

MEDICAL TREATMENT • RESEARCH • REHABILITATION

Shepherd

Center Spinal Column®

Shepherd Center employees reflect on the unique paths that led them to where they are today.

THE Paths

THAT LED US HERE

ALSO INSIDE

COMPLEX CONCUSSION CLINIC PROVIDES SPECIALIZED REHAB | CHRIS BAILEY REGAINS FUNCTION POST-SPINAL CORD INJURY | LEGENDARY LUNCHEON SPOTLIGHTS STORIES OF HOPE

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LETTER FROM SARAH MORRISON



Dear Readers,

We often say that the moment you enter our doors at Shepherd, you become part of our family. This is as true for the people who choose to work here as it is for the patients we serve, and it's the reason I have worked here for the past 38 years. In this issue, we highlight several members of our clinical and non-clinical staff and the unique paths that led them to Shepherd. Whether they were patients here first or started on one career path and ended up in something totally different, each story shows the drive and passion our employees have for the work they do. You can meet them on page 6.

On page 18, you will learn about Chris Bailey, an attorney from Jackson, Alabama. After sustaining a spinal cord injury in a utility task vehicle accident, his faith and positive attitude, along with constant support from his wife, Suzy, helped him make remarkable progress.

You'll also see the festivities from the Legendary Luncheon, an event that raises awareness for Shepherd Center's annual gala, The Legendary Party. Funds raised from this year's event will support the Andrew C. Carlos Multiple Sclerosis Institute, which provides comprehensive, patient-centered support for people with MS. Event speakers included two patients who explained how they found hope after receiving treatment at the MS Institute. Learn about their stories on page 22.

Finally, on page 3, you'll notice that we ranked in the top 10 rehabilitation hospitals in the nation, and the top in the Southeast, according to U.S. News. Accolades like this simply wouldn't be possible without our team of incredible employees. I am so proud to work alongside such wonderful professionals and people. While we only have space to shine a light on a few of them here, I hope everyone at Shepherd knows how valued they are.

Enjoy,

Sarah Morrison

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

Fall 2022 • Shepherd Center

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See 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 visit shepherd.org.

Shepherd Center Launches Pursuing Possible Campaign

Shepherd Center announced the launch of Pursuing Possible: The Campaign for Shepherd Center on September 29, 2022. The \$350 million campaign will fund capital and programmatic projects to benefit patients and families experiencing spinal cord injury, brain injury, stroke, chronic pain, multiple sclerosis, and other neurological illnesses and injuries.

Shepherd Center provides nationally-ranked care to nearly 900 inpatients and 7,100 outpatients annually through its continuum of care, which spans an intensive care unit, inpatient rehabilitation, post-acute day rehabilitation programs, and outpatient therapy and clinics to meet patients' ongoing needs.

"When we considered how Shepherd Center needed to grow to fully meet the needs of our patients, their families, our staff, and the community, it was clear that we should expand access to our services," says Sarah Morrison, PT, MBA, MHA, CEO of Shepherd Center. "And we also want to provide a world-class experience with an unparalleled level of recovery for our patients and families as they navigate rehabilitation and achieve their goals for life beyond injury and illness. This expansion will transform the way we provide care to our patients."

Pursuing Possible: The Campaign for Shepherd Center is slated to continue through 2025 – the same year as Shepherd Center's 50th anniversary.

"When we founded Shepherd Center in 1975, it was because we had tremendous community support that we were able to provide care with unmatched expertise and compassion for patients who desperately needed it," says Alana Shepherd, co-founder of Shepherd Center. "47 years later, the need has grown substantially, and so must we. We're eternally grateful for those joining us again or for the very first time to support our growth."

For more information, visit expandshepherd.org.*



1. Arthur M. Blank Family Residences: The addition of the housing tower, called the Arthur M. Blank Family Residences, will allow Shepherd Center to more than double its housing capacity, adding 160 new accessible units so that families and day program patients can stay in donor-funded housing for the full duration of their loved one's stay. **2.** Marcus Center for Advanced Rehabilitation: Located on Shepherd Center's main campus, the new Marcus Center for Advanced Rehabilitation will make an exciting and undeniable mark on Peachtree Road. This state-of-the-art facility will allow us to increase patient access and improve the patient and family experience in several key ways, including growing our day programs and outpatient services and creating a dedicated space for innovation. **3.** Located on Shepherd Center's main campus, the new access bridge will connect the current Marcus-Woodruff building to the new Marcus Center for Advanced Rehabilitation. The bridge will feature a special quote made by Shepherd Center co-founder, the late James H. Shepherd, Jr., who passed away in December 2019.



U.S. News Again Names Shepherd Center Among Best in Rehabilitation

Shepherd Center was recognized as a 2022-2023 Best Hospital for Rehabilitation by U.S. News, and the top rehabilitation center in the Southeast. In the 2022-23 rankings, Shepherd Center ranked in the No. 8 spot. Shepherd Center has been in the top 10 since 2008, a testament to the consistent, high-quality care it delivers. It is the only rehabilitation hospital in the Southeast to be ranked in the top 15, and it serves as a national destination for neurorehabilitation of spinal cord injury, brain injury, stroke, chronic pain, multiple sclerosis, and other neurological conditions.

"In the face of tremendous challenges in healthcare, our team at Shepherd Center continues to provide excellent clinical care that leads to patient outcomes that exceed the national standard for people who have highly complex injuries and illnesses," says Sarah Morrison, PT, MBA, MHA, CEO of Shepherd Center. "Our amazing team is committed to providing the best possible care to our patients each and every day, and it is incredibly rewarding to be recognized by U.S. News as one of the top rehabilitation hospitals in the country."*

Shepherd Center Named Traumatic Brain Injury Model System

The Administration for Community Living's (ACL) National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) recently awarded a five-year grant to Shepherd Center and recognized the rehabilitation hospital as a Traumatic Brain Injury Model System (TBIMS). It will officially be known as Georgia Model Brain Injury System at Shepherd Center.

NIDILRR awards TBIMS grants to institutions that are national leaders in medical research and patient care and that provide the highest level of comprehensive specialty services from the point of injury through eventual re-entry into full community life. Shepherd Center is one of 16 TBIMS organizations in the United States and part of a prestigious group of hospitals recognized as both a TBIMS and Spinal Cord Injury Model System (SCIMS).

"Throughout our research and clinical programming, we are driven to help our patients and their families meet their goals as they navigate rehabilitation all the way through life beyond injury and illness to transitioning home, reintegrating into their community, and returning to work or school," says Brick Johnstone, Ph.D., the O. Wayne Rollins Director of Brain Injury Research at Shepherd Center. "It is an honor to be designated as a Traumatic Brain Injury Model System among our peer institutions across the country."*



George "Brick" Johnstone, Ph.D., ABPP, is the director of brain injury research at Shepherd Center.

Shepherd Center Doctors Recognized by Atlanta magazine

Eight Shepherd Center physicians were recognized on *Atlanta* magazine's *Top Doctors* list. This roster is updated yearly with the city's best doctors, as acknowledged by their peers. These physicians care for Shepherd Center's patients, families, fellow staff, and each other with hope, humor, and hard work every day.*

L to R:
Erik Shaw, D.O., Anna Choo Elmers, M.D., Andrew Dennison, M.D., John Lin, M.D., Ford Vox, M.D., Angela Beninga, D.O., Ben Thrower, M.D., Brock Bowman, M.D.

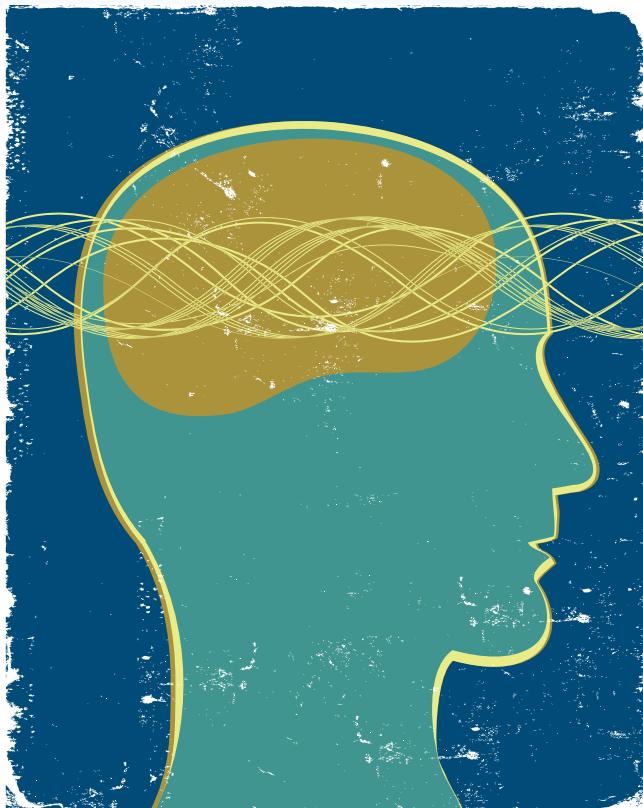


Shepherd Center's Complex Concussion Clinic

Provides Specialized Rehabilitative Care for People with Mild Traumatic Brain Injuries

BY DAMJANA ALVERSON

Concussions can occur as a result of playing sports, car crashes, falls, and other accidents. In most people, concussion symptoms resolve within three to four weeks, but for others – about 20% – their symptoms last longer or there may be complications that fall beyond the scope of primary care and sports medicine physicians. Fortunately, for these more complicated cases, Shepherd Center's Complex Concussion Clinic (CCC) specializes in identifying and treating symptoms to help people get better and return to their lives.



WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

Concussions are mild traumatic brain injuries caused by a sudden jolt or blow to the head and can cause symptoms such as headache, nausea, dizziness, confusion, and light sensitivity, among others. Typically, concussions resolve within a few weeks as headaches, and other symptoms subside. People return to work, school, and/or athletic activities, often feeling as capable as they did before their injury. For individuals with complicated co-occurring conditions or risk factors for a more protracted recovery, a specialized assessment and treatment with rehabilitation may speed and improve recovery.

HOW DOES SHEPHERD CENTER'S CCC TREAT PATIENTS WITH COMPLEX CONCUSSIONS?

Shepherd Center takes a wholistic approach so patients can receive an individualized treatment plan in one centralized location.

"We have a multi-disciplinary approach to care," says Russell Gore, M.D., medical director of the CCC. "All our disciplines, including neurology, neuropsychology, psychiatry, sports psychology, athletic training, speech, occupational, and physical therapy, are

under one roof working as a team. That is unique in the neurorehabilitation field."

The various disciplines communicate regularly to ensure the highest quality of care.

"We have patient-centered goals," says Cheryl Appleberry, MS, ATC, clinic coordinator for the CCC, who has worked there with Dr. Gore since its inception in 2016. "We meet several times each week to keep those goals at the forefront and discuss whether changes need to be made to the plan of care. We're looking at all factors, including return to activity and play, return to school and work, and return to driving."



Russell Gore, M.D., evaluates a patient in the Complex Concussion Clinic at Shepherd Center.

All patients receive an initial evaluation. Because impairments in specific areas tend to respond best to certain types of treatment, these tests help determine what the treatment team should focus on with each patient. Based on that information, the team develops a plan to aid the patient's recovery. This can include cognitive rehabilitation, vision services, vestibular physical therapy, psychological counseling, advanced neurological diagnostics, and more.

Treatment duration varies but may include outpatient visits ranging from four to 12 weeks. The CCC performs regular evaluations throughout to measure how the patient is improving.

WHAT'S A COMMON MISCONCEPTION ABOUT CONCUSSIONS?

According to Dr. Gore, one of the most common misconceptions about concussions is something that is a relatively new concept.

"Not too long ago, we thought that the only treatment for concussion was rest," Dr. Gore says. "We now know that long periods of rest are not an appropriate treatment for concussion, especially among high functioning, active adolescents and adults. Immediately following a concussion, we strictly rest folks for only 48 to 72 hours, and then we want to start doing light activity. That's where our team can help the most. Our team of therapists help people get back to school or work and physical activity as soon as possible with accommodations and treatment because getting back to activity predicts a faster, more complete recovery."

HOW CAN YOU SET AN APPOINTMENT?

For most concussions, people should rely on their primary care providers and/or athletic trainers. For injuries that have occurred in the past six months with ongoing or complex symptoms, or with risk factors for a longer recovery, an assessment at Shepherd Center's CCC is appropriate for diagnosis and treatment.

Patients can either be referred to the CCC by their primary care provider or contact the office directly at cccadmissions@shepherd.org. Contact Dina Forehand, MS, CCM at 404-603-4314 or Cheryl Appleberry, MS, ATC, at 404-603-4980.*



SCAN THE QR CODE TO LEARN MORE.

PHOTO BY LOUIE FAVORITE

QA

INTERVIEW BY DAMJANA ALVERSON



Luckie was recognized with a Sunshine Award for his clinical skill and compassionate care of former patient, Stevens Jacques. Here, he shows off his award and celebrates with the patient.

Q: How long have you worked at Shepherd Center?

I've worked at Shepherd Center for nearly 14 years as a patient care technician (PCT).

Q: What does a typical day as a PCT look like for you?

We do a little bit of everything! That includes assisting patients with bedside care and their therapy, keeping patients in good spirits during difficult times, and overall, assisting our nursing staff with anything they need.

Q: How did you know you wanted to be a PCT?

Many years ago, my grandmother was hospitalized for something minor and did not receive the basic bedside care she needed. During that time, I was working in a nursing home as a ground field technician, and I noticed the lack of care there as well.

Based on those experiences, I set it in my heart to make a difference in someone's life. I remember asking God to put me in a hospital environment where I could help. He did! I started off working as an environmental service technician, and from there, I began working as an operating room (OR) technician. Seeing what nurses did in the OR inspired me to pursue a career in nursing. Now I'm a PCT, and nursing is always in my heart.

Q: What types of patients do you see?

I'm what is known as a "floater" because I float to every department wherever I'm needed. Because of that, I get to see all kinds of patients across our inpatient brain injury, spinal cord injury, and critical/intensive care units.

Q: In your experience, what makes Shepherd Center unique?

I can see the difference in the care that we give to our patients, and I love that. When a patient enters our doors, we immediately begin preparing them for what's to come. They may not love to participate in therapy at that moment, but they love it over time. It is motivation that makes progress.

Looking back at where they were when they started to how much they improve while they are with us is nothing short of a miracle. We do amazing things here and I'm proud to be a part of that. I've teared up multiple times over the years when I saw how beautifully the progress has gone!

Q: What do you love most about your job?

Believe it or not, Shepherd Center staff are like family. I could not be successful here if it weren't for my colleagues. We are each other's comfort, each other's friends, and each other's support.*

Making a Difference in Patients' Lives

Patient Care Technician Luckie Wilkins explains why he loves his job after nearly 14 years with Shepherd Center.

INTERESTING FACTS

CREDENTIALS

- Patient Care Technician Certified Medical Technician

FUN FACTS

- He may go by Luckie, but his actual first name is Lamont. Luckie is his dad's last name and Wilkins is his mom's last name. He says he loves going by Luckie for many reasons, including the positive reaction he gets from his patients and especially family members!
- Luckie has become Shepherd Center's unofficial go-to barber for patients. He often gets emails and texts from colleagues when patients need haircuts.
- Luckie DJs and has even DJed Shepherd Center holiday parties in the past!

More online at news.shepherd.org

THE PATHS THAT LED US HERE

BY DAMJANA ALVERSON | PHOTOS BY JOANN VITELLI



**Shepherd Center
employees reflect
on the unique paths
that led them to where
they are today.**



JAKE CICCONE

**SHARE PEER SUPPORT
LEAD LIAISON**

Boredom is not in United States Navy veteran Jake Ciccone's vocabulary. In addition to owning his own dog training company and liquidation firm, he volunteers as a maintenance diver at the Georgia Aquarium and helps others through horticulture therapy.

"I once decided to remodel all the bathrooms in my house because I didn't have anything else to do!" Ciccone says.

This drive to work toward a goal and give back stems from a couple of places.

First, his parents. Ciccone's parents met while they were in the Navy. His mom is from the Philippines and got her U.S. citizenship while serving as a Navy Hospital Corps member. His father is a first-generation American



whose family came from Italy. He served as a Navy Diver.

"My parents did not have a lot of money at the start, but they had a ton of work ethic," Ciccone says. "They are the biggest influence on my life."

The second big influence in Ciccone's life was the 16 weeks he spent as a client in Shepherd Center's SHARE Military Initiative, a comprehensive rehabilitation program that delivers world-class treatment at no cost to veterans, service members, and first responders who are dealing with traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and mental health concerns.

At first, he was hesitant to give SHARE a chance, but his long-time friend and fellow veteran, AJ Veal, an outreach coordinator at SHARE, encouraged Ciccone to get evaluated.

"I didn't realize I even had a TBI until I got evaluated," Ciccone says. "After leaving the military, I had vision and balance issues. I started falling more often and became angrier. I felt lazy. SHARE helped me get my life back together. They helped me realize I'm a doer — that's when I feel happiest."

Ciccone graduated from SHARE in 2020. The confidence he gained as a client helped him create two successful businesses and start putting himself back out in the world. But that wasn't enough.

"I would talk with my therapist about what purpose means to me," Ciccone reflects. "When I laid it all out, I understood it involved helping others. Then I thought about who I wanted to help, and the answer was veterans like me."

Eventually, the SHARE peer support lead liaison position opened up at Shepherd Center. Ciccone applied and started on January 10, 2022. Now, he can pass on what he's learned through his experiences to others.

"I'm the bridge between our clinicians and the clients. As someone who's been through it, I normalize what the program is, give them the techniques that worked for me, and support them in any way possible," Ciccone says.

SHERRY TURNER

OTR/L, OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

Growing up in Southfield, Michigan, as one of four sisters, Sherry Turner was used to always having a lot of people around.

"My parents' house was the community house," Turner shares. "My mom cooks all the time, so it wasn't rare to have cousins and friends come over. We're like one big, collective family!"

It was Turner's mom, an oncology nurse, who had the greatest influence on her life. Turner knew she wanted to work in healthcare, and her mom guided her to look into occupational therapy (OT), which is therapy based on engagement in meaningful activities of daily life, such as self-care skills, education, work, or social interaction.

"After she recommended OT, I went to the career center at my high school and looked it up," Turner recalls. "I realized she was right and this career was the perfect fit for me!"

