something like that."



"I wanted to be confident by the time we left. We were well prepared, and the transition home went so much smoother than I expected. It's because I was part of everything directly alongside Carson."

- Alexis Schulze



Family photos by Kandalyn Green

And he loved hanging out with new friends during Fun Fridays — an Adolescent SCI Rehab favorite — playing music in the gym, painting on massive canvases, and doing movie-and-dinner nights.

The HiTe program offered plenty for Alexis, too, preparing her to become Carson's primary caregiver back home.

"They basically taught her everything they taught me," Carson says of his mom's involvement. "She had to get checked off on everything — suctioning my airways, helping me with showers, the bladder and bowel

programs, everything. I'm thankful she did all that."

"I wanted to be confident by the time we left," Alexis says.

"We were well prepared, and the transition home went so much smoother than I expected. It's because I was part of everything directly alongside Carson."

It's a good thing Alexis felt ready because Carson's progress enabled him to get discharged a week earlier than expected.

"We were home six days early, so I thought I'd surprise people," Carson says, then laughs. "I didn't surprise anybody."

His first clue was the police escort that guided him and his mom into Cincinnati's Colerain Township.

"I didn't realize it was for me at first," Carson laughs. "Then I started seeing signs."

Signs, banners, balloons. Hundreds of friends and neighbors lining the streets. His high school's marching band and cheerleading squad performing in his front yard. Even a former Cincinnati Bengals football player was there to welcome him.



Carson appreciated it all. But he also appreciated getting inside his house and closing the door.

"That felt so good," he says. "My dogs came running up. My sisters were there, my grandparents, and other family. I was just happy to be in my own home again."

(Clockwise from top left) ▶ Carson West shows off his graduation T-shirt. ▶ Adolescent rehabilitation program counselor, Cheryl A. Linden, MA, LPC; MS OT/L, poses for a photo with Carson. ▶ Carson poses for a family photo with Blayne, Paul, Alexis, Adalyn, and Esmae Schulze. ▶ Carson was thankful his mom, Alexis Schulze, received training at Shepherd for his care.

# Cathy May Participates in Shepherd's Comprehensive MS Wellness Program

## For years, Cathy May's multiple sclerosis (MS) symptoms —

vision issues, balance issues, fatigue, and more — were ascribed to other causes. She felt relieved when she finally received an MS diagnosis in 2009. But the relief didn't translate into a sense of ownership over her health. For too long, Cathy still felt at the mercy of her symptoms.

That changed in 2017, a few years after moving from her native Philadelphia to Atlanta, when she first met Ben Thrower, M.D., medical director of Shepherd Center's Andrew C. Carlos Multiple Sclerosis Institute. After treating Cathy's latest flare-up and updating her medications, Dr. Thrower recommended she join Shepherd Center's Eula C. and Andrew C. Carlos Multiple Sclerosis Rehabilitation and Wellness Program.

Now a decade old, the program was one of the first in the nation to integrate all aspects of wellness — fitness, nutrition, mental health — into a comprehensive, yet customized, approach for people with MS.



Photo provided by Cathy May

"I was kind of resistant because I can usually talk things out myself," Cathy says. "But she helped me understand that I was really grieving the loss of those long-distance walks. I had used those walks to figure things out in my mind. They helped me mentally as much as physically. So, I came up with new strategies for thinking through things, and my counselor directed me to a new aerobics program to help replace the walks to some degree."

Thankfully, there's far more that Cathy can do, thanks to the wellness regimen her team built just for her. Using a walker has helped keep her mobile and on her feet. She spends a month over the holidays each year in London, where her daughter Robyn lives. She's active in Atlanta's MS community. And she enjoys seeing plays and trying new restaurants around Atlanta with her friends — including Clinton, her partner of six years.

"We lived in the same building, and he would always stop and talk to me," Cathy says. "Six years ago, we started talking for real one day, and we've been together ever since. He grew up on a farm in southwest Georgia, and I'm a city girl from West Philly, just like the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air. So, we have a lot of fun together."



"For the first time, I learned how I can actively fight MS," Cathy says. "And I fight it by keeping my body strong and less stressed. When I do that, it helps my strength, my flexibility, and my cognitive issues. I am probably more fit today at 69 than I was in my 40s!"

Ever since, Cathy has taken advantage of the MS Wellness Program's slate of exercise and educational classes: whole-body exercise twice a week, pool classes, aerobics, yoga, and pilates.

"I never thought at my age I'd be starting pilates," Cathy says with a laugh. "There are some things in the class I can't do, but I try it all. And it's all adaptive. It's mat pilates. Seated yoga. No matter what stage you're at, I've realized there's always something you can do to fight MS and keep yourself going."

Cathy thrives when she takes charge of her health. Shortly before moving to Atlanta in 2013, she decided to get serious about losing the weight she'd put on due to her physical challenges. She began walking two miles a day and eating healthier. It took four years, but she lost more than 100 pounds.

Unfortunately, in 2018, the combination of her MS-related spasticity and the arthritis in her knees robbed Cathy of those long walks. The loss took a toll on her emotionally. So, Cathy did something else she hadn't done before; she talked to a staff psychologist at Shepherd Center about how MS was affecting her mentally.

Photos by Bitia Honarvar

**"For the first time, I learned how I can actively fight MS. And I fight it by keeping my body strong and less stressed. When I do that, it helps my strength, my flexibility, and my cognitive issues. I am probably more fit today at 69 than I was in my 40s!"**

**- Cathy May**



# Anna Katherine Spangler's Faith Helps Her Heal Post-Spinal Cord Injury



**On June 27, 2023, Anna Katherine Spangler, 18,** was home in Huntsville, Alabama, just days after winning a pair of silver medals at the 2023 USA Gymnastics Championships. The elite gymnast, who has trained with the U.S. national trampoline team, was at her hometown gym practicing a new drill when she landed awkwardly on her head. The fall resulted in a paralyzing C-5 to C-6 fracture-dislocation which led to severe impingement and swelling on her cervical spinal cord. ER doctors in Huntsville didn't know if AK — as Anna Katherine is known to her

friends and family — would make it through emergency surgery. "We were talking to keep her calm before surgery," recalls Scott Spangler, AK's father. "But she looked up at us and said, 'God knew this was going to happen even before we did. He's got a plan and a purpose for everything, even this.' It floored us. She has a strong faith, but, in that moment, wow." AK eventually spent more than three months at Shepherd Center through both the inpatient rehabilitation program and the Spinal Cord Injury Day Program. Here, she and her family continued



to lean on their faith to sustain their spirits and move forward — and they had support from one of Shepherd Center's chaplains, Ben Rose, M.Div., BCC, with whom they formed a strong bond. "Ben came in one of the first days I was there to introduce himself," AK says. "He's so encouraging and always rooting for you. Anytime something was bothering me, I knew I could pray with him or talk through it with him, and he would be there for me." As part of the Larry L. Prince Chaplaincy Program, Shepherd Center's chaplains provide spiritual care while honoring the diverse religious backgrounds of all patients, families, and staff. Rose says his role is all about being available, being positive, and providing outlets for patients' faith practices while away from home. "It was a joy to acknowledge and explore God's place in AK's rehabilitation," Rose says. "We, as chaplains, assisted AK and her parents in grieving loss while also cele-

brating the life that lies ahead. I consider that my most important mission as a chaplain here." AK and her family regularly attended Sunday services at Shepherd Center and kept meeting with Chaplain Rose even through AK's time in the Day Program. "For us, as a family of faith, it was so appreciated to have someone like Ben as an integral part of the care team there," Scott adds. "Even if you don't come from a faith background, it's such a benefit to have these chaplains, counselors, and psychologists as part of your care team who are all there to encourage you." Back home in Huntsville, AK's continuing her physical therapy, focused on getting strong enough to operate a manual wheelchair routinely — and not just in "turtle mode," as AK jokes. She's back in school, aiming to attend college and work in engineering. And she's often in touch with a new friend she made at Shepherd Center, 22-year-old Eden Schroeder, a member of the Shepherd Sharks swim team. During AK's time in Atlanta, the two

