

Medical Treatment • Research • Rehabilitation

# Shepherd

Center Spinal Column®

## Portraits of Hope

Capturing Strength, Spirit, and Stories



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**About the Cover**  
YaMya Johnson, a multiple sclerosis patient at Shepherd Center, participated in the Portraits of Hope project.  
Photo by Michelle Carmona

**Letter from Jamie Shepherd**



Dear Readers,

Hope is a powerful force, and those familiar with Shepherd Center understand just how powerful it can be. It is especially important when patients and their families first arrive at Shepherd Center. It can take time to see improvements in a patient's medical condition, so it's crucial to inspire patients and their families with optimistic mindsets from the moment they arrive.

Our staff infuses hope in every interaction, from therapy sessions to outings to simple smiles in the hallways. We're equally indebted to our former patients, as well as patients and families who are further along in their Shepherd journey, for encouraging and uplifting those in the early days of their recovery. The first days of rehabilitation can feel overwhelming, and these patients and caregivers offer invaluable support and inspiration to those just starting their journey.

In this issue of *Spinal Column*, we celebrate those who instill hope in our patients. One captivating example is the Portraits of Hope project, which spotlights former patients, their families, and staff members through an impactful photo series. The portraits have already inspired hundreds of people, and are set to be on display for millions more. You can see the portraits for yourself on page 8.

On page 18, you'll meet Veronica Watts. A former Complex Concussion Clinic patient, Veronica is back to her government and advocacy work after being hit by a car in early 2024. Now, her advocacy work centers on pedestrian safety, something she hopes will protect people from accidents like the one that caused her injury.

Throughout this issue, you'll also find continued coverage of our 50th anniversary. Our staff and our wider community enjoyed celebrations big and small in August, marking five decades of Shepherd Center and the hope it has inspired for many.

Sending you hope and well-wishes for 2026,

*Jamie Shepherd*

Jamie Shepherd, MBA, MHA, FACHE  
President and Chief Executive Officer of Shepherd Center



Winter 2025 | Shepherd Center

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



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



Mykell Fegins from Georgia RSVP Clinic works on his goal of walking.

## The Most Wonderful Time of the Year

**It's not too late to place your order for Pecans on Peachtree!** For over 40 years, Pecans on Peachtree has marked the start of the holiday season at Shepherd Center. Running from early November to Jan. 31, the fundraiser serves as the perfect opportunity to stock up on fresh pecans for holiday baking, as well as treats like chocolate-covered pecans and pralines.

Through this year's new supplier, Ellis Bros. Pecans, Shepherd Center is pleased to include new products and pricing for items such as gift boxes and flavorful selections of pecan bags and tins.

Ellis Bros. Pecans, located in Vienna, Georgia, has been growing pecans since 1944. Known for their "We're Nuts!" billboards off I-75, the multi-generational family business harvests between late-September and December each year, ensuring fresh pecans in time for the holidays.

To order yours, or to learn more about corporate orders, visit [pecansonpeachtree.org](http://pecansonpeachtree.org).



## Georgia RSVP Clinic Celebrates Five Years

### Nonprofit offers outpatient rehab for uninsured patients with spinal cord injuries and brain injuries

Many uninsured and underinsured patients who sustain a spinal cord injury or brain injury don't receive the rehabilitation, mobility devices and adaptive technology, or transition support they need after injury.

That's where Georgia Rehabilitation Services Volunteer Partnership (RSVP) Clinic comes in.

Georgia RSVP Clinic offers free, high-quality outpatient rehabilitation services to uninsured and underinsured people recovering from brain injury, stroke, or spinal cord injury. The group takes a comprehensive, holistic approach to rehabilitation — offering clinical services like physical therapy and occupational therapy and support resources for transportation, housing, and primary medical care. This year, the clinic celebrates its fifth anniversary.

"[This year] is a celebration for being able to serve 100 people who would not have gotten services and the outcomes that

we're able to provide," says Susan Johnson, MA, CCC-SLP, founder of Georgia RSVP Clinic. "It's a celebration of what we've been able to accomplish for people."

The group has expanded its team this year, hiring a community resource coordinator, volunteer recruiter, and bringing on new executive director, Viktoriya Antonov, MS OTR/L. Looking ahead, Johnson and Antonov hope to raise awareness of the challenges faced by uninsured and underinsured individuals, particularly those with catastrophic spinal cord or brain injuries, and to advocate for policy changes with lawmakers. Above all, they remain steadfast in ensuring every person they reach receives compassionate care, along with hope and the promise of a meaningful quality of life.