She graduated from Western Michigan University with a degree in occupational therapy in 2002, and followed her career prospects to Atlanta, Georgia. Missing her family back home, Turner created a new family in Atlanta through church, hobbies like roller skating, and her work. It was her work family that led her to Shepherd Center.

"At a previous job, I was very close with three of my colleagues. We were all ambitious new graduates," Turner says. "One of my colleagues did an internship at Shepherd and ended up working there. Next thing I know, another one went to Shepherd, followed by the third colleague!"

Curious about what Shepherd Center was all about, Turner applied for an OT role and visited the hospital for a half-day interview.

"There were two moments that won me over," Turner says. "When I went to the cafeteria and saw the Shepherd family sitting at a table eating





SHERRY TURNER ▾

with employees, I could tell the culture was a fit for me. Then, I went to the gym and saw a variety of disciplines collaborating to treat patients, mingling together. It was eye-opening – I knew I needed this job!"

Turner started in May 2006 and has been with Shepherd Center ever since. She now works primarily in two areas: outpatient spinal cord injury rehabilitation and the Upper Extremity

"When I went to the cafeteria and saw the Shepherd family sitting at a table eating with employees, I could tell the culture was a fit for me."

Rehabilitation Clinic, a comprehensive rehabilitation therapy and treatment program to improve upper extremity function for people with spinal cord and brain injuries who have limited function in their arms, wrists, and hands.

One person Turner credits for her interest in upper extremity care is Allan Peljovich, M.D., MPH, a Shepherd Center consulting orthopedic surgeon. Dr. Peljovich specializes in tendon and nerve transfer surgeries that can re-animate a muscle and restore function in the arm, wrist, and/or hand.

"Dr. P was a great resource," Turner says. "Earlier in my career, he took the time to talk with me and teach me. His passion was contagious. After shadowing him, I realized I wanted to learn more!"

Turner began participating in trainings and conferences to learn more, and she is now one of two OTs specializing in upper extremity at Shepherd.

"Our team is specialized to handle the kinds of surgeries and treatments needed for these complex patients with brain and spinal cord injuries," Turner says. "I am so proud to be part of that." ⬤

ALLYSON STRAUSS

CTRS, CCM, CASE MANAGER, COMPLEX CONCUSSION CLINIC

As Allyson Strauss reflects on her 14-year career at Shepherd Center, it seems like the stars aligned to get her to where she is today.

"I almost feel like this path was chosen for me – I never would've pictured it going this way, but it worked out," Strauss says.

Today, she is a case manager in Shepherd Center's Complex Concussion Clinic (CCC), a specialized program that uses an interdisciplinary approach to evaluate and treat individuals with suspected concussions so they can return to their lives. On any given day, Strauss serves as the liaison between the healthcare professionals on each patient's individual treatment team while overseeing patients' therapy benefits, coordinating paperwork, answering patient questions, facilitating return to work or school plans, and guiding patients through their treatment plans.

Strauss sums it up this way: "I basically help manage the medical, social,

financial, and behavioral needs of our patients in the CCC. It's all the behind-the-scenes work that people may not realize takes place in healthcare."

Her path at Shepherd even led her to her husband, Christopher.

"If I hadn't worked at Shepherd, I don't know if I would've met him!" she says. "We met through a colleague of mine who is a mutual friend and actually introduced us. Fast forward, and we now have two wonderful kids together."

Working in healthcare runs in Strauss' family. Her father is a retired physician, and her mom is a retired nurse. Growing up, she'd visit her dad at work, and normal dinner table conversation usually consisted of her parents recounting their days working with patients.

Allyson Strauss reviews what to expect out of therapy and the CCC admission packet with a new patient.



recreation therapist in the Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program. She left Shepherd for a brief period in her late 20s to fulfill a lifelong dream to live out West, but ultimately returned to Atlanta to be close to family. At the time, a recreation therapist/life skills therapist position at Shepherd was open.

"The position introduced me to life skills therapy which inevitably introduced me to case management. I would visit patients' homes to work on life skills and started helping with additional things like managing appointments or filling out social security disability applications. I didn't even realize I was interested in case management at the time, but I naturally fell into it!" Strauss says.

She decided to earn her Certified Case Manager (CCM) certification, and she has been doing case management ever since.

"What I love most about case management is helping people," she explains. "I know I'm contributing to helping someone during a stressful time in their life. It's challenging but so rewarding." ⬤



Dr. Willingham commonly uses technology such as the Functional Electrical Stimulation (FES) Cycle (pictured here) to deliver adaptive rehabilitation treatment strategies.

BRAD WILLINGHAM

**PH.D., CLINICAL RESEARCH SCIENTIST,
SHEPHERD CENTER'S VIRGINIA C. CRAWFORD
RESEARCH INSTITUTE, MS RESEARCH**

**A keen sense of curiosity.
An enthusiasm for the
unknown. A desire to
help people.**

For Brad Willingham, Ph.D., these forces drove his career aspirations and led him to begin a career as a clinical research scientist with a focus on multiple sclerosis (MS) at Shepherd Center on November 1, 2021.

In this role, he addresses fundamental scientific questions about treatments and interventions that can improve the lives of people with MS.

Dr. Willingham developed a deep appreciation for Shepherd Center as a young boy, when his uncle, who had a rare neurodegenerative disease, received services through the hospital. So, when his lifelong passion for exercise led him to pursue a master's in clinical exercise physiology, he knew where to volunteer in his free time.

"During my grad program, I volunteered at Shepherd's ProMotion



This decision set into motion what he jokingly refers to as "an odyssey, of sorts."

Throughout the doctoral program, Dr. Willingham stayed in touch with the team at Shepherd by continuing to work as needed and even basing his dissertation on clinical research at the hospital focusing on neuromuscular dysfunction in people with MS. He completed his degree and spent four years working in Washington, D.C., at the National Institutes of Health where he gained advanced scientific training in physiology. Then one fateful day, he received an email from Dr. Backus inviting him to rejoin the team at Shepherd.

Now well into his clinical research role, Dr. Willingham has the opportunity to do what he loves most: using the knowledge he's gained to help people. One of his most recent projects is a patent request for an innovative system that can extract meaningful information from the millions of data points generated by wearable fitness devices, allowing clinicians to monitor and improve treatment plans for patients remotely, in real-time.

In addition to career milestones, Dr. Willingham and his wife had a personal milestone to celebrate during the past year: the birth of their son, James, who recently turned one.

"Having James gives new meaning to my life – it's been by far the greatest thing I've done," Dr. Willingham says. "I told Dr. Backus that I'm so happy that not only does James get to be back home in Atlanta around his family, but he also gets to be exposed to our culture at Shepherd Center and everything we do."



Fitness Center as a fitness buddy, helping patients reach their goals," Dr. Willingham explains. "I loved knowing I was using what I'd learned to help others."

Volunteering made an impact. After graduating, Dr. Willingham accepted a position as an exercise physiologist in Shepherd Center's Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program working alongside physical therapists to create exercise programs for patients.

As he gained experience, his trademark curiosity kicked in. What could be done to make even more practical, meaningful advances in rehabilitation? What strategies could clinicians use to target and treat the underlying causes of mobility impairments he saw every day? To answer those questions scientifically, he realized he needed to pursue a career in research.

Dr. Willingham tapped his mentor and Shepherd Center Vice President of Research and Innovation, Deborah Backus, PT, Ph.D., FACRM, for guidance. She advised pursuing a doctorate; fortunately, he was up for the challenge.

JACKIE HAAR

MSW, LCSW, COUNSELOR IN THE ANDREW C. CARLOS MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS INSTITUTE

When patients with multiple sclerosis (MS) visit Shepherd Center's MS Institute, they receive a holistic approach to care, focusing on the physical, cognitive, and psychological aspects of their wellbeing. Jackie Haar, the MS counselor in Shepherd Center's MS Institute, focuses on the psychological piece of the puzzle.

"I provide individual and group counseling to people with MS and their care partners to help them adjust to life with MS," Haar explains. "We focus on chronic illness and pain and the impact it can have on one's life, including family, job, and social life. We cover it all."

This type of focused, specialized care is essential.

"Anxiety and depression are more prevalent for people with MS because of the nature of the illness, as well as the uncertainty of the disease," Haar explains. "I work on teaching my patients how to address those feelings and cope in a constructive way."

Haar also facilitates regular groups, including a 12-week psychoeducational series for people who are newly diagnosed called Living Well with MS and an emotional support group for people who have been living with MS and are looking to connect with others who understand their experience.

"My patients are wonderful," Haar says. "They come from all backgrounds. They all have their own story to tell. I love seeing how empowering it can be when I listen to them and validate what they are experiencing."

Haar started her position at Shepherd Center on July 26, 2021, after more than 25 years of clinical

experience providing individual counseling, group therapy, and resources to adults, couples, and children with various complex medical, developmental, learning, and mental health issues.

Haar's acute interest in how people overcome adversity began at a young age. Growing up, she struggled with learning challenges that she had to adapt to and overcome. She credits her mom and one special teacher for being key advocates for her.

"They fought for me to make sure I had the appropriate services in the school system," Haar says. "I had to work hard, but I overcame the challenges. Now I advocate for my patients and teach them to advocate for themselves."