(From left to right) Anna Katherine (AK) Spangler will graduate high school in May. ► At home, AK uses a functional electrical stimulation (FES) bike as part of her therapy regimen. ► AK poses for a photo with her parents at Shepherd. ► AK shares her room with two parrots, including Buddy. ► AK and her family, Scott, Kelly, and Aleksandra, appreciated having chaplains as part of the care team at Shepherd.

young women shared notes on their nearly identical spinal cord injuries — sustained three years apart — and bonded as athletes. AK watched Eden's swim practices while there, gaining further motivation. Last December, Eden competed in the U.S. Paralympics Swimming National Championship. Now, she's lobbying AK to take up adaptive swimming as her next athletic challenge. "We'll see," AK says. "Each day is a new day. One of my teachers always says something that has proved awesomely true: There's 'not yet,' but 'later on' always comes. What that means for me is maybe I can't do something at this moment. But that won't always be the case. I can keep working, and later on, maybe I can."

**"It was a joy to acknowledge and explore God's place in AK's rehabilitation," Rose says. "We, as chaplains, assisted AK and her parents in grieving loss while also celebrating the life that lies ahead. I consider that my most important mission as a chaplain here."**

**- Ben Rose, M.Div., BCC**



# Mark your Calendar for these recreation therapy events!

Our clinics provide individuals with physical and cognitive disabilities with the opportunity to live active lifestyles. Please note that participants will be responsible for registration fees and securing their own airfare for these events.

## June 2024

- Kayaking and Hand Cycling in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in partnership with the City of Chattanooga Department of Parks and Outdoors.
- Adaptive Surfing in Charleston, South Carolina, in partnership with Adaptive Expeditions.

## July 2024

- Outdoor Adventures in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, in partnership with Steamboat Adaptive Recreational Sports (STARS).

## August 2024

- Adaptive Climbing Clinic in Washington, D.C., in partnership with Catalyst Sports.

## September 2024

- Outdoor Adventures at Camp Twin Lakes in Rutledge, Georgia, in partnership with Camp Twin Lakes.

## November 2024

- Getaway to Miami, Florida, in partnership with Wheel the World.

## December 2024

- Outdoor Adventures in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, in partnership with Steamboat Adaptive Recreational Sports (STARS).



(From top to bottom) Jessica Gallagher participated in a Shepherd mountain biking clinic in Knoxville, presented in partnership with Catalyst Sports and funded by the Kelly Brush Foundation. ► Mistie Butler shows great form at a golf clinic presented in partnership with the Georgia State Golf Association and Bobby Jones Golf Course. ► During a weekend at Camp Twin Lakes, Neal Watson made the adaptive ropes course look easy.

Other events to watch for include birdwatching, hunting, art, tennis, and more.

Scan this QR code with your phone's camera to see all our upcoming recreation therapy events!



Photo by Joann Vitelli

# Helping Patients Understand Their Brain Injuries

As a board-certified neuropsychologist, Michelle Jackson, Ph.D., ABPP-CN, educates patients and families on how injury or illness may affect brain function.



## EDUCATION

- Loyola University, B.A., Psychology
- Suffolk University, Boston, Ph.D., Clinical Psychology
- University of Mississippi Medical Center-Jackson VAMC Consortium, Clinical Internship
- Methodist Rehabilitation Center in Jackson, MS, APPCN-approved postdoctoral fellowship in neuropsychology

## FUN FACTS

- Dr. Jackson grew up in Trinidad.
- She loves scary movies and encourages people to watch "The Golden Bachelor."
- She is a CrossFit Level-1 trainer. Her goal is to combine her love for weightlifting and brain injury rehab by becoming certified in Adaptive and Inclusive Training.
- She loves spending time with her dog, Belle.

Interview by Ruth Underwood

## How long have you worked at Shepherd Center, and what is your role?

I've worked here for seven years. I am a neuropsychologist in the inpatient Brain Injury Rehabilitation Program. I work with patients to assess cognition, behavior, and emotional functioning after their brain injury. I educate patients, families, and staff about those changes.

I also am co-director of our Neuropsychology Fellowship training program. In that role, I help recruit, train, and supervise neuropsychology fellows.

## What is the difference between a neuropsychologist and a psychologist?

Neuropsychologists are specialized in understanding the brain/behavior relationship.

When most people think of a psychologist, they imagine a clinical psychologist who works with people with anxiety, depression, or trauma histories. Neuropsychologists work to understand how the brain's function impacts someone on a day-to-day basis. That includes working with people who had injuries to their brain, like strokes or traumatic brain injury, and people who have illnesses that could impact their brain function, like multiple sclerosis or dementia.

Neuropsychologists consider a holistic view of the patient, including mental health. We need to understand their medical history, any medications they're taking, and how those might impact their cognitive or behavioral functioning. We also consider things like sleep, fatigue, and pain and how those might also impact cognitive functioning. We also need a good understanding of the role of culture, educational attainment and quality, family systems, health literacy, and other factors.

## How do you think your role impacts patients and their families?

As patients become more insightful, education, validation, and normalization of their experiences can be essential for coping. Educating patients and their families about what to expect, what a recovery timeline looks like, and how they can help with recovery can improve adjustment.

## What's the most fulfilling part of your job to you?

The education piece is fulfilling — helping people have those light bulb moments of understanding how brain injury is impacting them. The teamwork—building relationships through working with the interdisciplinary team and training our fellows are also very fulfilling.

## What was one of your best days at work?

When our previous inpatients come back to visit us, seeing their progress lights up the day. \*



Photo by Aaron Marshall Photography

# Saying “Yes!” to Adventure

After sustaining a spinal cord injury, Alesha Savannah thought her life was over. Instead, the self-proclaimed “people person” has thrived on new experiences.

By Ruth Underwood

Thirty-three-year-old Alesha Savannah is a Georgia native who now lives in a small town in northern Florida. She greets others with a smile and “grateful day.” She describes herself succinctly as a “people person” and says that in the past few years, she has become a “yes” woman — saying “yes” to adventures and opportunities whenever she can.

