

— THE —
Bridge
WINTER 2026



2023



2024



2025



Above: Another year, another turkey-leg headband photo—Sarah Lutz and Wes Loomis are keeping their Thanksgiving tradition going strong.

On the Cover: The Maple Terrace Atrium shines bright following this year’s Grand Illumination.

From the President

As we turn the page into a new year, I find myself reflecting on the many moments that made this past season so special at Bridgewater Retirement Community. From the glow of the Christmas trees at our Open House to the music of the Village Choir filling Houff Community Center, the holidays reminded us once again of the warmth and togetherness that makes our culture so special.

In this edition of *The Bridge*, you'll see that same spirit woven throughout every story. Residents Steve and Ruth Watson have been inspiring others to get moving and have fun through their beginner dance classes—proof that it's never too late to learn something new. Life Enrichment Specialist Rhonda Collins has taken that same sense of adventure to new heights with her "Adventure Club," helping residents check off bucket-list experiences like kayaking, rail riding, and a spring rafting trip to come.

Innovation continues to flourish across campus as well. Speech-language pathologists Patrick Massey and Abby Koller are bringing their vision for an in-house FEES (Flexible Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing) program to life—an idea born through our innovation grant program that will enhance comfort, safety, and support for residents right here on campus.

This issue also offers insight into the structure and purpose of BRC's Operating and Foundation Boards, highlighting how the work of each supports our mission and strengthens the future of our community.

As we begin this new year together, I'm filled with gratitude—for the creativity and compassion that flow throughout this campus, and for each of you who make BRC such an extraordinary place to live, work, and thrive.

Wishing you a happy, healthy, and energized start to the year ahead,



Rodney D. Alderfer
President | Bridgewater Retirement Community



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Veterans Join Honor Flight

Residents Doug Gilbert, Jack McAvoy, and Eddy Wampler joined the Honor Flight: Top of Virginia trip to Washington, D.C. this fall, a meaningful day honoring their military service. The experience was filled with reflection and gratitude, and their dedication continues to inspire BRC.



A Strategic Look Ahead

Every three to five years, BRC engages in a comprehensive strategic planning process to set long-range goals for the organization. This effort brings together senior leadership, both the Operating and Foundation Boards, and resident representatives, guided by an external consultant.

Past strategic plans have shaped major initiatives such as the household model, Gardner House, and The Grove. This year's planning is now underway, informed by a recent market analysis designed to understand BRC's position and identify future opportunities and needs.

Ready, Set, Colorado!

Judy Colquitt traveled to Colorado with family to visit her sisters, where she joined in a family relay race. Judy is often seen on the move around campus, so be sure to stop and ask her about the "CODY relay race!"





On the Air: BRC's New Content Studio

A new Content Studio is up and running in the nursing basement (near the door to June's Café and the ramp to Lantz Chapel). Outfitted with all-new video equipment, it will serve as a hub for media production, storytelling, and an upcoming BRC podcast—including much of what's written in this edition of *The Bridge*.

Loads of Improvements

BRC's laundry area received a major upgrade after 44 years, including a new outside-air system, blower coil, and odor-reducing exhaust fan—boosting both efficiency and air quality. The roof, also 44 years old, has now been fully replaced as well.

The Extra Helping

A new initiative is putting surplus food from nursing and memory support households to good use. When extra portions are available, they're safely packaged and placed in The Arcade for any team member who could use "an extra helping." The program supports team members while reducing food waste—no questions asked.



A Moment of Extraordinary Compassion

CNA McKenzie North came in on her weekend off to take Sam Lam, who loves kids' sports, to her little brother's football game. Her selfless act created a joyful, meaningful experience that Sam will long remember. McKenzie's compassion and stewardship are a shining example of the culture that makes BRC so special.



Candles, Carols, and Christmas Cheer!

As Thanksgiving quickly faded into December, the Life Enrichment Team and a cheerful crew of “elves” began their annual transformation of campus.