Her fascination with human behavior grew during high school when she was introduced to sociology, the study of the development, structure, and functioning of human society. She continued her studies at Emory University, majoring in sociology with a minor in psychology, and eventually earned her master's degree in social work at Washington University in St. Louis.

All of these experiences have led her to Shepherd, where she points to the people as one of the primary reasons she loves working at the hospital.



"My patients are wonderful. They come from all areas of life and backgrounds. They all have their own story to tell. I love seeing how empowering it can be when I listen to them and validate what they are experiencing."

"I see my work as more meaningful when working with a team of professionals," Haar says. "All the specialties collaborate, so the patients are being treated as a whole person – mind and body. That approach is really important to me."



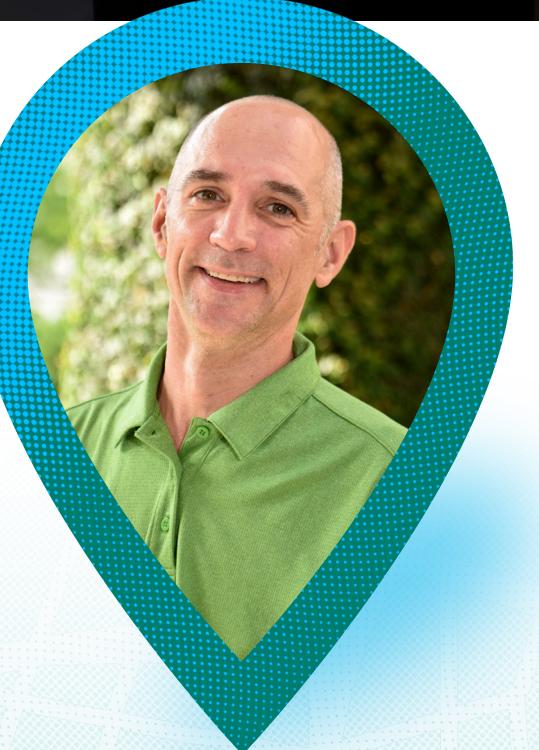
CRISPIN DEL NERO

RN, BS, CRRN, CCRN-K, LEAD NURSING EDUCATOR FOR ICU, COMPREHENSIVE REHABILITATION UNIT, AND PRN RESOURCE STAFF

Nursing was a second career for Crispin Del Nero. “Until my late twenties, I worked in restaurants and night clubs. With nursing, I decided I wanted to do something to help people get healthy instead of unhealthy!” he jokes.

All jokes aside, when Del Nero dedicates himself to something, he goes all in. He was first introduced to Shepherd Center as a nursing student when he shadowed a nurse during his senior practicum. This nurse worked in the ICU on weekend nights, and once Del Nero saw what she did, he was hooked. He began his nursing career at Shepherd Center in 2009.

“It’s a privilege and a responsibility to take care of people at their most vulnerable,” Del Nero says. “That first year, I was like, ‘Oh my gosh, there’s so much to do in one day!’ Slowly, you gain experience, the job gets more manageable, and you understand that you can do it all.”



Crispin Del Nero and his colleague Rodney Adams demonstrate proper, safe patient turning technique using a life-like mannequin.

In 2016, Del Nero had the opportunity to shift gears at work, accepting a role as lead nursing educator across several areas at Shepherd Center, including the ICU and Comprehensive Rehabilitation Unit (CRU). The ICU treats patients that require a higher level of care and closer monitoring. The CRU is a 28-bed unit that serves patients with medical-surgical issues and complex injuries, including pressure injuries, catastrophic injuries requiring amputation, medical complications, and spinal cord and brain injuries.

“Essentially, I’m a teacher. I help orient new nurses and patient care technicians to their roles, helping them integrate into the Shepherd culture and learn skills they did not gain in school,” Del Nero explains. “I also help lead emergency preparedness, teaching CPR and Advanced Cardiac Life Support. We practice mock emergencies once a month with simulation equipment and life-like mannequins that allow employees to practice these rare but high-impact scenarios in a low-risk way.”

Outside of work, Del Nero applies his focus and determination to what he affectionately refers to as his “healthy obsession” — cycling. Like nursing, he did not discover cycling until his late 20s when a friend invited him to go mountain biking, and again, he was hooked. Now he rides almost daily with a tight-knit group of fellow enthusiasts. He has competed and medaled in multiple amateur races, several of which allowed his wife and him to travel to Europe. But if you talk to Del Nero, you’d never know how accomplished he is.

“Being into athletics isn’t part of who I am, but I found out being a thin, dorky guy works well for riding bikes!” he quips. “You try it once, and before you know it, you’re doing it every weekend!”

Whether it’s healthcare or hobbies like cycling, Del Nero’s dedication to his passions comes down to one thing.

“It’s the culture,” he says. “That culture of caring for people as human beings at Shepherd affects how we treat our patients and how we treat each other as colleagues. It’s rewarding to work in an environment like that.”

Dr. James works at Shepherd Pathways, a comprehensive outpatient rehabilitation program for people recovering from brain injury.

GARY JAMES

PSY.D., NEUROPSYCHOLOGY SUPERVISOR, POST-ACUTE SERVICES, AND SENIOR ADVISOR FOR APPCN NEUROPSYCHOLOGY FELLOWSHIP >>

GARY JAMES ▾

When kids think about what they want to be when they grow up, roles like doctor, astronaut, or artist usually come to mind. Hailing from an island in the Caribbean (Jamaica), Dr. Gary James says one career option that was never discussed in his family was psychology.

"Psychology wasn't mentioned as a career path when I was growing up," Dr. James says. "Believe it or not, I was originally a pre-med chemistry major when I started college in Canada. But I took psychology as an elective and enjoyed it so much that I switched my major after my second year."

The rest, as they say, is history. Dr. James completed his undergraduate degree at McGill University and a graduate degree at Howard University in Washington, D.C., then did his doctoral work at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. During his time at Baylor, he discovered the specialized field of neuropsychology.

"As a neuropsychologist, my job is to understand the brain/behavior relationship — how the brain affects the way people think and act," he explains.

At Shepherd Pathways, Shepherd Center's comprehensive outpatient rehabilitation program for people recovering from brain injury, Dr. James focuses on how brain injury has affected his patients holistically.

"I'm looking at how their injury affects how they think, feel, and function, and then how we can help that patient and their family overcome those things so they can re-enter the community and get back to life as they've known it," Dr. James says. "We do that via counseling and with neuropsychological testing to assess memory, attention, aspects of language, problem-solving capabilities, and other factors that impact a patient's ability to function."

During the 18 years that Dr. James has worked at Pathways, Shepherd Center has evolved and grown,

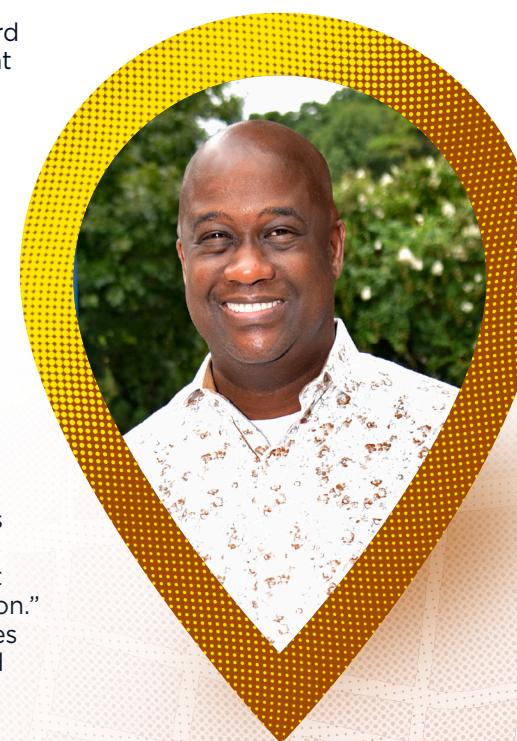
expanding training programs for post-doctoral fellows and students interested in learning how experts at Shepherd approach their fields. And this is where Dr. James' passion lies. In addition to serving as the senior advisor for the neuropsychology fellowship at Shepherd, he was selected to serve on the Society for Clinical Neuropsychology's Division 40 Education Advisory Committee, where he will explore variables impacting neuropsychology interest and training from undergraduate programs and beyond.

"I have a strong commitment to training the next generation of neuropsychologists," he says. "A lot of students don't know much about neuropsychology until graduate school, and we want to change that! We're looking at what we can do to demystify the field."

In addition to improving neuropsychology training as a whole, Dr. James has another mission close to his heart.

"As a field, our providers do not match the demographics we serve. There is an underrepresentation of qualified neuropsychologists of color," he says. "I want to facilitate greater representation and education for our younger aspiring scholars of color to know that this field exists."

This commitment to improving his field and advocating for important



COLBY HIGGINS

RECREATION THERAPY INTERN AND HEALTHCARE SCREENER AT SHEPHERD CENTER

In 2016, Colby Higgins was challenged to change the course of his life and find success in a completely new way.

causes grew from values he learned from his family and, more specifically, from Dr. James' late mother, Alicia James.

"My mom is definitely the biggest influence on my life — she is my rock," Dr. James says. "She taught me to persevere no matter what. I would not be where I am in my career without everything she provided me over the years. The journey to get here has not been without challenges, and I have often found myself pulling from that inner voice from my mom as I push through."