Five years ago, on New Year’s Eve, Alesha was on a road trip with friends when the car she was riding in flipped, and she was thrown out the back window. When she landed, she sustained a T-10 to T-11 spinal cord injury (SCI). And while her life changed that night, she says her view of life ultimately changed as well.

“I thought my life was going to be over,” Alesha says. “I wasn’t going to be able to do anything. I thought it was going to be a period. God put a comma there instead, and I have lived more now than I did before.”

Alesha went to Piedmont Columbus Regional Hospital in Columbus, Georgia, before transferring to Shepherd Center for rehabilitation. She says the first night at Shepherd, her mom couldn’t stay with her, and she was terrified to be alone, but one of the nurses stayed by her side. “To this day, I still talk to Allie, the night nurse. She held my hand until I fell asleep.”

Alesha participated in the inpatient Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program and the outpatient SCI Day Program and says the staff felt like family.

“From the first day, everybody was there to support me. Everybody was

realistic. They allowed me to be angry, to be sad, to be whatever I wanted to be.”

At first, Alesha was hesitant to try new things. “I said, ‘Absolutely not. Why would I want to do that? That’s going to be too much on my arms. Or physically, I’m incapable.’ I guess I didn’t want to get used to being in a wheelchair. But now I’ve realized there’s so much more life to live while in a wheelchair — even if it’s different, there is a way to do it. I have done so many things.”

Since graduating from the Day Program, Alesha has tried many activities through Shepherd’s Recreation Therapy Program. She’s participated in Adventure Skills Workshop, where she learned to waterski — now one of her favorite things to do. And she and her partner, K, recently took a trip to Steamboat Adaptive Recreational Sports (STARS) Ranch in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, to participate in an outdoor adventure program with Shepherd’s Recreation Therapy Program and STARS.

“I’m always so grateful that my partner gets to attend with me because it’s easier for her to experience new activities with people who will tell us how to make it work, and we can ask for help if we need it. That’s important.”



In 2022, Alesha was crowned Ms. Wheelchair Georgia, and she spent the year traveling around the state advocating for people with disabilities.

“That really started a fire for me to get involved in advocacy, because it’s not about me. It’s about the generations coming behind me. I plan to go back to school for disability studies so I can learn more as well as apply my experiences. I’m excited to grow and see what I can do for the next generation.” \*

*(Opposite page)* At a photoshoot in Atlanta, Alesha Savannah chooses rainbows to celebrate life and the anniversary of “the day God said He wasn’t finished with me yet!”  
*(Clockwise from top)* ▶ Alesha celebrates her 33rd birthday with a trip to Niagara Falls, Canada.  
▶ Alesha (center) poses for a photograph with Kelly Edens, CTRS, Shepherd recreation therapy manager (L), and Katie Harmon, CTRS, Shepherd health and wellness coordinator (R), after a gondola ride in Steamboat Springs, Colorado.  
▶ Alesha and her partner, K, enjoy adaptive cycling at Howelsen Park in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, while participating in a Shepherd Center recreation therapy trip.

Shepherd Alums:

# From “I Can’t” to “I Can”

By Sara Baxter

## Bill Duncan

Acworth, Georgia

Bill Duncan, a senior superintendent for Choate Construction, has taken a special interest in the renovation of the building that houses Shepherd Center’s SHARE Military Initiative.

It’s not the first time Bill has spent a lot of time in that building. In fact, he credits SHARE for saving his life.

Bill, a retired U.S. Army staff sergeant who spent most of his time in the military as an infantryman, had been dealing with depression, anxiety, and anger management issues since his discharge in 2017 but couldn’t find help. It wasn’t until he heard about SHARE that he felt like things could change.

“I didn’t realize how hard it was to access mental health care until I tried to do it,” Bill says. “It was like I was on an island by myself, frantically searching for help. I was thinking, ‘Nobody gives a damn, so why should I care?’ I had suicidal ideations. Shepherd was my last hope.”

Bill entered SHARE in August 2020, where doctors diagnosed him with a traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, and clinical depression. Right away, he began cognitive, behavioral, physical, and other types of therapy to work through both his emotional and physical symptoms.

“I learned that if I don’t take care of myself, I can’t take care of anyone else,” says Bill, who is married with three children. “They give you a plethora of tools for your toolbox and teach you how to use them.”

Nearly two years later, Bill says he is a different person with a more positive outlook. He is now finding ways to make life better for his fellow veterans.

“I have a passion for helping veterans,” he says. “Because I’ve been there.”

He created an employee resource group at Choate that raises money for veterans and veteran organizations. He describes it as “veterans helping veterans.” He is also very involved in Shepherd’s Men, a volunteer group of civilians and active duty and retired service members who advocate for veterans and support SHARE.

“My story started at SHARE,” Bill says of his transformation. “Everything else was a lead-up to that. The people there care about you walking out of there better than you walked in. It’s the most amazing place in the world.”



## Lesley Douglas

Atlanta, Georgia

Lesley Douglas, a flight attendant for Delta Air Lines, was used to traversing the country and working long hours. As a former personal trainer, she saw the value of keeping fit and working out every day.

That all changed in November 2022 when Lesley fell down some stairs and fractured her ankle. Her doctor put her foot in a boot and prescribed physical therapy.

But things didn’t improve — they got progressively worse. “I was in the worst pain I’ve ever been in,” Lesley recalls. “My foot would shift from blue, swollen, and ice cold, like I was losing circulation, to red hot, prickly pain. It felt like someone was burning my foot.”

Not only that, but she could not exercise, drive, or work. Sleeping was also difficult.

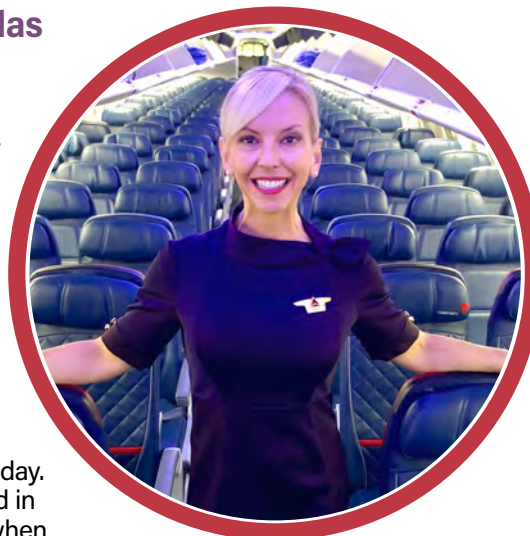
Lesley sought a second opinion and was told she had complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS). The second doctor referred her to the Dean Stroud Spine and Pain Institute at Shepherd Center.

In February 2023 — three months after her fall — Lesley met with the Institute’s Medical Director, Erik Shaw, D.O., who gave her a sympathetic nerve block and prescribed medication to relieve her symptoms. Within two weeks, she could stand on her foot — something she hadn’t done in months. After the second nerve block, Lesley says her pain continued to subside — from level 10 to level four. She was standing for longer periods and was sleeping better.

Lesley also worked with Shepherd physical therapist Chris Nesbitt, PT, who specializes in CRPS.