Dozens of ornaments were unwrapped, branches were fluffed to perfection, and uniquely themed Christmas trees emerged in every corner. With each window glowing by candlelight, BRC sparkled inside and out, ready to welcome residents and guests to Grand Illumination and the Christmas Open House.

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CANDLES, CAROLS, AND CHRISTMAS CHEER!

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Much of the holiday magic can be traced to Life Enrichment Specialist Rhonda Collins, who thoughtfully crafts the themed trees that brighten Maple Terrace and Houff Community Center. This year was no exception. Each tree stands as a small masterpiece—distinct in color, texture, and character—and it's rare to see

the same design twice. Among this year's themes, one stood out: a shimmering tribute to the 25th anniversary of the Arts Council of the Valley and BRC's ongoing partnership with First Fridays. Together, all 17 trees form a walk-through gallery of Christmas imagination, delighting residents and guests at every turn.

This year's Grand Illumination began in the heart of Houff Community Center, where Santa and Mrs. Claus were joined by residents Bill and Ginnie Reinhold to share the honor of lighting the towering





navy-and-gold Christmas tree. Moments later, voices rose from above as the

Village Choir filled the Atrium with carols and Christmas favorites, their harmonies echoing throughout the community while the full room below sang along.

With the glow of candles in every window, trees sparkling in every corner, and music drifting through the air, the celebration



marked the perfect start to the season. Residents and guests ended the evening strolling through the beautifully decorated Community Center, with a delicious holiday spread in the Mack and Custer Rooms—another festive triumph from BRC’s talented dining team. And as the night drew to a close, it was clear once again: at BRC, the joy of the season isn’t just seen in the lights—it’s felt in the community that gathers beneath them.



Guiding the Mission

How Both BRC Boards Work Together to Shape the Future

Behind every great organization is a team of dedicated leaders guiding its path forward. At Bridgewater Retirement Community, two volunteer boards—the Operating Board and the Foundation Board—work hand in hand to ensure that BRC continues to grow with purpose, compassion, and vision.

The Operating Board: Governance and Guidance

As BRC’s governing body, the Operating Board provides oversight, accountability, and strategic direction for the organization. Members come from diverse professional backgrounds—finance, law, business, education, healthcare, and community leadership—bringing a wealth of experience and insight to the table.

Each board member is eligible to serve two three-year terms, offering both continuity and fresh perspective. Recruitment is managed by the Governance Committee, which seeks individuals whose values align with BRC’s mission and whose expertise can strengthen the board’s collective leadership.

The Operating Board also oversees the President’s role, offering guidance, evaluation, and support to ensure organizational integrity and alignment with BRC’s core principles. Its committees—Executive, Finance, Investment, and Governance—work closely with leadership to steward resources, plan strategically, and safeguard the long-term health of the organization.

The Foundation Board: Stewardship and Support

While the Foundation Board operates under the approval of the Operating Board, its focus is distinct—championing philanthropy and community connection. This board partners with the BRC Foundation to advance fundraising, cultivate donor relationships, and ensure that every gift is used faithfully and in keeping with donor intent.

Members of the Foundation Board act as ambassadors for BRC, sharing its story in the wider community and connecting others to the mission. Like the Operating

Board, its committees include Governance, Finance, and a shared Investment Committee. In recent years, Foundation board members have also played an active role in reviewing and advising on BRC's innovation grants—helping to identify and support new ideas that enhance resident life, team culture, and strengthen community partnerships.

Board members come from a dynamic range of backgrounds, spanning generations—from seasoned professionals to lifelong community volunteers. Many have deep family ties to BRC, while others simply feel called to serve and give back. What unites them all is a shared belief in the power of generosity and the importance of sustaining something meaningful for future generations.

Shared Purpose, Shared Commitment

Though their functions differ, both boards share a common goal: to strengthen the mission of BRC and ensure its continued success. Together, they balance thoughtful governance with heart-led stewardship—guiding the organization toward a vibrant, sustainable future.