For Dr. James, that feeling of family has kept him at Shepherd for 18 years.

"I am so encouraged when I look at how hard my colleagues work every day to support the patients and families we serve," he explains. "I feel fulfilled, and it nourishes me to keep going."



From 2011 to 2016, Higgins attended the University of North Georgia, earning a bachelor's degree in design and technology in theater with a focus on stage management. Toward the end of his final semester, he fell from a balcony and sustained an incomplete T-4 level spinal cord injury (SCI). By May, he was a patient in Shepherd Center's Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program.

After three months as an inpatient, Colby spent six weeks in the SCI Day Program. He then advanced to Shepherd Center's Beyond Therapy®, an activity-based therapy program that helps people improve their lifelong health.

Colby saw an exercise physiologist offering a wheelchair spin class and decided to try it.

"I started doing it once a week, and five months later, I got my own racing chair," Higgins says. "I tried the racing chair out on a track first and then got the gusto to take it out on the road and

trail. It was a long progression, but I went from doing a spin class once a week to doing 12 wheelchair races per year and joining Shepherd's track team, the Spinners."

When the pandemic hit in 2020, Colby took stock of his life. Pre-pandemic, he had tried to re-enter the theater world, but there were accessibility issues with backstage work.

"When the pandemic started, I decided I had to make a move to do something new. I was so involved with recreational therapy through Shepherd that I thought it was a good fit for something I could pursue as a career," Higgins says.

He pursued a master's in recreational therapy in January 2021 while also serving at Shepherd Center as a part-time health screener. For nearly two years, he worked at the welcome desk of the hospital, ensuring COVID-19 policies were followed.

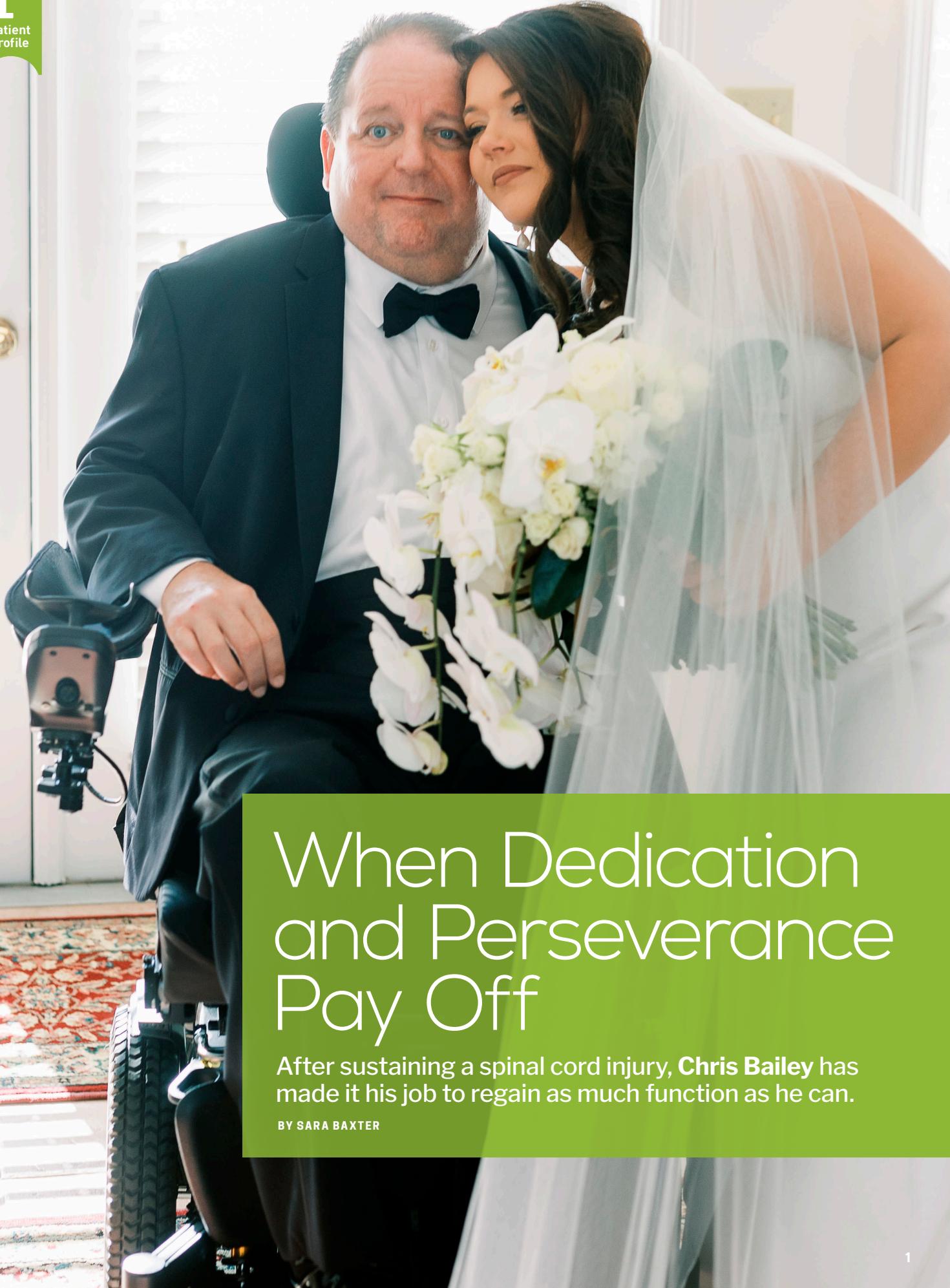
For his master's program, Higgins needed to complete an internship to receive his Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) credential. He is currently interning in Shepherd Center's SHARE Military Initiative, a program that provides rehabilitation to veterans and first responders who have traumatic brain injuries and co-occurring mental health concerns.

"The SHARE population is something I've never worked with before, so I am being challenged. But I've learned sticking with your comfort zone isn't something you should do. That's what this internship experience is all about, and I'm learning a ton," Higgins says.

Higgins aims to be a recreational therapist in an environment like Shepherd's. While his achievements are because of his tenacity, he also received a lot of support along the way.

"I'm proud of what I've accomplished, picking myself up after injury, and getting involved in things I've never done before. But, it wasn't just me," Higgins says. "A lot of people, including my immediate family who I'm really close with, pushed me toward trying something new with my life. And at every turn, the Shepherd staff found a way to prop me up. Whenever I expressed an interest, they were right there to support me and make sure I was successful." 





When Dedication and Perseverance Pay Off

After sustaining a spinal cord injury, **Chris Bailey** has made it his job to regain as much function as he can.

BY SARA BAXTER

In September 2021, Chris Bailey started taking steps with a platform walker. By Thanksgiving Day, he could feed himself. And on Christmas Eve, he took a few steps on a rolling walker.

Achieving these milestones – which were not likely after he sustained a C-3/C-4 incomplete spinal cord injury (SCI) and was paralyzed from the neck down – are in part due to the hard work and perseverance Chris has shown in the last year and a half during his rehabilitation. It's a journey that began on January 30, 2021 – while at a hunting camp near his home in Jackson, Alabama – when a utility task vehicle (UTV) he was riding in skidded off the trail and hit a tree. After the impact, he instantly felt a wave of paralysis traveling down his body.

"I knew it was serious," Chris says. "I couldn't move and I was having trouble breathing."



Chris, a personal injury attorney in Jackson, was taken to a local hospital before transferring by ambulance to University of Alabama-Birmingham Hospital three-and-a-half hours away.

His wife, Suzanne (Suzy), got the phone call no one wants to receive in the middle of the night, telling her that Chris had been injured. At that point – and for the next 12 days – doctors were uncertain that Chris would survive. He was placed on a ventilator with a tube down his throat, which made him unable to speak. He communicated with Suzy by blinking his eyes.

Suzy, always the planner, made finding the next step – rehabilitation – a priority.

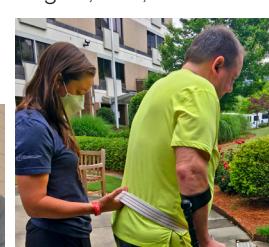
After hearing about Shepherd Center from two close friends, she worked to get him into the hospital's Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program. The only movement Chris had below his neck occurred the day before leaving Birmingham for Shepherd Center when his right thumb moved while Suzy held his hand.

When he arrived at Shepherd Center on February 12, 2021, he was greeted by hospital

Co-Founder Alana Shepherd, who gave him these words of encouragement: "Welcome to Shepherd Center. We're going to take good care of you."

"That's when I knew I would live," Chris says.

Slowly, as he worked in therapy every day, some movement returned to his fingers, toes, and feet.



Though it wasn't as fast as he would've liked, he made steady progress and he and Suzy took any movement as a good sign. He believes a positive attitude has been the key to his improvement.

"I have always been a hard-headed person," Chris admits. "But after this happened, a calm came over me. I had to wrap my mind around the reality that I couldn't do anything about what had happened in the past, and that helped me focus on what was ahead. You just have to have hope and faith that things will continue to improve in the future."

And things did continue to improve. He was able to transition from a wheelchair controlled by head movements to one that he could control with his right hand. After 10 weeks of inpatient therapy and another 10 weeks in the SCI Day Program at Shepherd, Chris was discharged home. He resumed therapy in Mobile last August where he's made great progress. Because of those improvements, he was able to return to Shepherd Center's

Day Program in April this year for additional therapy where he progressed enough to begin walking with forearm crutches.