In mid-November, in collaboration with Dr. Shaw, Lesley called Delta and told them she was ready to come back. Since she had been gone for a year, she was required to undergo extensive training, including evacuation, fire, and medical drills. She passed them all with flying colors and returned to the skies in mid-December.

“When I got to Shepherd Center, I couldn’t do anything,” Lesley says. “And now I’m going back to work — which is a game changer. I’m so grateful to everyone there. I felt so valued and taken care of. Without them, I wouldn’t be where I am today.”



## Maria Motta

Brooklyn, New York

Maria Motta had a plan. After she graduated from the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) in May 2022, she would move to New York City and get a job as a graphic designer.

Unfortunately, those plans were derailed when a car she was riding in was T-boned by an impaired driver in March 2022 — just months before graduation. Maria sustained a broken hip, broken ribs, a fractured orbital bone, and a traumatic brain injury (TBI). She was in intensive care for two weeks at Memorial Health University Medical Center in Savannah, during which a family friend recommended that she consider Shepherd Center’s Brain Injury Rehabilitation Program.

She transferred to Shepherd Center, and her mother, who lives in Panama City, Panama, where Maria is from, accompanied her. Because of the TBI, Maria had difficulty processing what was happening. She thought she and her mother were in a hotel room. She tried to walk, not understanding that she had a broken hip.

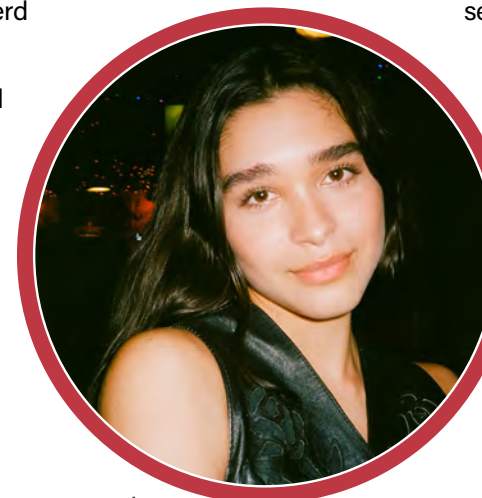
She worked with physical, occupational, and speech therapists to regain strength, balance, memory, and executive functioning skills. After a month, Maria transitioned to Shepherd Pathways, Shepherd Center’s comprehensive outpatient rehabilitation program for people recovering from brain injury. She continued therapy with the goal of returning to school, graduating, and finding a job. As she improved, she was able to do her schoolwork from Pathways, and her graduation was delayed by only three months.

“I just wanted to get back to living my life,” Maria says. “And Shepherd Center gave me the building blocks to do that.”

After graduating from SCAD in August 2022, Maria followed through with her plan and moved to New York with a friend, eventually landing a six-month internship at a branding studio. She now lives in Brooklyn with a couple of roommates and navigates the subway system commuting to her job in Manhattan as a junior designer at a consulting firm.

Though she never lost sight of her plan, she credits Shepherd Center for helping her execute it.

“The staff at Shepherd Center helps you reach your goals realistically and practically,” Maria says. “They made me feel capable and fueled my ambition. None of them said, ‘You can’t do this.’ Instead, they said, ‘Let’s try this so you can do this.’”



## Peter Bradshaw

Temple, Georgia

On a rainy night in March 2021, Peter Bradshaw’s truck was hit by a speeding car that veered into his lane. Peter went to Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, where he learned he had a severe concussion. In the coming days, he experienced weakness on his right side, dizziness, balance issues, difficulty walking, and sensitivity to light. He was prohibited from driving and had to take leave from his job at an electronics company.

He next went to Shepherd Center’s Complex Concussion Clinic, where he spent the next five months working on regaining his strength and balance and addressing memory issues.

The staff reviewed his medications and recommended he stop taking them since they can mask symptoms.

“Things got worse before they got better,” Peter admits. “I had ringing in my ears and a lot of pain.”

He spent three days a week at Shepherd Center, participating in various forms of therapy. When he wasn’t in therapy, he worked on exercises at home.

“It was a lot of hard work,” Peter says of his recovery. “But I was committed to getting better. The staff was so supportive, and they motivated me to keep working. I didn’t want to let them down.”

Slowly, he saw progress. His short-term memory improved. He could walk in a straight line. Strength returned to his right side. He tapered off his therapy sessions to weekly visits to Shepherd Center.

The most significant victory was when Peter was cleared to drive. At first, he was allowed to drive only short distances, and his wife had to be in the car. As he built up the hours, he could eventually drive part of the way on a trip to Florida. Then, he was cleared to return to work — once again in small increments.

Peter says life has returned to normal and credits his family, his faith, and Shepherd Center.

“Shepherd Center saved my mind and quality of life,” he says. “The people there care about you and show that in everything they do. I would recommend it to anybody going through what I did. I thank them for the support and what they did for me.”





# More than a Meal

Dinners and brunches allow patients and families to make connections and build community.

By Ruth Underwood

Most Tuesday evenings at Shepherd Center, just in time for dinner, the spinal cord injury therapy gym on the fourth floor transforms. Therapy tables are covered with fresh sheets that double as tablecloths. Environmental services staff set up a long row of tables and chairs. Volunteers place flowers on some tables and fill others with the food they brought – one night, it might be barbecue; another, tacos; and still another, lasagna. Patients and families gather in the buffet line, and everyone enjoys a meal together.

The dinners were born in 2016 from the hope of Anna Elmers, M.D., to help patients connect and build community.

"When people are going through this catastrophic event, they need to know they're not alone, and not just the patients, but the families need to know they're not alone," Dr. Elmers explains. "It's all about community and giving people more support."

Dr. Elmers pitched her idea to Renee Houle, who participated in outpatient physical therapy at Shepherd and was eager to give back after discharge. Renee accepted the challenge — and in August 2016, she and a friend, Joan Marie Hyland, worked with Dr. Elmers to hold the first family dinner and followed the first with many more.

"It was pretty simple. We didn't think twice about it. We would cook the meals, lay them out, and put out tables and chairs. Then we'd let everybody know dinner was ready. It was great to see how much it helped the patients and families to have each other, to talk about what they were going through and how to solve problems they were facing. And it gave us a chance to sit down with them and learn their stories — all the heartbreak and all the good stuff that happened through them being there," Renee recalls.

COVID safety precautions stopped family dinners for a time, but recently, Jennifer Heffron, donor engagement coordinator for Shepherd Center Foundation, revived the tradition, with groups volunteering to make or order meals, set up, and serve. After everyone's plate is full, volunteers or staff lead the

dinner guests in introductions and an icebreaker question — asking guests to share things like a favorite movie, hidden talent, or someone who inspires them. Introductions are sometimes followed by friendly — or heated — competition in a game of Bingo — with a bag of much sought-after prizes.

"The dinners are super fun," Jennifer says. "I'm so charged up after each one of them. People are so kind to each other. It really makes a difference in people's day."

Courtney Alderman, a Shepherd patient, says the dinners and games give patients something to look forward to. And even though he technically hasn't won at Bingo yet, "I smiled very hard one night, and the person who won gave me her gift card," he laughs.