And while their contributions are often behind the scenes, their impact is felt in every corner of campus—from the quality of living and financial stability to the sense of belonging that defines life at BRC.

At its core, this work is more than leadership—it's love in action, carried out by volunteers who give their time, expertise, and personal resources to ensure that Bridgewater Retirement Community remains a place where residents and team members truly thrive.

Operating Board

- **Role:** Governs BRC's operations and long-term strategic direction
- **Composition:** Up to 12 members from diverse professional backgrounds
- **Committees:** Finance, Investment, Governance, Executive
- **Term Length:** Two three-year terms
- **Focus Areas:** Oversight of leadership, financial stewardship, and organizational strategy

Foundation Board

- **Role:** Supports BRC's mission through philanthropy, donor relations, and community advocacy
- **Composition:** Members with expertise in finance, law, business, and community engagement
- **Committees:** Finance, Governance, Joint Investment Committee, Innovation Grant Review
- **Term Length:** Two three-year terms
- **Focus Areas:** Donor stewardship, fundraising, and strategic community partnerships

Shared Commitments

- 100% volunteer service
- Financial and personal support of BRC's mission
- Collaborative leadership ensuring BRC's continued strength and sustainability



Through a New Lens

How Two Speech-Language Pathologists Are Advancing Swallowing Safety at BRC

When Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) Abby Koller and Patrick Massey talk about the way swallowing works, they light up with the kind of enthusiasm usually reserved for hobbies or lifelong passions. For them, though, it's something deeper—a commitment to dignity, safety, and resident-centered care that sits at the heart of the work they do every day.

Swallowing is something most of us do without thinking, but for many older adults, it becomes a source of fear, frustration, or even danger. At Bridgewater Retirement Community, referrals for swallowing evaluations are common, and until now, assessments relied on outside contractors or off-site appointments that often introduce

delays, discomfort, or uncertainty. When Abby and Patrick realized they could bring these evaluations in-house through a clinical procedure called FEES (Fiberoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing), they knew it could transform how the Therapy Team supports residents.

“A lot of the time, we can see signs of swallowing difficulty, but we can't see the cause,” Patrick explains. “It's kind of like trying to treat a broken arm without an X-ray.” FEES solves that problem by using a tiny camera threaded gently through the nose to view the throat and voice box while a person swallows. The test shows, in real time, whether food or liquid enters the airway and which strategies help keep swallowing safe.

The barrier at BRC wasn't interest, though; it was access. Contract companies travel long distances, have tight schedules, and often only one chance to perform the exam. "There are so many times a resident isn't available in that moment," Abby explains. "Or they tolerate the procedure poorly and really need a second try. But when the company only has a thirty-minute window after driving four hours, that's it. You lose the chance to get the information you need."

The limitations don't end there. Residents in independent living, who are not covered by the same billing structures as those in assisted living or nursing, often face out-of-pocket costs or complicated reimbursements. "I've had to help people figure out what paperwork Medicare needs, and it's just... it's a lot," Patrick says. "Some people skip the test entirely because of that."

The idea for an in-house FEES program simmered for months before taking shape, sparked initially by encouragement from BRC's Director of Rehab Services, Nikki Yeago. "She said, 'This might be something

“ Every time we told people at Johns Hopkins that BRC sent us, supported us, even gave us a company car to get there, they were shocked. It made us realize how unusual this opportunity really is.”

— Patrick Massey, SLP

you could pursue—we have an innovation grant program for ideas like this,” Patrick recalls. “When Abby arrived [at BRC], that's what really got my butt in gear.”

With the innovation grant application in hand, the two began researching scope equipment, comparing models, and meeting with representatives. “That part alone was huge,” Abby says. “Patrick went back and forth with companies for weeks, building a pros-and-cons list just so we'd know exactly what we needed and why. It was really the foundation of the whole program.”

But the grant process did more than just secure funding—it forced them to think bigger. “The application had really detailed questions,” Abby says. “It made us consider not just what we wanted to do, but what the program could grow into, how it would function, and how it would support residents across the whole campus.”