"I am truly grateful to all the staff and therapists at Shepherd Center," Chris says. "I would not be where I am today without them."

While Chris' story is one of dedication and perseverance, it's also a heartwarming story of love and devotion. Suzy, also an attorney, gave up her legal career to become his full-time caregiver and has been his constant source of support. She stayed with him in his hospital room at Shepherd Center, cared for him when they lived in family housing while in



the Day Program, and she now keeps up his care at home. Every morning, she stretches out his body, gets him out of bed, bathes and dresses him, and gets him ready for the day. They still make the three hour round trip drive to Mobile four days a week for therapy, where he continues to improve.

The couple believes that the 24/7 togetherness has actually made their marriage stronger.

"I wouldn't change anything for the closeness we have and the strong bond that has developed," Suzy says. "We take it day by day and stay in the moment. It's been a slow process but he has made incredible progress."

In the future, Chris would love to return to practicing law. But for now, they take it one milestone at a time. Chris and Suzy returned to Shepherd Center in September for 12 weeks at Beyond Therapy®.

"The life we have is not what we had expected," Chris says, "but we have faith that our future, although different, will be even better than what we had planned." *

Shepherd Alums: From “I Can’t” to “I Can”

Carolynn Goerke

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

“Here’s what we’re going to do.”

Those words were spoken by James Liadis, M.D., staff physiatrist in the Dean Stroud Spine and Pain Institute at Shepherd Center, in December 2018. And they were words Carolynn Goerke had been waiting to hear for years.

Diagnosed with Complex Regional Pain Syndrome at 17, Carolynn has been dealing with debilitating chronic pain for half of her life, the worst of which has been in the last six years. The condition became so severe that she could not move her left arm, hold her head up independently, or walk unassisted. As a result, she wore a neck collar and used a wheelchair. It was also extremely painful to be touched, which made dressing herself and hugging her husband, James, impossible.

She said on the pain scale of one to 10, she “lived” at the edge of 10. For years, Carolynn and James, who just celebrated their eighth wedding anniversary, searched for answers and relief, consulting with countless doctors. The only thing that got them through this difficult journey was their strong Catholic faith.

“Nobody could tell me what was wrong, so they were limited in what they could offer in terms of a solution,” Carolynn says. She underwent several radio-frequency ablations – a minimally invasive procedure that can be used to treat chronic pain – and she tried numerous medications. Often the pain was relieved temporarily, but it inevitably returned worse than before. Some doctors said there was nothing they could do.

Then, she found a neurologist who advised her to go to Shepherd Center, which she did in December 2018.

Dr. Liadis was familiar with what Carolynn was experiencing and offered immediate treatment options.

“Just having someone listen and understand what I was going through was amazing,” she says. “He had more in his arsenal than other doctors we saw, and he offered us hope.”

She was put on ketamine infusions and eventually started physical and speech therapy. Now, nearly four years later, the pain is being managed, she’s out of the neck brace, has regained use of her left arm, and can hug James and hold his hand. She admits progress has been slow, but just seeing any improvement has been motivating.

“It’s like I have been stuck on the top of a mountain for years,” she says. “Now I’m coming down slowly. Each step is significant. I still have a lot more to go, but thanks to Shepherd Center, we are finally on the right path.”

With her chronic pain symptoms better managed, Carolynn Goerke is able to hug her husband James again.



1

Shawn Tyson

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

Shawn Tyson had a goal. By his 20th birthday in August 2022, he would be able to walk on his own, without the assistance of a cane.

He met that goal, achieving yet another milestone in a year and a half filled with them.

Shawn sustained a traumatic brain injury on December 31, 2020, when a car he was riding in slammed into a telephone pole, and his airbag did not deploy. He was taken to Regional One Medical Center in Memphis where he immediately underwent brain surgery. He remained in a coma for two months.

His prognosis was bleak, but his mother, Melissa Hewitt, refused to accept it. She remembered hearing about Shepherd Center from her father who was a professional football player and a fire fighter.

“He always said, ‘If you have a catastrophic injury, the best place to go is Shepherd Center,’ and that just stuck with me,” she says.

When Shawn arrived at Shepherd Center on March 18, 2021, his eyes were open, but he remained unresponsive. He eventually was able to walk with assistance and could respond to “yes” and “no” questions. After three months, he hit a plateau, and both his care team and Melissa thought it would be best for him to take a break and go home.

“The light came on when he was back home with his family,” Melissa says. Shawn did weekly physical, occupational, and speech therapy and made progress every day. In April 2022, he returned to Shepherd Center to continue his treatment in the Brain Injury Rehabilitation Program.

Nearly two years after the accident that almost took his life, Melissa says Shawn has almost fully recovered. Both she and Shawn credit Shepherd Center for giving them hope and care, especially after being told he would never live a normal life.

“Just the atmosphere alone was motivating,” Melissa says. “It was the worst time of my life and they just made it easier.”

As for the future, Shawn, who grew up working on cars with his father, plans to start a business building and restoring high performance race cars. It was something he was working toward before his accident. He also hopes to one day be a race car driver.

“That’s what kept me going,” Shawn says. “I wanted to get back to working with and driving race cars. Thanks to Shepherd Center, I think I will be able to do that.”



2

Stephanie Anderson

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

In addition to leading a busy life as an attorney, wife, and mother, Stephanie Anderson had a goal: to complete the Campaign School at Yale University, a rigorous five-day program that prepares women to run for public office. That goal faded after she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) in February 2020. She was concerned the vision and cognitive issues she was experiencing because of the disease would make it challenging to learn new material.

Fortunately for Stephanie, her therapists at the Andrew C. Carlos Multiple Sclerosis Institute at Shepherd Center had a different idea. They worked with her to develop strategies and workarounds, including how to use the computer to compensate for her vision issues, take notes effectively, and organize information.

“I was able to get through the program just fine,” Stephanie says. “I didn’t think that would be possible, but they gave me methods to do it.”

Stephanie participated in physical, occupational, and speech therapy. Therapists worked with her on her vision, mobility, and cognitive issues. She was also put on disease-modifying drugs and noticed dramatic improvements.

She continued to work as an estate and probate attorney, thankful that the pandemic allowed her to work from home so she didn’t have to worry about going into the office.

“The timing was a gift,” she says. “It gave me some time to get used to my new normal, to get stronger, and to gain confidence.”

Last summer, she mentioned the Yale program to her therapists.

“Right away, they began working with me on the skills and strategies I would need to complete it,” she says. “It gave me such a sense of accomplishment.”

Finishing the class also gave her confidence to apply to be an associate judge in the Rockdale County Probate Court. In October 2021, she was appointed to the position. Since it is not full-time, she still practices law at her own firm.

Now, Stephanie can walk without a cane, is able to stay active, and has taken up gardening. She still receives occupational and speech therapy weekly, and she has seen positive mental and physical improvements thanks to the infusion drugs she takes. For that, she credits Shepherd Center.

“Shepherd Center is like a warm hug,” Stephanie says.

“It’s unlike any other place to get care for MS. They make it possible for you to accomplish things you wouldn’t think were possible.”

After receiving treatment for MS at Shepherd Center, Stephanie Anderson turned her symptoms and her life around.



3

Rob Newbill

DALLAS, GEORGIA

On a summer afternoon earlier this year, Rob Newbill finished playing a couple of hours of pickleball at his local YMCA with a group of people he’d just met, and he emerged victorious. A year ago, this never would’ve happened.

“I was a recluse,” he says. “I didn’t want to interact with people or even leave the house unless I absolutely had to.”

He was struggling with depression and anxiety, and he was easily frustrated. His physical symptoms included vertigo, blurry vision, and problems with word recall. Although he knew something wasn’t quite right, he didn’t know how to solve the problem.

It wasn’t until a chance meeting with a Shepherd Center SHARE Military Initiative intake coordinator through a mutual friend that he realized that his symptoms might be related to his 20 years in the military, namely two tours in Iraq.

He came to SHARE in April 2022 and was diagnosed with cognitive, visual, and vestibular problems – a diagnosis that Rob calls “both shocking and vindicating.” He spent three months at SHARE, living in an off-site apartment and traveling home on the weekends to be with his wife and three children.

Rob, who is originally from Chico, California, enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1995 at age 18, looking for adventure and a way to see the world. He eventually attended the United States Military Academy at West Point, graduating as an infantry officer in 2002.

At SHARE, Rob was given the tools to deal with his challenges through various forms of therapy as well as counseling. He also had the opportunity to explore outside interests such as fly-fishing and beekeeping.

It has made quite a difference.

“I feel better today – mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually – than I have in a very long time,” Rob says. “I have gone from being depressed and pessimistic, to confident, optimistic, and enthusiastic about the future. I am proud of the person I am and have developed a deep desire to help others.”

Through the help of a Shepherd Center vocational coach, Rob is looking for a job, hoping to find a veteran outreach or an Army JROTC instructor position. He credits SHARE for his turnaround.

“Everyone at SHARE is part of a team whose purpose is to improve clients’ lives,” he says. “The entire team met me with patience and encouragement and were ready to shift into higher gears when I was ready. They gave me my life back and I appreciate each of them immensely.”