The dinners make for a fulfilling experience for volunteers as well.

Ben Bunyard, a project executive for Choate Construction, has hosted several family dinners with teams from Choate and groups affiliated with designing and constructing the new Marcus Center for Advanced Rehabilitation on Shepherd's main campus.

"One of the best parts is getting to experience the interaction of the patients and the families.

"Everybody there is so genuine, and they open their hearts. It seems like everything is left at the door, and everybody comes together as one family, and I've never experienced that before. It's heartwarming," Ben says.

Alana Shepherd, Shepherd Center co-founder and chairman, often joins the group for conversation and fellowship.

"It's an important way for our volunteers to have direct contact with our

patients. And I think it's very rewarding for them. Sometimes, their children come, or a scout troop or sports team will volunteer. The kids love scrambling around, serving drinks, or helping carry patients' plates to the table. They run Bingo and give out the prizes — even the very young kids help out.

"It's exciting to see the patients go from their first dinner, where they're a little bit shy, to the other dinners, when they've gotten to know people, they open up and realize it's a social occasion for them. They get to know people and have a real bond that is beyond their therapy expectations," she says. "Their children attend and see that they are not alone in the family journey," Alana adds.

Family brunches for caregivers of patients with an acquired brain injury (ABI) are a recent off-shoot of family dinners. Shepherd staff chose a Saturday brunch to give patients and families something to look forward to on what is often a quiet day.

After the first brunch, a former brain injury patient and his wife, eager to provide much-needed support to caregivers, volunteered to host more.

The quarterly brunches are open to caregivers and dietarily approved patients. And the response, especially from caregivers, has been one of gratitude.

"Caregivers come with their loved ones or on their own, but across the board, the reaction we're getting is, 'Thank you for thinking of us,'" says Lauren Tucker, grateful patient and grants senior manager.

For more information about hosting a family dinner, contact Jennifer Heffron, at [jennifer.heffron@shepherd.org](mailto:jennifer.heffron@shepherd.org).

(from left to right) DJ Babey Drew, a Grammy-winning producer, actor, and television personality, cooked a homemade meal for the patients and he and his friends serve it. ► Courtney Alderman enjoys the friendly competition of Bingo. ► Volunteers serve a plate of food to attendee Bria Richardson, who came to dinner with her brother. ► Jason Terry heads to the table ready for a delicious dinner and good conversation. ► Walter Peeler chats with other guests after dinner. ► Jennifer Heffron, Shepherd Center Foundation donor engagement coordinator, laughs with attendee Jim Jarvis about an icebreaker question.

Photos by Forrest Smith



# The Legendary Party Hits Record Numbers

By Erica Spurling

Atta Junior Photography and Ben Rose Photography

## Shepherd Center's black-tie gala raises \$4.4 million for Shepherd Center's Innovation Institute with record-breaking attendance.

When guests entered the courtyard of 2023's Legendary Party, their eyes were immediately drawn to the balloons and flower towers that were an abstract representation of the retro-futurism theme for this year's gala.

"This year's theme, 'The Nostalgia of Discovery,' holds a profound significance, especially in the context of this year. It's a reflection on our shared past and an eager anticipation of the discoveries that the future holds for us," said Anne Worrell, who co-chaired The 2023 Legendary Party with her husband, Andrew Worrell.

The 2023 Legendary Party raised \$4.4 million, benefiting Shepherd Center's Innovation Institute, a new, 30,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art space allowing Shepherd Center to advance research and therapies for patients at Shepherd and worldwide. The Innovation Institute will be housed in the Marcus Center for Advanced Rehabilitation building on Shepherd's main campus. With the expansion of innovation and research programming, Shepherd will further integrate the latest in data science, rehabilitation technologies, and care models.

More than 600 guests attended the festivities, including a diverse mix of long-time supporters and a new generation of champions. The program included Shepherd Center CEO Sarah Morrison and event chair Anne Worrell



*(Clockwise from top left)* Andrew Worrell, Anne Worrell, honoree Elizabeth Allen, Sherry Abney, Alana Shepherd, and honorees Jessica Jones and Justin Jones. ► Elizabeth Smith, Sarah Batts, and Boynton Smith. ► Jared Grier belts out a karaoke tune with friends during Legendary Late Night. ► Dr. Africa Wallace, Dr. Keith Dockery, Jayne Lipman, and Dr. John Lipman. ► The décor and place settings reflect the theme of 2023's Legendary Party, "The Nostalgia of Discovery." ► Guests flood the dance floor, enjoying tunes from Rupert's Orchestra. ► Ball Chair Anne Worrell underscores the impact Legendary Party honorees Elizabeth Allen and her late husband Carl Allen, their daughter Jessica Jones, and her husband Justin Jones have had on Shepherd Center. ► Liz Blake, Sherry Abney, Sarah Chatel, Elaine Carlos, KK Hudson, and Brenda Smith.





thanking guests for supporting and attending the event. Next, guests enjoyed a three-course meal provided by Legendary Events. After dinner, attendees moved on the dance floor with music by Rupert's Orchestra. Shepherd Center Junior Committee kept the party going for Legendary Late Night, which included late-night bites, college football, and DJ karaoke by Radial Entertainment.

The Legendary Party honored Shepherd Center Board of Trustee member Elizabeth Allen and her late husband Carl Allen, their daughter Jessica Jones, and her husband Justin Jones, who serves on Shepherd's Board of Directors.

"Elizabeth Allen and her dear late husband Carl have demonstrated an unwavering commitment and service to the hospital for more than 32 years," said Worrell. "Their involvement has spanned from serving on boards and committees to hosting events at their beautiful home, and Elizabeth even chaired this very ball twice. Their dedication to Shepherd Center has been unparalleled. Their daughter and son-in-law, Jessica and Justin Jones, have continued this legacy. They have been involved with Shepherd Center for decades, also serving on boards and committees, and hosting events. Currently, Justin is serving as co-chair of the Pursuing Possible

Campaign at Shepherd. This family has built a lasting philanthropic legacy that will continue into the future, for generations to come."

Anne told guests, "Together — the people from the past and the volunteers, donors, and staff of the future — we will continue to make new, cutting-edge discoveries. These advancements will drive future treatment and rehabilitation for spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis, acquired brain injuries, pain management, and more."

This year's Legendary Party will be held on November 2, 2024, at Flourish, with Sherry and David Abney serving as co-chairs. The event will benefit Shepherd Center's new Arthur M. Blank Family Residences and honor long-time Shepherd Center partner and philanthropist, Arthur Blank, whose foundation made the lead gift for the construction of the building. ✨

*(Clockwise from top left)* Justin Jones, Leslie Buchholz, and Matt Buchholz. ► The tables are set for a delicious three-course meal provided by Legendary Events. ► Jamie Shepherd, Alana Shepherd, and Julie Shepherd. ► Shepherd Center Junior Committee Executive members CaryAnn Liner, Callie Hegland, Grayson Martin, Frank Cannon, Jennifer Kiser, Tate Davis, and Rachel Simononis. ► Rock Outler, Cory Jackson, Trey Harrell, and Leon Smith. ► Sarah Morrison, Kyle Hinson, Juan Pablo Bejarano, and Abby King.