To volunteer with Georgia RSVP Clinic, refer a client, or learn more, visit [georgiarsvpclinic.org](http://georgiarsvpclinic.org) or follow it on social media.

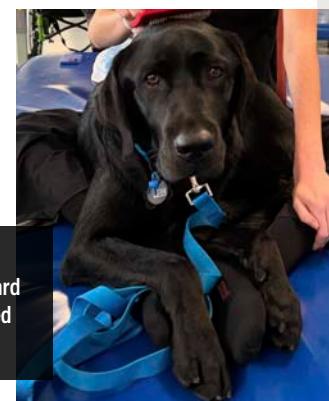
## Pippy, Steffi, and Jaxx Join Facility Dog Team

Ask Shepherd Center patients about their care team, and you may find some people's favorite teammates walk on four legs instead of two and have a wagging tail and a shiny coat of fur.

Facility dogs are an integral part of patient care at Shepherd, and in May, the dogs welcomed two new members to their ranks, bringing the total up to seven. Kimberly Wood, SLP, a speech language pathologist who works in Shepherd's inpatient and outpatient programs, now also serves as a handler for Pippy, Shepherd's first female facility dog. Julie Shepherd, CCM, LMSW, CLCP, director of founding family relations and canine therapy program lead, now handles Jaxx.

In August, Shepherd welcomed its second female facility dog, Steffi II. Steffi works alongside her handler, Juliana Heimann, CTRS, a recreation therapist.

The dogs are much more than cute therapy companions. Pippy, Steffi, and Jaxx received extensive training, and each know dozens of commands. All three dogs completed two years of training through Canine Companions, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that provides highly trained service dogs to people with disabilities. Since its founding in 1975, Canine Companions dogs and all follow-up services have been provided at no cost to their clients. Thank you to Canine Companions for their partnership and for training Shepherd's beloved facility dogs.



(Clockwise, from left)  
Steffi, Pippy, and Jaxx are hard at work. The new dogs joined the team last summer.

## ShepherdCares Shows School Spirit

In September, Shepherd Center's hallways turned into something out of a yearbook. Cards bearing the superlatives "Best Dressed," "Most Athletic," and "Most Likely to Succeed" popped up on doors throughout the hospital, showing employee participation in the organization's annual employee giving campaign.

This year's school spirit-inspired campaign, "ShepherdCares Class of 2026," raised funds for the Sarah Morrison Staff Support Fund and new sleeper sofas in the Irene and George Woodruff Family Residence Center. The support fund provides emergency financial support for employees navigating unexpected crises, like flooding or house fires, while the new sleeper sofas will enhance the patient and family experience.

"We know that loved ones play an important role in the rehabilitation journey," says Jamie Shepherd, MBA,

MHA, FACHE, Shepherd Center's president and chief executive officer. "Ensuring their comfort while they stay in our housing allows them to fully engage in the experience and focus on their time together at Shepherd Center."

Led by Alex Seblatnigg, CAVS, CPXP, the director of volunteer services and internal engagement, this year's campaign raised \$223,241, well over the \$200,000 goal. The funds will be split evenly between the staff support fund and the sleeper sofas.

"The success of this campaign can be attributed to the enthusiasm of our ambassadors and the generous spirit of Shepherd Center employees," Seblatnigg says. "Every department in the organization supports this campaign — a true representation of the special culture that thrives within our walls."



Campaign ambassadors reveal this year's fundraising total.

# Marking Milestones

## Anniversary Traditions at Shepherd Center



By Erin Kenney

At Shepherd Center, milestones are a big deal. When patients reach a goal in recovery, it's celebrated. When they're preparing to return home after rehabilitation, they gather with their care team, friends, family, and other patients to commemorate how far they've come. It only makes sense that Shepherd Center's enthusiasm for celebrating achievements extends beyond patient floors.

Shepherd Center's anniversary has been celebrated since the early days — in fact, what's now *Spinal Column* magazine evolved from a newsletter first sent out in August 1976, commemorating Shepherd's first year of serving patients. Over time, the anniversary, and eventually, "Anniversary Week," have expanded to celebrate patients, staff, and the community overall. And for this year's major milestone, celebrations were extra special.



At the center-wide employee luncheon on Aug. 18, staff members enjoyed a barbecue lunch and received some 50th anniversary swag. Lunches at Peachtree Park, home of the SHARE Military Initiative and the Complex

Concussion Clinic, as well as at Shepherd Pathways, ensured all employees got to celebrate the anniversary.

