

CELEBRATE LIFE IN
JEFFERSON'S VIRGINIA

albemarle

A SENSE OF TIME

Early American Clocks

December 2020/January 2021 \$4.99



www.albemarle magazine.com

**SPECIAL FEATURE ONE SKETCH A DAY SELECT WORKS OF ARTIST MICHAEL FITTS:
A PEN AND PENCIL ACCOUNT OF THE PANDEMIC • HOLIDAY CHEER, PUT VIRGINIA
SPIRITS IN YOUR SEASON • CENTER FOR ADOLESCENT AND ADULT AUTISM
SERVICES • HANGOVER TRIVIA • TO A MOUSE**

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

The Center for Adolescent and Adult Autism Services Takes Shape



BY CATHY PURPLE CHERRY, AIA, FOUNDING PRINCIPAL OF PURPLE CHERRY ARCHITECTS

When you raise a child with autism, you learn to live in the moment. You can't think about the future, especially in the early years. You find yourself overwhelmed with just trying to figure out the day. And over time, you might look forward a bit. Before you know it, your child is an adult, and you worry what will happen when you're gone. Literally.

Every mother or father raising a child worries about their future. When a child struggles, these worries can be even bigger, if not simply huge. I remember my mother worrying about my brother with intellectual disabilities and his future without her. She worried about her other children too. And she worried that her other children would not have additional responsibilities beyond their own families.

When my adopted son on the autism spectrum was little, I wasn't worried about him knowing how to add two-digit

numbers. I was always looking years out. I credit my childhood experiences with my Down Syndrome brother for this different outlook. I was worried about my son's future. I focused on building his capacity to live as independently as possible. I remember making the skills list when he was about seven years old. Vacuuming, sweeping, emptying the dishwasher, taking out the trash, washing windows, raking leaves, folding laundry, grocery shopping, making simple meals. I could go on endlessly.

I wanted to allow every opportunity for my son to do things on his own. Things that seem so simple for us can be quite hard for people on the spectrum. Things that seem logical are not. When my son first bagged groceries, the bread was at the bottom of the bag squished by the milk jug. I had to teach basic things. When he tried to cut the lawn, he couldn't manage the riding mower for turns. So I took away the turns. He cut in circles. And why not? I had to learn

to shift my expectations. He taught me how to do this. He showed me that every child is different and capable in different ways. It was by no means easy. It took years. But he made me a better parent and an incredible advocate. And while he was doing this, he grew to become a responsible adult. Though he needs some supports, he has a job, a cat, and his own apartment. With Maryland State programs, at 29, he is independent to the best of his abilities.

This is why programs like the Virginia Institute of Autism (VIA) are so incredibly important and why they are so close to my heart. There are so many children and adults in the Charlottesville area with autism that need support, reinforcement, teaching, opportunity, advocacy, life, and social skills. So many parents need guidance, counseling, enlightenment, advocacy skills, respite, and hope. VIA exists to provide all of this. To help when the outlook seems overwhelming. To prepare their students and their par-



Cafe



Classroom

“We see the CAAAS project as a way of building a bridge to a more meaningful future for people with autism. This new facility will be a hub for social experiences, for job training, and for developing the skills of independent living. Those opportunities have been few and far between for people with autism in our community. It will be a huge benefit to the families we serve to have this great new space for their loved ones with autism to learn, to grow, and to belong. And the benefits aren’t just to our Adult program. Shifting our adolescent and adult services to CAAAS frees up space across all of our programs to get more people off our wait lists and provide them with essential services that will make a difference in their lives.”

—Ethan Long, PhD, BCBA,
President and CEO



Conference Room and Social Center

ents for independence, starting at a very young age. To allow kids to blossom where they are able and empower them to succeed by defining their abilities.

The new Center for Adolescent and Adult Autism Services (CAAAS), located at 491 Hillsdale Drive, is an exciting new step for VIA. It combines transitioning school-age adolescents with adult graduates. I’m so very proud to be involved as their architect of record. Located in the former home of The Center, the facility will be bright and welcoming. The building will house three large transitioning classrooms, a life-skills apartment, the VIABLE Ventures program, a teaching kitchen, a Cafe for interactive sales, a socials skills group room, and administrative offices. There will be job and life skill opportunities created for the students and adults with autism, including greeters, receptionists, coffee shop attendees, candle making, cooking, serving, hospitality skills, cleaning, and laundering. As the program



Community Garden and Outdoor Recreation

expands, new opportunities will be developed under VIABLE Ventures. This social impact program develops businesses specifically tailored to create gainful jobs for their adults in the program. The students and adults will need job opportunities in the surrounding community as well. With repetition, job skills can be obtained. With public interface, social skills can be developed. With time, individuals can become more independent.

Our special kids need more time. That's it. It's that simple. The time may be months, years, or a lifetime. Our responsibility is to support kids with autism spectrum disorder in finding their gifts and helping them be successful. And success is defined in innumerable ways. I remember having to rewire my thinking when my son was younger. Success for my son, Matthew, was not completing his homework but rather cooking eggs, dressing independently, and wrapping a gift. There are so many opportunities in every given day to learn a skill. These skills don't come easily. They don't manifest appropriately. So, they need time. And love. And patience. And expertise. This is what VIA has and gives. All of these. It's an amazing program with amazing staff.