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# Engaging Future Philanthropic Leaders

The new Shepherd Impact Council aims to harness the passion and perspective of its members.



Established in 2023, the Shepherd Impact Council (SIC) is a leadership development board comprising 21 accomplished business professionals and community volunteers. With the oversight of Shepherd Center Foundation's Board of Trustees, SIC educates its members about the hospital and its vision for the future. SIC aims to develop strong community ambassadors, fundraisers, and future volunteer leaders. A combination of regular business meetings, networking opportunities with trustees and executives, volunteer engagement with patients, and member/family socials make for a unique and impactful board experience.

This group will be a mechanism through which Shepherd Center attracts and cultivates the next generation of philanthropic leaders in Atlanta and beyond — increasing engagement from younger donors and volunteers.

Shepherd Impact Council's mission is to build off the passion and perspective of its members to inspire philanthropy and commitment to supporting Shepherd Center as it helps patients and families begin again after injury or illness. Each member has committed to making Shepherd an annual philanthropic priority while also introducing their networks to Shepherd Center in at least two scheduled events of their choosing per year.

"I am excited for the impact this board of enthusiastic, action-oriented individuals will have on the Shepherd community. We have built a solid group who are well-positioned to support Shepherd for years to come," says Greg Dunavant, SIC chair.

To learn more about the Shepherd Impact Council, contact Courtney Harris at [courtney.harris@shepherd.org](mailto:courtney.harris@shepherd.org) or scan the QR code to check out their webpage. \*



## Impact Council Members

- |   |   |
|---|---|
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# Derby Day is turning 40!

The spring celebration continues to be a beloved Shepherd Center tradition.

By Ruth Underwood

Shepherd Center's annual Derby Day will celebrate 40 years on Saturday, May 4, 2024, at Chastain Horse Park. Atlanta's biggest Kentucky Derby-themed fundraising event has been a Shepherd Center tradition since 1983.

Julie Shepherd, CCM, LMSW, CLCP, director of founding family relations and canine therapy program lead, will co-chair this year's event with Rachel Simononis. Rachel supports Shepherd in several ways, including as a member of The Junior Committee and Women Shaping Shepherd. Julie has grown up attending Derby Day with her family.

"I have many memories of attending Derby Day with my dad, grandparents, and brother growing up. My grandfather Harold's favorite activity was playing the ponies. He wore a derby hat every year and always had a blast," Julie recalls.

"Being a co-chair for the 40th anniversary is special to me because I can help continue the Shepherd legacy by highlighting great memories and making new ones," she says.

Proceeds from the event support Shepherd Center's Recreation Therapy Program, which helps restore and rehabilitate patients' levels of function, independence, and involvement in life activities while improving quality of life and removing barriers to participating in their communities.

"Recreation therapy meant so much to my dad during his rehab. He always said it's what taught him he could live again and have fun," Julie says.

Guests are invited to don their hats and seersucker suits and enjoy lawn and casino games, a photo booth, food, drinks, and, of course, the race itself, which celebrates its 150th anniversary this year. A silent auction promises a chance to bid on experiences, gift baskets, and art.

Since its inception, Derby Day has raised \$5.2 million for Shepherd Center's Recreation Therapy Program.

For more information, tickets, and sponsorship opportunities, scan the QR code or visit [DerbyDay.com](http://DerbyDay.com). \*



(Above) A ticket for the first Derby Day, held in 1983. (Left) ► Alexander Kaufman, Rachel Simononis (Derby Day 2024 co-chair), Julie Shepherd (Derby Day 2024 co-chair), and Andrew Louw at Derby Day 2023. ► Alana Shepherd and the late Harold Shepherd pose for a photo at the 2006 Derby Day. ► Derby Day 2023 guests enjoy a beautiful spring day, food, drinks, and fun.



# Aiming High for a Cause

The 20th Annie Oakley Tournament raises funds for the SHARE Military Initiative and Recreation Therapy Program.

By Shanna Thorpe

On a crisp October morning, participants in the 20th annual Annie Oakley Clay Shoot Tournament gathered at the picturesque Burge Farm in Mansfield, Georgia, for a day of camaraderie and philanthropy.

Organized by Mary Huntz and chaired by Leigh Kelley of the Annie Oakley Shooters, the tournament promised a unique blend of outdoor excitement and community spirit, all for a worthy purpose: to raise funds for Shepherd Center's SHARE Military Initiative and outdoor Recreation Therapy Program. They hit the mark, raising more than \$135,000 to benefit the two programs.

In the 20-year history of the tournament, the Annie Oakley Shooters have raised more than 1 million dollars for charities in Atlanta. ✨



(clockwise, from top) In the 20-year history of the Annie Oakley Clay Shoot tournament, the Annie Oakley Shooters have raised more than 1 million dollars for Atlanta charities.  
► Participants Randy Erving, Kelly Erving, Debraleigh Jowers, and Jon Jowers.  
► After the clay shoot, musician David Payton entertains participants.  
► Mary Huntz started the clay shoot tournament in 2004. The 20th annual tournament included a tribute to Huntz for her service and dedication. (L to R: Betsy Morehouse, Mary Huntz, Lucy Millar, and Jane Brown)



## Shepherd's Men Invitational Clay Shoot

Shepherd's Men raises funds for Shepherd Center's SHARE Military Initiative at another successful clay shoot.

By Shanna Thorpe

On October 13, 2023, at the Beretta Shooting Grounds at Barnsley Resort in Adairsville, Georgia, supporters gathered for Shepherd's Men Invitational Clay Shoot, which included a day on the range followed by fellowship and a BBQ lunch catered by Duval Semi Trailers. The event raised more than \$165,000 to benefit Shepherd Center's SHARE Military Initiative. The comprehensive rehabilitation program delivers world-class treatment at no cost to veterans, service members, and first responders who have sustained mild to moderate traumatic brain injuries (TBIs).

Guest speaker Commander Mark Nutsch kicked off the day, thanking those who served and reminding the group that it's okay to care for themselves through programs like SHARE Military Initiative.

The story of Commander Nutsch and the Green Beret team he led on a covert mission in Afghanistan was featured in the book "Horse Soldiers" and the movie, "12 Strong."

For nearly 10 years, Shepherd's Men has advocated for veterans and service members and raised awareness and funds for SHARE. The funds raised will contribute to enhancing the quality of life and providing support services for those who have served our country and communities.



(clockwise) Duval Semi-Trailers serves a delicious barbeque lunch for clay shoot participants. ► Shepherd's Men Invitational Clay Shoot raises more than \$165,000 to benefit Shepherd Center's SHARE Military Initiative. ► Shepherd's Men co-founder Travis Ellis speaks to clay shoot participants. ► Participants listen to speakers, including Commander Mark Nutsch, who led a mission in Afghanistan that is featured in the movie, "12 Strong."