Additionally, anniversary week is a time to celebrate employee tenure — the average length of service at Shepherd is



8.4 years, and each August, those celebrating anniversaries in increments of five are invited to the milestone luncheon. This year, 237 employees celebrated a major anniversary, with 14 celebrating 35 years of service or more.

"I didn't plan to be at Shepherd for 25 years. It's like a good friendship or marriage — you just stay in it," says attendee, Dawn Pennington, a data quality analyst on the patient financial services team. "I was very happy to have that opportunity to see colleagues [celebrating] their 5-year anniversary and those [celebrating] their 25-year anniversary like me."



This year's anniversary week also brought some extra festivities, including burying Shepherd Center's 50th anniversary time capsule. At a short ceremony, hospital co-founder Alana Shepherd spoke about the hospital's history and invited attendees to imagine what the next 50 years will bring. Jamie Shepherd, MBA, MHA, FACHE, Shepherd Center's president and chief executive officer, also spoke about objects included in the capsule and how future Shepherd patients and employees may react to them.

Another standout event from anniversary week was the 50th anniversary party at the Atlanta History Center. With special guests like Georgia Governor and First Lady Brian and Marty Kemp, as well as other state leaders, former patients, Shepherd staff who've worked at the hospital



(Clockwise from top left) The light-up 50th anniversary sign has made appearances at events throughout the year.

- At the center-wide lunch, items from the 50th anniversary time capsule were on display for staff. ► Staff enjoyed 50th anniversary festivities at the center-wide lunch on Aug. 18.
- Anniversary week celebrations paid tribute to the hospital and its co-founders, including Dr. David Apple. Dr. Apple and his family attended the party at the Atlanta History Center.
- The party at the Atlanta History Center showcased Shepherd Center's impact on the city and the state of Georgia. Gov. Brian Kemp, pictured with hospital co-founder Alana Shepherd, spoke at the event.

Photos by Bita Honarvar and William Twitty

for over 35 years, and board members, the party showcased Shepherd's widespread impact and influence on the state of Georgia and the city of Atlanta.

The city and state, along with Fulton County, also acknowledged Shepherd Center on formal recognition days throughout the year. Other influential Georgia healthcare facilities, businesses, and organizations joined in on the celebration, sharing anniversary well-wishes on social media (featured on page 37). Dignitaries, including Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens and Georgia Sen. Raphael Warnock, also sent messages of congratulations.

Even as Shepherd Center closes the chapter on its 50th year, celebrating milestones will continue — cheering on patients at events like Project Rollway, gathering in therapy gyms for patient graduations, sharing a slice of cake for employee "workiversaries," and busting out dance moves at The Legendary Party. With resilient patients, unwavering staff, and a steadfast community, there's never a shortage of milestones to celebrate.

# A New Home for Best Health and Wellness Program

## Accessible Fitness Classes Open for Registration



(Left) A patient and physical therapist attend the inpatient wellness class.  
► Patrick Jones attends the adaptive strength class.

It's Wednesday afternoon in the Best Health Suite. A playlist shuffles through Beyoncé, 50 Cent, and Usher. And Alexandra "Allie" Juarez, EP, RYT-200 HR certified yoga instructor, and Patrick Jones are getting in a workout.

Allie leads the Best Health and Wellness Program's weekly adaptive strength training course. One of three weekly in-person offerings from the Best Health and Wellness Program, the strength class is open to patients and community members, providing access to professional fitness and health and wellness support in a fully accessible setting.

Since sustaining a spinal cord injury in 2017, Patrick has completed a variety of rehabilitation programs at Shepherd Center and beyond: inpatient therapy, the Spinal Cord Injury Day Program, Beyond Therapy®, and rehab at the Veterans Affairs hospital in Augusta, Georgia. He discovered the Best Health and Wellness Program's class listings online and has made them part of his routine.

"Even [with my background as a trainer], a lot of stuff Allie shows me makes me go, 'Oh, I didn't know that,'" says Patrick, who was an avid runner and personal trainer prior to his injury. "The classes are fun, and I enjoy it. And I learn something new every time."

The program also offers weekly inpatient classes. These classes are offered in-person as well as pre-recorded and can be streamed anytime, anywhere around the hospital. Marina Moldavskiy, ACRP-CP, Shepherd's tele-wellness program manager and exercise

physiologist, says this allows patients across injury levels and programs to participate in class together. The pre-recorded classes offer another accessibility benefit — subtitles allow patients who are hard of hearing or who don't speak English to engage in real time, without delays from using an interpreter.