When the grant was awarded, the next step was training. The pair traveled to Baltimore, Maryland to complete a hands-on certification workshop with Pathos at Johns Hopkins Hospital—an intensive, deeply practical weekend surrounded by 25–30 other SLPs from around the country. “We were scoping each other nonstop,” Patrick laughs. “I think I got scoped eight times in one afternoon. And honestly?

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THROUGH A NEW LENS

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It made the whole thing less scary. You realize it's really not that bad—a little uncomfortable going through the nose, but once it's in, it's fine." Abby agrees. "I always tell people now, 'I was scoped about thirty times in Baltimore, and if I can do that, you'll be okay!' It helps them feel at ease."

Their training revealed something else: the support BRC offers is rare. "Every time we told people at Johns Hopkins that BRC sent us, supported us, even gave us a company car to get there, they were shocked," Patrick says. "It made us realize how unusual this opportunity really is."

But the final part of their certification required something deeper—twenty-five supervised passes, observed by either a credentialed SLP with ear, nose, and throat (ENT) approval or a licensed ENT specialist. Patrick and Abby completed their first 15 supervised passes during their hands-on training in Baltimore. The remaining, however, needed to be performed back at home—and as luck would have it, BRC is home to someone uniquely qualified to help: resident Dr. Conrad Zapanta, a retired ENT-Head & Neck Surgeon with decades of experience. His involvement changed everything.

"I was impressed by their enthusiasm to learn and improve their skills," Dr. Zapanta shares. "They demonstrated with ease what they learned in the workshop. They handled the instruments carefully, followed sterilization guidelines, and explained the procedure to every volunteer with professionalism and appreciation."



And now we're doing something here at BRC that many therapists never get the chance to do."

— Abby Koller, SLP

He not only supervised their final passes but also helped bring together volunteers to scope—many of them fellow members of the Rockingham Male Chorus. Along the way, Dr. Zapanta offered guidance on anatomical differences, unexpected variations, and the importance of never assuming a procedure will be routine. "It was like being with my medical students again," he says fondly.

With Dr. Zapanta's signature, Abby and Patrick were officially certified to perform Flexible Endoscopic Video Laryngoscopy (the foundation of the FEES program), and he remains a partner moving forward. "I told them they can consult with me anytime if they want me to review videos," he adds. "This will be a great boost for faster healthcare delivery at BRC."

Now, with the program set to launch January 1st, 2026, the benefits are already clear. Residents will no longer travel off-site, coordinate with distant contractors, or wait long periods for answers. Evaluations can happen in real time, by experts they already know and trust.

Perhaps the most transformative outcome of FEES is the impact it will have on residents' quality of life. "Eating is a ritual," Abby says. "I always ask people, 'Do you eat to live or live to eat?'" For many



residents, food brings joy. And when access to instrumentation is available, there's no guessing—decisions can be made that protect their safety and dignity. Patrick adds, "We'll be able to test strategies right then and there. We can say, 'That swallow would have gone into your airway before—now it's not.' Or we can figure out why something isn't working and adjust. That's true resident-centered support."

Nikki sees the same promise. "Their ownership of this idea shows strong

we hadn't even considered," she says. "Patrick and Abby approached it with a level of commitment that was inspiring—researching equipment, giving up personal time for training, thinking through every detail. This is what happens when team members are empowered to think creatively and donors help bring those ideas to life."

Looking ahead, both SLPs are dreaming bigger—from using FEES to support BRC's singers and choirs, to serving community members, to perhaps expanding into

Stroboscopy (a technique that provides a clearer, slow-motion view of vocal function) in the future. For now, though, they're focused on mastering the new equipment, refining their interpretation skills, and preparing to offer residents a service that once felt out of reach.