Photos by William Twitty

Deceased friends of Shepherd Center are listed first in bold print followed by the names of those making gifts in their memory. This list reflects gifts made to Shepherd Center between **October 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023.**



In December, Shepherd staff and members of the Choate Construction Company team celebrated the beginning of construction of "The James H. Shepherd, Jr. Bridge From I Can't to I Can." The bridge will connect the current Marcus-Woodruff building to the new Marcus Center for Advanced Rehabilitation. Photo by William Twitty

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Save the Date

Upcoming Events

Shepherd’s Men  
2nd Annual Murphy  
Music and Brews  
Saturday, April 13, 2024  
Downtown Murphy,  
North Carolina

40th Annual Derby Day  
Saturday, May 4, 2024  
Chastain Horse Park

40th Annual  
Shepherd Center Cup  
Monday, September 23, 2024  
Cherokee Country Club

SCJC's Second Annual  
Cornhole Tournament  
Saturday, October 26, 2024  
Steady Hand Beer Co.

Shepherd's Men Clay Shoot  
Friday, November 1, 2024  
The Borge Club

Legendary Party  
Saturday, November 2, 2024  
Flourish Atlanta

For more information  
on Shepherd Center events,  
scan the QR code.



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In November, Shepherd’s recreation therapy team hosted a holiday workshop. Festive craft projects allowed patients to work on functional and cognitive goals while getting in the holiday spirit.

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In November, Shepherd Center hosted the annual Shepherd Classic rugby tournament with several teams from the Southeast including the Shepherd Smash, Brooks Bandits, Lakeshore Demolition, and Raleigh Sidewinders.

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Doctors, therapists, and nurses on the 4th floor worked with their patients in Shepherd's adaptive kitchen in the "I Can" Studio to cook an entire Thanksgiving meal and serve it up to patients and staff.

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# We're Listening

If you are an outside (non-Shepherd employee) vendor, case manager, interpreter, or another stakeholder, we would like your feedback on your experience with Shepherd Center.

Please scan the QR code with the camera on your phone to participate in a quick survey. Thank you!

For a paper survey, contact Jacqueline Baron-Lee, Ph.D., CPHQ, PMP, director of quality and outcomes management, at [jacqueline.baron-lee@shepherd.org](mailto:jacqueline.baron-lee@shepherd.org) or 404-367-1359.



Scan the  
QR code for  
the survey

Honorees are listed first in bold print followed by the names of those making gifts in their honor.  
This list reflects gifts made to Shepherd Center between **October 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023.**



In November, the Georgia Bulldogs football team stopped by Shepherd Center ahead of their game against the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets in Atlanta. Players visited with patients and their families, signed autographs, and posed for pictures.

- Sean Abercrombie**  
Ms. Cheryl Freimutj

**Shaler Alias**  
Mr. and Mrs. John W. Rooker

**Elizabeth and The Late Carl Allen**  
Mr. and Mrs. William C. Fowler  
Mr. and Mrs. Grant Whitney

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Mr. and Mrs. Eugene L. Pearce III

**Cyndae Arrendale’s Birthday**  
Mr. and Mrs. John C. Beane

**Chase Atkinson**  
Olivet United Methodist Church

**Jackson Amburn**  
Ms. Linda Kuryloski

**Louise Baum**  
Ms. Loretta Fine

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**Lauren Bell**  
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**Tim Condrey – Happy Holidays**  
Mr. Van Aggelakos  
Mr. and Mrs. Peter J. West

**Elise Conroy**  
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**Ellen Crowe**  
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**Mrs. Carol M. Curtis Wishes Happy Holidays to:**  
Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Adler  
Mr. and Mrs. John Alston  
Mrs. Wanda Hopkins  
Mrs. Jane Knight  
Dr. and Mrs. Jerome Lynn  
Mr. and Mrs. CV Nally  
Mrs. Sally Nunnally  
Mrs. Lula Post  
Mrs. Laura Spearman  
Mrs. Harriet Warren
- Mr. and Mrs. James Wells

**James A. Curtis Wishes Happy Holidays to:**  
Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Adler  
Mr. and Mrs. Michael J. Brucato  
Ms. Jean F. Caldwell  
The Honorable Max J. Cleland  
Mr. and Mrs. Brad Courts  
Mr. and Mrs. Richard W. Courts II  
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Mr. and Mrs. Blake G. Dexter  
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Mr. and Mrs. David Glass  
Drs. Matt and Kiery Grabowski  
Mr. and Mrs. Ryan Hardage  
Ms. Renee Hart  
Ms. Sharon L. Hollis  
Mr. Greg Logan  
Dr. and Mrs. Jerome W. Lynn  
Mr. and Mrs. Brian Maloney  
Mr. and Mrs. John Martin  
Mr. and Mrs. Todd Norwood  
Mrs. Sally Nunnally  
Miss Carol Olsen  
Mr. and Mrs. Josh E. Rowan  
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Ms. Tena S. Gerdes