Rob Newbill spends time with his family on the beach at St George Island, Florida. From L to R: Rob, Sam, Lilly, Jerah (wife), and Ella.

BY SARA BAXTER

Spotlighting Stories of Independence, Health, and Hope

Attendees at the Legendary Party Luncheon had the opportunity to learn about Shepherd Center's MS Institute and how patients with MS succeed and thrive.



Bill Henis and Stephanie Anderson are two of the thousands of patients who have benefitted from care at the Andrew C. Carlos Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Institute at Shepherd Center. And on June 9, they shared their stories with attendees at the Legendary Party Luncheon held at the St. Regis Hotel's Garden Room.

Elaine Carlos and daughters Kari and Angela, who are the co-chairs of this year's Legendary Party, hosted the luncheon as a way to raise awareness for both the MS Institute and The Legendary Party. Proceeds from this year's gala event, Shepherd Center's largest fundraiser, will benefit the MS Institute.

Shepherd Center CEO Sarah Morrison, PT, MBA, MHA, welcomed everyone to the event and introduced Clare Hartigan, PT, MPT, a physical therapist in the Eula C. and Andrew C. Carlos Multiple Sclerosis



Rehabilitation and Wellness Program at Shepherd Center. Hartigan spoke on the history of the MS Institute and highlighted how much has changed and improved over the years in the treatment of the neurological disease.

"Patients have many more disease-modifying drug options and the rehabilitation therapies have advanced as well," Hartigan told the group. "Our specialized programs help hundreds of people a month realize their potential and improve their independence. And through that, they gain hope."

Bill and Stephanie told stories of how they were given hope – and a new outlook – by receiving treatment at Shepherd Center.

Stephanie, an estate and probate attorney, wasn't given much hope from doctors and specialists when she was diagnosed with MS in 2020. Fortunately, that changed when she came to Shepherd Center. Right away, Stephanie began physical, occupational, and speech therapies to improve her vision, mobility, and cognitive issues.

Before her diagnosis, Stephanie had hoped to complete the Campaign School at Yale University, a rigorous five-day program that prepares women to run for public office. But with her MS symptoms, she didn't think it would be possible.

Fortunately for Stephanie, Betty Mathew, M.S., CCC-SLP, a speech-language pathologist in the MS Rehabilitation and Wellness Program, had a different idea. Mathew works with patients on speech and voice issues, swallowing disorders, and cognitive issues, such as memory, attention, word recall and decision making, and organizational skills – all of which can be impacted by MS.

Mathew worked with Stephanie to develop compensatory strategies, which allowed Stephanie to complete the



"Our specialized programs help hundreds of people a month realize their potential and improve their independence. And through that, they gain hope."

program with flying colors. That accomplishment gave her the confidence to apply to be an associate judge in the Rockdale County Probate Court. In October 2021, she was appointed to the position.

"We work to give people hope, control, and confidence," Mathew says. "It is so rewarding for me to see them progress and achieve their goals. And having a department that is completely dedicated to working with those with multiple sclerosis is amazing."

Bill is another example of progress made after coming to the MS Institute. He experienced pain and mobility issues in his legs and cognitive issues for two years before being referred to the MS Institute in 2015 and being given a definitive diagnosis of multiple sclerosis. Since then, he has seen vast improvements. Bill used a cane to get around, but hunching over while using it affected his posture and back pain. Hartigan, his therapist, solved the problem by replacing the cane with two trekking poles that enabled him to stand straight while still providing the balance and stability he needed. Bill calls that change "transformational."

Hartigan calls it rewarding.

"Helping people improve their function and seeing both the physical and emotional changes they experience is the most

gratifying part of my job," she says. "It's a huge thrill to be part of restoring their hope."

Since its creation in 1992, the MS Institute expanded its part-time services to include full-time case management, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech/cognitive therapy, counseling, and a comprehensive wellness program. Additionally, a director of MS Research was hired to lead investigations of new medications, to improve clinical outcomes, and to enhance the quality of life for people with multiple sclerosis.

This wholistic approach to care benefits patients in so many ways, but unfortunately, insurance does not cover everything. Patients often need help paying for equipment, co-pays, medication, transportation, and extras that can make life easier for someone with MS. To fill these gaps, the MS Institute relies on the generosity of donors and receiving the proceeds from this year's Legendary Party will give it an added boost.

"These donations are essential to fulfill our mission of improving the lives of people with MS," Hartigan says. "We are all extremely grateful to the Carlos family for bringing the MS Institute into the spotlight." *

1. Bill Henis shared his Shepherd Center story with luncheon guests. 2. Clare Hartigan and John Carlos attended the event. 3. Ball-Chairs Angela Carlos, Elaine Carlos, and Kari Dunn attended the event. 4. Judge Gary Washington, Stephanie Anderson, and her husband Rashaan Matthews, and Betty Mathew enjoyed the event. 5. Julie Shepherd, Tori Bjerke, and Dr. Anna Elmers enjoyed the luncheon.

Shepherd Center Employees Give Back

BY SARA BAXTER



Since the Shepherd Serves employee volunteer program began in 2020, 220 staff members have volunteered to help the community.

Whether sorting through medical supplies to send overseas, organizing clothing for foster children, or preparing meals for senior citizens, Shepherd Center employees have an opportunity to be out in the community giving back through Shepherd Serves, an employee volunteer program.

Shepherd Serves is the brainchild of Sarah Morrison, PT, MBA, MHA, Shepherd Center's chief executive officer. She wanted to create an opportunity for Shepherd Center employees to give back to the community that has supported the hospital for 47 years. She enlisted the help of Alex Seblatnigg, CAVS, CPXP, director of volunteer services and internal engagement at Shepherd Center.

"Shepherd Center wouldn't be what it is today without community support," Seblatnigg says. "Shepherd Serves is a way to give back to a community that has given us so much."

Seblatnigg finds volunteer opportunities all over the city, doing her best to make sure there is a variety of organizations to serve and that the nonprofit can

accommodate 20 to 25 volunteers. Shifts last about four hours, and employees go during work hours. Since the program began in 2020, right before the pandemic, Shepherd Serves volunteers have given their time to organizations like Friends of Disabled Adults and Children (FODAC), Open Hand, Meals on Wheels, the Foster Care Support Foundation, MedShare, Covenant House, the Gateway Center, and MUST Ministries. Seblatnigg has also coordinated on-site activities – such as stuffing goody bags – to provide more opportunities for employees to volunteer.

To ensure as many employees as possible can participate, they can only volunteer on one of four off-site projects a year. Slots fill up fast, and Seblatnigg often establishes a waiting list to replace last-minute cancellations.

"We have such a demand," Seblatnigg says. "Even during our third year in, people are still so excited to be a part of this."

So far in 2022, employees have served a total of 760 hours. And since the program began, 220 staff members have volunteered.

When they are out volunteering, employees wear Shepherd Serves t-shirts that were designed by Shepherd Center employee Mariellen Jacobs.

"This program is tremendously popular, and we know our volunteers make an impact on the organizations we serve," Seblatnigg says. "It's so nice to see our employees embrace this project with such enthusiasm."

Not only does Shepherd Serves give employees a chance to volunteer, but since they come from all departments, employees get a chance to work alongside people they may not know or don't usually have an opportunity to interact with.

Seblatnigg credits the program's popularity to the nature of Shepherd Center employees.

"You don't work here if you don't have a caring, giving heart," she says. "Our employees just want to give back. Not everyone can write a big check to an organization, but everyone can give some time." *

PROMISE MADE, PROMISE KEPT

Award-Winning Country Superstar Chris Young Returns to SHARE Military Initiative Benefit

Last year, award-winning country music performer Chris Young made a promise to return to Atlanta for a concert to benefit Shepherd Center's SHARE Military Initiative, a program that provides comprehensive rehabilitation at no cost to military veterans, service members, and first responders who have traumatic brain injuries and co-occurring mental health concerns. Young kept that promise by performing yet again at a backyard concert hosted by SHARE supporters Toby and Kelly Regal. Kelly serves on the Shepherd Center

Board of Trustees and Toby is a former patient and former Foundation chair. The event was organized by a partnership between The Charlie Daniels Journey Home Project and Shepherd's Men, a volunteer group that advocates for veterans and helps raise money for SHARE through various programs.

Young has often expressed his gratefulness for veterans' service to this country, and he continues to honor them by furthering the work of Shepherd's Men and The Journey Home Project. Since Charlie Daniels' passing in 2020, Young has graciously stepped in, using his talents to carry on the mission of the organization by raising money for injured veterans to reintegrate and rehabilitate after they return home from service.

This year's concert featured Young and his band's acoustic performance, distinguished guest speakers, SHARE graduates, and a live auction. Before performing numerous hit songs, Young interacted with the audience, praised guest speakers for their courageous military service, and vowed to continue his work to support injured veterans — which included a \$50,000 pledge to the evening's fundraiser. The line-up of guest

PHOTOS BY WILLIAM TWITTY

1. Chris Young makes \$50,000 pledge to the fundraiser. 2. Supporters of The Journey Home Project, Shepherd's Men, and Shepherd Center (L to R: Hazel and Charlie Daniels, Jr., Alana Shepherd, former NYC Police Commissioner Bernie Kerik, MSGT Earl Plumlee and family, Chris Young, Shepherd's Men co-founder Travis Ellis, David and Carolyn Corlew, Jennifer Bocook, Jamie Shepherd). 3. Long time Shepherd's Men supporters Joe and Denise DeAngelo won a Chris Young guitar and a CMA experience. 4. SHARE alumnus Mike Reynolds speaks to the crowd about his time in SHARE.