"This is the coolest thing a speech therapist can do," Abby says, grinning. "I knew from the beginning that I wanted to be a medical SLP. And now we're doing something here at BRC that

many therapists never get the chance to do." Patrick nods. "It's rewarding knowing this is going to help people right away. We can be the ones to take what is maybe a fearful experience and make it a positive one. That's why we do this." And for BRC, this new program is more than innovation—it's a renewed commitment to learning, supporting one another, and growing together, one swallow at a time.



leadership, collaboration, and innovation," she says. "It strengthens our therapy team and directly translates to improved outcomes for residents."

Annie Frazier, Vice President for Development & Community Relations, who oversees the innovation grant process, believes this project captures the heart of donor-supported creativity. "This idea stood out because it introduced a service

Great Adventures Start Here

with Rhonda Collins &
BRC's Adventure Club



If you've ever wondered who keeps life in the village lively, look no further than Rhonda

Collins—Life Enrichment

Specialist and the spirited force behind BRC's new Adventure Club, an ever-growing lineup of resident bucket-list adventures ranging from rock walls to rafting, blueberry picking to riding the rails, and even ziplining at 80-something years old.

Rhonda sat down to talk about where the idea came from, how she makes it all happen, and what adventures might be next.



with Rhonda Collins

Q: Rhonda, tell us a little about yourself.

Rhonda: I've been the Life Enrichment Specialist in the village for about 15 years now, and before that I worked 11 years in activities with nursing and assisted living while my kids were growing up. Outside of work, I love to travel, garden, and kayak—I actually just bought my own



kayak after one of our trips! I live right here in Bridgewater with my dog, Ellie, and I have two grown boys who live nearby.

Q: What inspired the Adventure Club?

Rhonda: Last year at a conference, I took a class called “Don’t Baby the Baby Boomers.” It really got me thinking—why can’t we offer more adventurous things?

The Adventure Club isn’t about age or limitations. I put out a survey asking [residents], “What’s on your bucket list?” and got the most wonderful range of answers. Some were small, like wanting to visit a

favorite restaurant or go blueberry picking. Others were big—ziplining, kayaking, even a hot air balloon ride.

When people retire, they finally have time. And what better way to use that time than trying something you’ve always dreamed of—especially with neighbors and friends?

Q: What kinds of adventures have you embarked on so far?

Rhonda: So many! Blueberry picking, a soak in the Warm Springs pools, fishing at a trout pond, and then a fish fry afterward.

We’ve gone rock climbing on a real rock wall—people there were shocked to see BRC residents climbing! We’ve kayaked on the North River; we went to the Safari Park.

One of my favorites was taking [resident] Carolyn Price ziplining! She had the biggest grin on her face the whole way. Watching her check that off her list was just incredible.

Our biggest adventure so far has been “riding the rails” in West Virginia. You get on these pedal-powered rail cars and go 12 miles through the mountains. I thought, “There’s no way,” but it’s pedal-assisted—like an e-bike on rails. We took 16 people, made it an overnight trip, visited New River Gorge, and stopped at Tamarack. Beautiful trip.

And now kayaking has become one of our newest favorites!

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GREAT ADVENTURES

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Q: How do you choose which adventures to pursue?

Rhonda: Almost everything comes straight from residents. They bring me newspaper clippings, magazine articles, ideas from friends, things they've always wanted to try.

If it's possible—and even sometimes when it seems impossible—I'll try to make it happen.

And we (the Life Enrichment Team) also balance big trips with onsite things: art classes, drawing workshops, cooking demos, concerts, and eventually I want to offer hands-on cooking classes where residents make their own pasta, for example.

Q: Derek from Outdoor Adventure Experiences, Inc. has become a big part of the club's outings. How does that partnership help bring these experiences to life for residents?

Rhonda: I've known Derek Young for years—he works in life enrichment at another community and runs guided outdoor adventures all over the Valley, so partnering with him was a natural fit.

Before taking residents kayaking, he took me out on the river to test everything—how to get in and out of the kayak, what happens if someone tips (nobody did!), how to steer, and how to stop.

He's been fantastic. He even suggested rafting, so we took a group of team members first just to see whether residents could do it. (They can—it just takes some paddling!)