It takes a village. I'm sure you've heard this before. Well, it's true. Autism is a lifetime disability. It is not curable. You can't heal it. And it presents in so many different ways. From high-functioning to severely impacted, these are the book-ends of a thousand different faces for this diagnosis. The Virginia Institute of Autism exists to help all of these faces and their families.

Born and raised in Virginia, **Cathy Purple Cherry** ultimately landed in Annapolis where she grew a large architectural firm specializing in high-end custom homes and estates. A talented architect, visionary, and three-dimensional thinker, Cathy is able to marry clients' dreams with the reality of the built environment. While Cathy revels in the intricate design opportunities presented by high-end residential architecture, she is equally passionate about her philanthropic efforts and her work serving the special needs community through the firm's Purposeful Architecture studio. An award-winning residential architecture and interior design firm specializing in exceptional homes and luxurious estates throughout the East Coast from Plymouth, MA to Warm Springs, VA, Cathy has grown her team two-fold in the past three years. Purple Cherry Architects truly loves the journey of bringing together their clients with stunning pieces of property where they can build the home of their dreams.

Purple Cherry Architects
 Purposeful Architecture
 434-245-2211 purplecherry.com



Apartment Living Concept



VIABLE Ventures



Nurse Office and Health Services

Q&A

With **Nicole Thomas, EdD,**
Director of Advancement



What brought you to the Virginia Institute of Autism?

I really enjoyed my time fundraising within the higher education space for the University of Virginia. I built lasting relationships and am proud of the impact UVA has across the world. For my next opportunity, I wanted to get to know my local community on a more personal level. VIA was a great fit with my background in education, and its mission truly touched me. Even in just a few short months, the families, staff, and volunteers have blown me away with their kindness, compassion, and motivation to provide effective services for our families challenged by autism in Charlottesville. I am thankful to be a part of the VIA team, and I am honored to share our story in an effort to secure support for our critical services.

Why is VIA developing The Center for Adolescent and Adult Autism Services?

Autism doesn't stop when an individual graduates from high school. For many of our young people, services become scarce, and funding for those services dries up after they pass school age and enter adulthood. That reality is so common that it has a name among parents of kids with autism; they call

it falling off the "autism cliff." As a result, adults with autism experience isolation and underemployment at far higher rates than the general population. VIA has the expertise to build services to provide employment opportunities, life-skills training, social connection, and behavioral therapies for adults with autism, but we have not had the space to grow that programming to serve more people. Until now.

How does this project connect to the overall goals of the organization?

The CAAAS is a culmination of everything VIA has done since its founding. We began as a school for kids with autism. Later, we added outpatient services and then an adult program. All of those programs are focused on enabling our students and clients and their families to lead fuller, richer lives—whether that involves learning how to communicate their needs or to achieve academic success, or even just to learn the basics of personal hygiene and self-care. The CAAAS will be a facility where we can focus all of those efforts

on building a lifetime of greater independence and greater social connection for our clients once they reach adulthood. It will be a vital community hub and a place where adults can experience social connection and social belonging.

This is a huge project to take on during COVID. Why now?

As every parent knows, the needs of our children haven't disappeared just because schools and businesses have shut down. The needs of parents of young adults with autism continue to grow—as do the numbers. For forty years, the number of children diagnosed has been growing steadily, and it still continues to grow. As those children age, increasing numbers are arriving at adulthood every year and falling off the services cliff. The answer to "why do this now?" is the same as it was when our founding families first created a school that could serve their children with autism because families need us to.

What are your fundraising needs?

We met our goal to purchase the building back in April. We're now fundraising to complete the renovation, and the \$250,000 grant from the Perry Foundation is a huge expression of support for the project and a big step toward reaching that goal. The grant comes with a 1:2 matching requirement, so as we reach out to the community to finish the funding, we want them to know that every dollar they contribute is being matched by fifty cents from the Perry Foundation grant. It's a great incentive for the community to get involved in this very exciting project.

Perry Foundation Grant Supports New Adult Services Center

With a recently-awarded grant for \$250,000 from the Perry Foundation, and with generous support from private donors, the Virginia Institute of Autism (VIA) is not just responding to the current pandemic; they're actively building for the future.

"The Perry Foundation has been an integral partner in helping our area non-profits grow," said Kelley MacDougall, a member of VIA's Board of Directors and the Capital Campaign Steering Committee. "VIA is proud to collaborate with Perry to realize the long-envisioned Center for Adolescent and Adult Autism Services."

The new Center will fill a substantial gap in services for people with autism, and it will do so at a crucial time. Rates of autism diagnosis have been rising for decades. The Centers for Disease Control announced earlier this year that the incidence of autism has now risen to 1 in every 54 children.

HOW CAN THE COMMUNITY HELP?

The grant from the Perry Foundation is helping move the new facility toward completion. The matching grant is intended to spur community engagement and new fundraising efforts for the project. The facility is scheduled to open its doors to teens and adults for programming in the spring of 2021, in time for Autism Awareness Month in April. VIA is a 501(c)3 organization. Tax-deductible donations will help people with autism across the spectrum, across the lifespan, and across Virginia. For more information, please visit the Virginia Institute of Autism at www.viaschool.org.