2



3



4



event — which raised more than \$300,000 for both organizations.

"The evening was designed to honor those who were transformed and healed through SHARE and bring awareness to the condition of those struggling in our veteran community. For many, the difficulty acclimating to life with these injuries is a constant struggle and often leads to broken families, addiction, and unfortunately loss of life," says Travis Ellis, co-founder of Shepherd's Men. "We are grateful to Chris Young, The Journey Home Project, the veteran community, event guests, sponsors, donors, and countless friends for joining us to support this cause."

speakers began with a welcome from Jamie Shepherd, president and COO of Shepherd Center, and Bernie Kerik, former New York City Police Commissioner. Mike Reynolds, SHARE graduate and CEO of Hero Agriculture, shared insights about his military service, journey to healing, and successful career transition to farming, while Glen Wells, SHARE graduate and assistant district attorney of Cherokee County, Georgia, recounted his military experience, healing from injuries, and new career. The audience also heard from Earl Plumlee, who was awarded the Medal of Honor last year for going above and beyond the call of duty in the U.S. Army in Afghanistan.

In support of the evening, Daniels' wife of 55 years, Hazel Daniels, his son, Charlie Daniels, Jr., and David Corlew, co-founder of The Journey Home Project, were in attendance. More than 60 people attended the



THE TRIUMPHANT RETURN OF DERBY DAY



1. Derby Day guests try their luck at the Casino Games. 2. Derby Day guests cheer on the winning horse Rich Strike as he gallops to one of the biggest upsets in the Kentucky Derby history. 3. Enjoying a moment at Derby Day are 2022 Derby Co-Chair Sarah Shepherd (center) along with Sara Chapman (left), 1984 Derby Day Co-chair and member of Shepherd Center Board of Directors, and Sarah Morrison (right), Shepherd Center CEO. 4. Country singer and former Shepherd Center patient Nick Malloy performs for guests in the VIP tent. 5. Derby Day sponsors and guests enjoy the beautiful weather and outdoor ambience.



For nearly 40 years, Derby Day, a Kentucky Derby-themed party and fundraiser that takes place annually on the first Saturday in May, has been a highlight of Atlanta's spring social calendar. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic put a halt to in-person events.

But some former Junior Committee members weren't ready to say goodbye to the long-standing Shepherd Center tradition. They wanted to bring it back after its two-year absence, but in a different way. Co-chaired by Junior Committee alums Alex Panos and Sarah Shepherd, the Derby Day Alumni Committee, made up of about 20 members, went to work to bring a new Derby Day to life.

"After a two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was a good time to dust the cobwebs off and bring this event back with a new vibe, while building on the success of the past. To Alex and me, that meant more exposure and education around Shepherd Center's mission and greatest needs, all while hosting a fabulous and one-of-a-kind event," Sarah says.

"We wanted to keep the best of the old event, but were open to new ideas," says Alex, who also serves on Shepherd Center's Advisory Board. "And we wanted to take it up a notch. Many Shepherd supporters – former Junior Committee Members themselves – have families now. We wanted to give them a reason to attend Derby Day and make it worth it to them to hire a babysitter. And I think we accomplished that. It was a really positive experience."

As in the past, the event was held at Buckhead's Chastain Horse Park Special Event Facility, which consists of an outdoor equestrian ring and a house containing banquet rooms and balconies. Food was available on multiple levels and games were present both inside and in the equestrian ring.

Highlights of the event included two live bands, lawn games, a bourbon tasting, a prize drawing for

Shepherd Center's Junior Committee is a volunteer group of young professionals who founded Derby Day and have since expanded their mission to provide hands-on volunteer experiences and fundraisers to support Shepherd Center's patients. Please email **Erica Spurling** at erica.spurling@shepherd.org to learn more.

THE TRIUMPHANT
RETURN OF
DERBY DAY

a Green Egg Outdoor Grill and of course huge TV screens to view the broadcast of the Kentucky Derby. The intent of the planning committee was to reestablish this annual event where people would want to drop their regular Saturday activities and come join the fun.

"One of my favorite memories from this year was gathering together to support Shepherd in such a fun and energetic environment. It was a long-awaited milestone that many of us have missed! Another highlight was seeing a former Shepherd Center patient, Nick Malloy, welcome guests to the event with his musical talents," Sarah adds.

This year's Derby Day raised more than \$170,000, directly benefitting patients in Shepherd Center's Recreation Therapy Program. The largest program of its kind in the country, recreation therapists help patients get back into the community by taking them on outings, teaching leisure skills, and developing other skills needed in everyday life. Typically not covered by health insurance, recreation therapy is integral to Shepherd's mission of turning "I can't" into "I can" moments for patients by incorporating patients' hobbies and other outside interests into their rehabilitation plan.

Alex says "Derby Day 2.0" will continue into the future, and he hopes even more additions can be made.

"Now that we have the first one under our belts, it offers a wonderful opportunity to bring in more ideas and continue to evolve and improve," Alex says.*



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PECANS ON PEACHTREE

...just in time for the holidays



Shepherd Center's annual Pecans on Peachtree® offers delicious praline pecans, chocolate, and more, from October through January, just in time for the holiday season. 100% of proceeds will support family housing at Shepherd Center, allowing families and loved ones to stay together while patients receive rehabilitation at Shepherd.

Pecans are delivered across the country from the orchard at Pearson Farm in Fort Valley, Georgia.

Visit pecansonpeachtree.org to begin placing your orders!

Questions? Contact
pecans@shepherd.org
for more information.



Shepherd Center
PECANS ON PEACHTREE

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 **January 1, 2022 and March 31, 2022.**

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Ms. Michelle M. Boudreaux



Shepherd Center patients attended the Braves vs. Mets game as a part of their recreational therapy. These outings help patients get out into the community while meeting therapy goals.



After sustaining a spinal cord injury in June, Blake Melton was able to return to the ice by playing sled hockey for the first time with help from his family and his recreational therapist.



SHARE Military Initiative clients worked with horticultural specialist Wendy Battaglia to freshen up a garden. The planting activities help foster collaboration and give clients skills to take home.

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Zac Bradley, a vocational specialist at Shepherd Pathways and former Shepherd Center patient, was the keynote speaker at a gathering of CEOs at the closing bell of the New York Stock Exchange to advocate for disability-inclusive hiring.

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In partnership with Georgia Aquarium, Shepherd Center patients participated in the Shark Cage Dive program as part of their rehabilitation.

HONORARIUMS

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 **January 1, 2022 and March 31, 2022**.



Shepherd Center's Wheelchair Division of The AJC Peachtree Road Race took place on July 4. Susannah Scaroni, 30, from Urbana, Illinois, won the women's open division with a course recordbreaking finishing time of 21:18 and took home a \$53,000 bonus on top of a \$7,500 prize for her first place finish. In the men's open, Daniel Romanchuk, 23, of Champaign, Illinois, took the crown to win with a finishing time of 18:39. It is his fifth win and came with a \$7,500 prize.

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Susan Hawkins-Fabulous job as a board chair!

Ms. Sheryl Sellaway

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Mrs. Sarah A. Morrison

Andrea E. Wahner Hendrickson, M.D. –Thank you and Happy Holidays!

Anonymous

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Julie Shepherd

Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan G. Roxland

Clyde Shepherd III's Birthday

Bickers Consulting Group, LLC

Sydney Simon-Happy Chanukah!

Anonymous

Wayne Sweezey

William Howard Flowers, Jr.

Foundation, Inc.

Jo Tapper-Great Board Report!

Dr. David F. Apple, Jr.

Dr. Rhonda Taubin

Ms. Inderpreet Kaur

Jodie Tharp

Ms. Ruby B. Graves

Dr. Ben Thrower

Mrs. Linda Agnello

Anonymous

Lesley Archie

Ms. Ursula Carlton

Mr. Joshua Evitt

Ms. Tara Gilmore

Mr. Tim Golden

Mr. Arthur L. Hardy

Ms. Ebonie Hirst

Ms. Valerie Johnson

Macon Moves LLC

Mr. Lee Means



Shepherd Center

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Shepherd Center Once Again Recognized as a Disability Equality Index® Best Place to Work for Disability Inclusion

Shepherd Center was named a “Best Place to Work for Disability Inclusion” by the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) and Disability:IN. Shepherd Center earned this recognition by scoring 90 out of a possible 100 on the Disability Equality Index® (DEI), the world’s most comprehensive benchmarking tool for the Fortune 1000 and Am Law 2001 to measure disability workplace inclusion against competitors.

“Shepherd Center was founded based on helping people with disabilities rebuild their lives with hope, independence, and dignity. For many, that includes being part of the

workforce by either launching or returning to their careers,” says Sarah Morrison, PT, MBA, MHA, CEO of Shepherd Center. “Being named a Best Place to Work for Disability Inclusion by the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) and Disability:IN is confirmation that we’re staying true to our mission by both being an inclusive workplace for those with disabilities and celebrating the range of talents and perspectives of our team.”