I'm hoping to partner with him on more adventures down the road.

Q: What does the “adventure dream team” look like behind the scenes?

Rhonda: I've received amazing support! Donovan in fitness has helped assess who's ready for things like rock climbing and has even thrown out big ideas—like a NASCAR driving experience.

Dining, marketing, and maintenance have pitched in on different trips. Team members are eager to volunteer to come along. People love helping residents try new things.

It really does take a village, and I'm grateful for everyone who jumps in.

Q: What does it take to turn a resident's bucket-list dream into a real-life adventure?

Rhonda: It's a lot—just like planning a family vacation for 14 people! Hotels, transportation, timing, meals, dietary needs, accessibility, motion sickness, sleeping arrangements—you name it.

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Great Adventures
IMPRESSIONS



Ed Johnson
Village Resident

“ Kayaking, rock climbing, riding the rails—I've enjoyed every adventure. Rhonda takes what people dream about and makes it happen. I'm ready for whatever she plans next.”



Jared Lunn
Village Maintenance

“ At Riven Rock, a few residents told us they'd never had a s'more before. Being part of that first-time moment was something special.”



Laura Spicer
Vice President of Well-Being

“ Adventure can be big or small. What the Adventure Club really does is nurture curiosity, confidence, and community. It proves adventure has no age.”



Jamie Shoemaker
Village Maintenance

“ The train ride, the fishing trip—I've enjoyed all of it. Getting out, meeting residents, seeing them smile... being part of their good day makes it worth it.”

GREAT ADVENTURES

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For overnight trips, I invite interested residents to meet in person so we can figure out all those details. But for day adventures, I start with residents who originally marked interest, and then we expand from there.

And anyone, anytime, can bring me an idea or hop in on an adventure. Missed kayaking? That just means we'll plan another float!

Q: What kind of excitement have you seen from residents so far?

Rhonda: They are so excited! They bring me ideas every day. They ask when the next adventure is and help spread the word—someone comes back from kayaking all fired up, and suddenly three neighbors want to try it too.

The two most-requested adventures so far? A hot air balloon ride and, believe it or not, skydiving—yes, skydiving! I told one resident I'd happily drive the van and film the whole thing, but I will not be jumping out of a plane! Fortunately, a team member has already volunteered to go with him.

I even have a big Mississippi River cruise planned for next year—over 20 people have signed up to go already.

Q: What moments have made you stop and think, “This is why I do this”?

Rhonda: Taking Carolyn ziplining and watching her soar—that was unforgettable. She also pedaled the entire 12-mile rail ride without stopping—just incredible.

Carolyn Price
Village Resident



“ I’ve loved every trip. I never got to travel when I was married—we just worked. Now I’m somewhere I’m cared for so well... I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else.”

And then there are the small moments, like teaching people how to make s’mores—some had never made one before! Those simple joys are just as meaningful.

Q: What do you hope residents take away from Adventure Club?

Rhonda: That you can come to BRC to live... really live.

Adventures don’t have to be big. For someone, “energy for life” might be kayaking a river. For another, it might be walking to Maple Terrace for lunch or going to a concert.

What matters is having something to look forward to—and a community beside you. I love watching residents help each other on these trips, link arms, cheer each other on, and share the excitement. It feels like family.

Q: What’s next?

Rhonda: More ideas come in every week—tattoos, ear piercings, cooking classes, clay shooting, hot air balloons, skydiving, and who knows what else.

Honestly, the adventure I’m most excited about might be one I haven’t even imagined yet.

And I want residents to know: my door is always open. No idea is too silly, too small, or too big. Bring me your bucket list, and let’s see where it takes us!



Above: 100 years old and still soaring! Marie Chaplin's river swing moment lit up one of our local summer picnics.



Left: Our second overnight trip to Smith Mountain Lake was all smiles—boat rides, s'mores, card games, and plenty of sunshine (with a little rain for good measure)! Thanks to generous donor support, residents made memories that will last long after the waves settled.