**Travis Daniel**  
Ms. Kristy Cantlin

**Ann Day**  
The Aderhold Family Foundation

**Joe and Denise DeAngelo**  
Mr. Travis Ellis

**Nancy E. Delany**  
Mr. and Mrs. Hugh C. Kendrick

- Melissa Thomas Durand**  
Mr. and Mrs. Bobby M. Thomas

**Maggie and Jim Eanes – Happy Holidays**  
Mr. and Mrs. John S. Wallace

**Maggie Wallace**  
Mr. James G. Wallace

**Lynne Elander**  
The Frederick Bliss Foundation, Inc.

**Travis Ellis**  
Anonymous

**Mrs. David Erskine – Happy Holidays**  
Anonymous

**David Ewing**  
Mr. Timothy Ewing

**Dr. Payal Fadia and the Staff at Pathways**  
Mrs. Joy V. Culbreth

**The Featherstons**  
Mr. Paul Gressette

**Charlotte Felner**  
Ms. Mary Frances Albright  
Ms. Ellen Buoyer

**Dr. Edelle Field Fote**  
Mr. John Tregidga

**Alec Fraser**  
Yates Insurance Agency, Inc.

**Emily Garrett**  
Ms. MacKensie Brandt

**Richard G. Gayle**  
Mr. and Mrs. Franklin D. Cancel

**Stephen Gennusa**  
Ms. Elizabeth Gennusa

**John Gillin’s Birthday**  
Mr. Bernard S. Goldstein

**Clara Godwin's 3rd Birthday**  
Mr. and Mrs. Milton Godwin, Jr.

**Matthew P. Godwin’s Birthday**  
Mr. and Mrs. Milton Godwin, Jr.

**Alan Goldenberg’s Birthday**  
Scott, Krista, Sam, Kate and Jacob Goldenberg

**Nancy Goldstucker’s Birthday**  
Anonymous

**Scott Gordon, Sr.**  
Mr. and Mrs. Scott Gordon

**Connor Gow**  
Mr. and Mrs. Jeffrey J. Gow

**The Grafts**  
Mr. Paul Gressette

**Ellie Green**  
Mr. Gary Precanico

**Greg and Ann Hampton**  
Mrs. Kathryn H. Kapnek

**Connie Hart**  
Ms. Cynthia Kelley

**Carol Hatfield’s Birthday**  
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph S. Hiatt III

**Susan Hawkins**  
Ms. Renee Keith

**Caroline Hazel**  
Ms. Jordan M. Hinkebein

**Andrea E. Wahner Hendrickson, MD – Happy Holidays**  
Anonymous

**Patrick Higgins**  
Ellen and Rob Allen

**Shaneika Hillman**  
Ms. Bonnie Hillman

**Bobby Hogg**  
Dr. and Mrs. Jimmy C. Nash

**Wanda Hopkins**  
Mrs. Carter Smith, Jr.

**Nicolas Horne**  
Mr. Dameon Horne

**Mary Kay Howard Wishes Merry Christmas and Best Wishes for 2024 to:**  
Mr. and Mrs. Carroll Benson  
Ms. Ann Corrigan  
Mr. and Mrs. Philip Dater  
Mrs. Elaine Etheridge  
Mr. and Mrs. Billy Kennedy  
Mr. and Mrs. Michael Knoblauch  
Mr. and Mrs. David Kowal  
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Ms. Nell W. Bradbury

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**Ms. Amy Kisber – Happy Birthday and Happy Chanukah**  
Anonymous

**John and Joyce Kiser**  
Ms. Joyce G. Parris

**Nate Klein**  
Carol Klein and Michael Larter

**Earl Klugh**  
Ms. Kathryn Mardo

**David Kuniansky’s Birthday**  
Mr. and Mrs. Steven J. Labovitz

**Josh Lam**  
Ms. Lisa A. Deitz

**Bob and Annette Lang**  
Ms. Leigh Drango

**Donald P. Leslie, M.D.**  
Mr. and Mrs. Howell W. Newton  
William Howard Flowers, Jr. Foundation, Inc.

**Crystal Lethcoe’s Birthday**  
Mr. and Mrs. Michael W. Brown

**Doug Lindauer's 60th Birthday**  
Anonymous  
Ms. Bonnie Baldwin  
Maire and David Baldwin  
Mr. and Mrs. David Blau  
Mr. and Mrs. Tully Bragg  
Mr. and Mrs. Coleman B. Breland  
Mr. Jeff Briller

Mr. and Mrs. George R. Crowe  
Ms. Jennifer Dangar  
Mr. and Mrs. Charles L. Davidson III  
Candy and Charlie Ergen  
Ms. Jan Farrell  
Mr. Brad Foreman  
Mr. and Mrs. Robert P. Gauntt  
Mr. and Mrs. William F. Goodwyn  
Mr. and Mrs. Ernest L. Greer  
Todd and Kira Haney  
Mr. Daniel Hartman  
Mr. and Mrs. Andrew T. Heller  
Amie and Fred Herbert  
Ms. Lori Hodo  
Ms. Kimberly Ingwersen  
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Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Townsend

**Shirley McFarlane and Tim Condrey Wish Happy Holidays to:**  
Becky and Van Aggelakos  
Barbara Barton  
Joyce and Ron Bernie  
Dion and Liz Condrey  
Terrie and Chuck Dale  
Cathy and Joe Frank  
Monte and Laurie Hartman  
Tom Hartman and William Landeros  
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**Ryan Narramore**  
Anonymous

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Mrs. Patricia O. McGill

**Bill and Colleen Roop**  
Mr. and Mrs. Michael L. Dill

**Bobby Rosenbleath**  
Anonymous



Volunteers from HD Supply spread holiday cheer by making decorations for patients and families to hang in their rooms.

**Travis Roy**  
Mr. Paul Narkiewicz

**Sebastian Russell**  
Ms. Ellen Schorsch

**Mr. Keith Sanders and Mrs. Zoe Sanders**  
Ms. Mary Anne Wynn

**Richard Schultz**  
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**Shapiro Capital Management Co. Wishes Happy Holidays to:**  
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Ms. Kimberly Goodwin

**Steven T. Shaw**  
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**Zachary Sheats**  
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Ms. Lynn Heinemann  
Dr. and Mrs. John B. Neeld, Jr.  
Mr. and Mrs. Harrison M. Schwall  
Mr. and Mrs. Richard L. Simms III  
Ms. Lisa M. Workman

**Mrs. Sydney Simon – Happy Chanukah**  
Anonymous  
Carolyn Shiverick  
Mrs. Margaret Long

**Donna Skeen**  
Ms. Nell W. Bradbury

**Grant Smith**  
Ms. Regina Smith  
Mr. Richard Smith

**Pat Smith’s Birthday**  
The Caswell Family

**Marty and Sharon Spiegelman**  
Dr. and Mrs. Bruce M. Beeber

**Mrs. Wynne P. Stevenson Wishes Happy Holidays to:**  
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Mrs. Sue Ann Baker  
Mr. and Mrs. Frank Foley  
Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner Garrard  
Mr. and Mrs. Mason Lampton  
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**Dina Varner – Happy Holidays**  
Mrs. Margaret Long

**Deborah Vegas**  
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**The Vinson Family – Happy Holidays**  
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**Debra Walker**  
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**Hal Williams**  
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**Tammy Woodward’s Birthday**  
Ms. Laura Essex  
Ms. Jane Melilli

**Tammy Woodward**  
Ms. Mary Parent  
Mrs. Meredith Wetherington

**Robert and Margie Wynne**  
Mr. and Mrs. Mark C. West

**Mr. and Mrs. P. Daniel Yates Wishes Happy Holidays to:**  
Ms. Wilma Bunch  
Mr. and Mrs. Randy Bryan

Dr. and Mrs. David Dubose  
Mr. and Mrs. Alec Fraser  
Mr. and Mrs. Keith Hicks  
Mr. and Mrs. Tom Johnson  
Mr. and Mrs. Rob Johnston  
Dr. and Mrs. Donald Leslie  
Mrs. Phil Mouchet  
Mr. and Mrs. Louie Pittman  
Mr. and Mrs. Richard Ripley  
Mr. Clyde Shepherd  
Mrs. Alana S. Shepherd  
Mr. and Mrs. Jamie Shepherd  
Mr. and Mrs. Dell Sikes  
Mr. and Mrs. Steve Sloan  
Mr. and Mrs. John Spalding  
Mrs. Frank Troutman

**Don Yatko**  
Mr. Ryan Babcock

**Mak Yost**  
Ms. Candace English



Shepherd Center’s DEIA Council hosted a talk by award-winning global humanitarian, social justice advocate, and author Eddie Ndopu in December.

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## Shepherd Center

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# Recognizing Employees Who Shine at Shepherd

By Damjana Alverson

Every year, Shepherd Center celebrates employees who represent Shepherd's trademark culture and go above and beyond with the Best Employee Attitude Award. Honorees have a consistently positive attitude and show respect for patients, families, and colleagues.

The award, made possible by the generosity of Fred Alias, recognized 22 finalists this year. Top winners Kakia Bennett, Nicole Thompson, Graylyn Jones, Carlyn Kappy, Debbie Mombrun, Shawn Walding, and Brian Smith were announced at Shepherd's annual employee party at Truist Park. \*