Holidays Then & Now

Cherished Traditions from BRC Residents and Team Members

The holidays have a way of stirring up fond memories—of snowy sleigh rides, family breakfasts, and new traditions that keep the season alive year after year. This holiday season, BRC residents and team members shared some of their favorite holiday memories and how they've found new ways to celebrate over time.



The Christmas of '69

Contributed by Ralph Compton

“Christmas 1969 was memorable for all 14 of us in our immediate family. My brother and his wife usually spent Christmas morning in Ohio before driving to join us in Virginia. That year, it snowed hard, and their drive took all day. By the time they arrived at 10:30 that night, the roads were so bad we couldn't leave. We all stayed over—every room and couch filled. Breakfast was eaten in shifts the next morning as we ran out of milk and eggs, but Mom made do. It wasn't perfect, but we'll never forget the togetherness of that Christmas.”

A Sleigh Ride to Remember

Contributed by Joanne Lam



“Growing up, we were fortunate to have neighbors who had horses. One day near Christmas, it snowed nearly three feet! Our neighbors hitched up their horses to a sleigh and invited us for a ride. I'll never forget the sound of those bells, the frosty breath of the horses, and the crisp wind on our faces. The road was hidden under a white blanket of snow, and I thought... what a perfect Christmas gift.”



A Tradition that Gives Back

Contributed by Jessica Fisher

“One of my family's favorite traditions is going to Christmas Wonderland at Creative Works Farm in Waynesboro each year. It's a fundraiser for Camp Light, a summer camp for children with special needs. We always have a wonderful time, and we love supporting a great cause while we enjoy ourselves.”



Sugar Cookies & Cedar Trees

Contributed by Lisa Shickel

“Growing up, Christmas always started with my mom’s baking. She made a bazillion kinds of cookies, but the sugar cookies were our favorite. My sisters and I would decorate cutouts with red, green, blue, and yellow icing, making wreaths, angels, stars—everything.

We also went to my grandparents’ farm in Mount Jackson to cut down our cedar Christmas tree every year. They looked perfect in the field, then huge and a little wonky once we got them home, but I loved them—sticky branches, homemade ornaments, and tinsel placed one strand at a time.

On Christmas Eve, after church, we always had shrimp, coleslaw, and Dad’s eggnog with a little rum and nutmeg. My favorite part was turning on his reel-to-reel tape player with Christmas music recorded from old LPs. Hearing that music was the true kickoff to Christmas for our family.”

Whether it’s a sleigh ride through the snow, a breakfast shared long after the holidays, or a fundraiser that warms more than just hearts, these stories remind us what matters most: connection. Traditions may change, but the feeling of togetherness never fades.



New Traditions, Same Togetherness

Contributed by Michele Dodrill

“When I was growing up, we always had Christmas breakfast at my Grandma Simmers’ house at 8:00 AM sharp. As we all grew up, got married, and had kids of our own, it got harder to gather on Christmas morning. So, we started a new tradition—‘Breakfast for Dinner’—sometime between January and March, when everyone’s schedules calm down. It’s a night filled with laughter and shared memories, and we look forward to it every year.”





When Purpose Takes the Lead

Steve & Ruth Watson Share Their Rhythm with BRC

At Bridgewater Retirement Community, “bring your purpose” is more than a phrase—it’s an invitation. And for Steve and Ruth Watson, purpose arrived with music playing and feet in motion.

The couple moved into The Grove last winter, unlocking their apartment door for the first time and declaring, without hesitation, “We’re home.” What they didn’t yet know was that their longtime love of ballroom dance, something they’d enjoyed for more than 25 years, would quickly become part of BRC’s heartbeat too.

Their passion for dance began long before arriving at BRC though. Steve started dancing in high school and college, while Ruth discovered it through college classes of her own. Decades later, they took ballroom lessons together, joined the Shenandoah chapter of USA Dance, and even helped start a dance club at Bridgewater College. “We’re not professionals,” Steve says. “We just love dancing. We enjoy it—and other people seem to enjoy it too.”

The idea to bring lessons to residents actually began on the prom dance floor.

After watching the Watsons glide around the room, several residents approached them with the same request: Could you teach us? Fitness Coordinator Donovan Schmude, who is on the prom committee this year, had the same thought. “We just wanted to get more people up dancing,” he says. “And dancing is great dual-task work—thinking, moving, reacting. It’s good for the brain and the body.”

When Donovan posted a beginner class on Wellzesta (BRC’s resident engagement app), the response shocked everyone. The first session filled almost immediately. “He didn’t expect that at all,” Ruth laughs. “But people were excited from the start.”

Steve and Ruth approached the classes with three simple goals: to have fun, be social, and only *then* learn a few steps. Most participants had never taken formal dance lessons. Several shared that dancing wasn’t allowed in their childhood homes or the churches they grew up in. One resident

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WHEN PURPOSE TAKES THE LEAD [continued]

only signed up to learn how to dance for his 90th birthday. Yet by the third class, the room looked completely transformed.

“The enthusiasm just kept growing,” Steve says. “People went from unsure to smiling, laughing, moving confidently. They wanted more before we even finished the last lesson.” Residents who had never danced before were suddenly counting steps out loud, practicing with neighbors, and asking when the next session would begin. “We can hardly walk down the hall now without someone mentioning it,” Ruth adds.

The lessons also awakened something familiar for residents who grew up dancing. “With my Italian background, dancing is just part of living,” shares Rose Wells. “Steve and Ruth made everything easy to follow, welcoming, and fun. It felt good to be in a room where everyone—all backgrounds, all levels, singles or couples—could learn together.”

Others, like Bud and Jane Branch, saw it as a chance to refresh skills they hadn’t used in years. “It was good exercise, too,” Bud says. “We were up on our feet for 45 minutes. Steve and Ruth are talented teachers, and we really appreciated them taking the time to work with us.”





Even Donovan, who attended as both a learner and partner in planning, found himself absorbing their teaching style. “They’re incredible,” he says. “Patient, clear, encouraging. They make people feel comfortable. And we’re hoping to



“ People went from unsure to smiling, laughing, moving confidently. They wanted more before we even finished the last lesson.”

– Steve Watson

offer more classes for residents and team members in the new year.”

In true BRC fashion, the lessons didn’t just teach dance—they built community. The Watsons still talk about one moment from prom: longtime resident Earle Fike, who arrived with a caregiver and was barely able to stand, insisted on dancing with Ruth. “I was just going to hold his hand,” she recalls. “But he stood up... and before we knew it, we were actually dancing!” It was his last prom before he passed, and the memory remains one of the most meaningful reminders of why movement matters.

As for what’s next? January will bring new sessions for residents, with special classes planned for team members who want to join the fun or prepare for prom. Donovan and Steve are even working on a small surprise performance for the big night (details are strictly under wraps).

No matter how lessons evolve, Steve and Ruth remain grounded in the same purpose they began with: having fun. “What matters most,” Steve says, “is that people laugh, move, and have fun together.” Ruth nods. “We’ve loved every moment. It feels good to bring a little joy to BRC.” And judging by the full Wellzesta calendar and hallway smiles, the entire community is more than ready to keep dancing.

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July 1, 2025 – October 31, 2025

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BRC deeply appreciates the contributions of each donor. We have made every effort to make this list complete and accurate. If you notice a mistake or omission, please accept our apologies and contact us at **540-828-2652**.



Walking Wonders is getting residents in nursing and memory support households up and moving—whether it’s a stroll through the village, a scavenger hunt, or even a walk across the street for lunch. This fitness team initiative is turning everyday moments into fresh-air adventures.

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Charlie Angersbach

Bob Atkins

Mary B. Atkins

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The *Bridge* committee would love your feedback! Email your thoughts on this edition to communicate@brcliving.org.

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first brushstroke

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