"These classes allow patients with a variety of needs to participate in a real-time fitness class with other patients from around the hospital," Moldavskiy says.

"And because the courses are pre-recorded and available on demand, patients off-site at the SHARE Military Initiative or Shepherd Pathways can also engage. Patients who aren't able to leave their rooms can engage. Patients can then transition to participating in these classes upon returning home, which is really great!"

Classes recorded through the Best Health and Wellness Program are available on demand via an online platform. Access is free for Shepherd Center patients, ensuring that even once they return home, they have access to high-quality, expert-led classes. Anyone can subscribe to the platform to access the virtual content. For assistance signing up, please email [marina.moldavskiy@shepherd.org](mailto:marina.moldavskiy@shepherd.org).



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## Fitness Class Schedule

Mondays  
11 a.m. to 12 p.m.  
Adaptive  
Cardio Class

Wednesdays  
1 to 2 p.m.  
Adaptive  
Strength Class



Fridays  
10 to 11 a.m.  
Adaptive  
Yoga Class

Register today at [shepherd.org/events](http://shepherd.org/events). The first class is complimentary, with subsequent classes at \$25 each. For any questions, please e-mail [marina.moldavskiy@shepherd.org](mailto:marina.moldavskiy@shepherd.org).

# Above and Beyond

Brain Injury Unit Secretary Matilda Lamar-Reed Supports Patients In and Outside of Her Role

Interview by Erin Kenney

### What is your role at Shepherd, and how long have you been here?

I've been at Shepherd for nine years as a unit secretary. What drew me to Shepherd was my mother, who had a brain injury. She passed away in 2021. I got to see all those different aspects of living with someone with a brain injury and working with someone with a brain injury. It's had a big impact on my family. [Now] I listen to the patients, who can be having it tough, and you try to be here and be positive for them. That's really why I came here to work.

### What does a typical day in your role look like?

Sometimes, it starts out very smooth and easy. But when you log in to the computer and get orders where you have to call different places, like [Piedmont Atlanta Hospital], to schedule consultations and procedures for different patients, it can get busy. It can be very hard to schedule appointments — sometimes outside clinicians have room for 20 appointments, and I'm the 21st person to call. Sometimes you don't know how long it will take to get an appointment for a procedure, but one thing I do is call every day. Even if they say it will be a week, I'll call every day to see if there's been a cancellation or another way to fit in one of our patients. We also work closely with case managers, for example, if we have a discharge at 6 a.m., case managers won't be here at 6 a.m., so they leave packages for me to give to the ambulance driver, to the patient's family, to be sent to the patient's home, etc.

### You're known for coordinating Atlanta Police Department visits for patients who are police officers. How did that start?

My dad was an Atlanta police officer. So, people will come to me and say, "Matilda, we have an officer here. Maybe you can talk to the family and let them know how Shepherd works, what we're doing, and what's going to happen." Some of the officers are patients far from home, nowhere near home, and they want an officer to visit them and say, "Hey, that's my brother. They know what I've been through." So, I have a contact at APD, and we let him know what we need and when. Sometimes patients may want to see a chaplain — we have our own chaplains [at Shepherd], but they may feel more comfortable with the police chaplain. Or some officers may come by on their bikes for the patient to see. The visiting officers want to support our patients — they'll do anything for them.

### In addition to coordinating the officer visits, you do some volunteer work at the hospital — what does that look like?

In order to be in my motorcycle club, you have to do volunteer service. So, for mine, I come to Shepherd Center, pick a patient that's in need, and do something for them. We do a



big thing for Christmas — we've done that for the last six years. And the patient isn't necessarily in my unit — they can be anywhere. If someone says to me, "Hey, we have this guy on my floor who needs a little help," we'll do something for them and their family. We've done gifts, given custom helmets, and thrown pizza parties.

### What is your favorite part of working at Shepherd Center?

I have some wonderful, wonderful coworkers. When I see myself all backed up and the phones are ringing, and the doorbell is ringing — because we're a locked unit, and not everyone can enter and exit — my coworkers are a big, big help. They're always willing to step in.

Responses have been edited for length and clarity.

Years at Shepherd: 9

#### Training

- Secretary Duties, The Atlanta College of Medical and Dental Careers

#### Fun Facts

- Matilda is a motorcycle enthusiast.
- She is an avid Disney fan, with Mickey Mouse being her favorite.
- She is a Barbie doll collector and has over 100 Barbies!

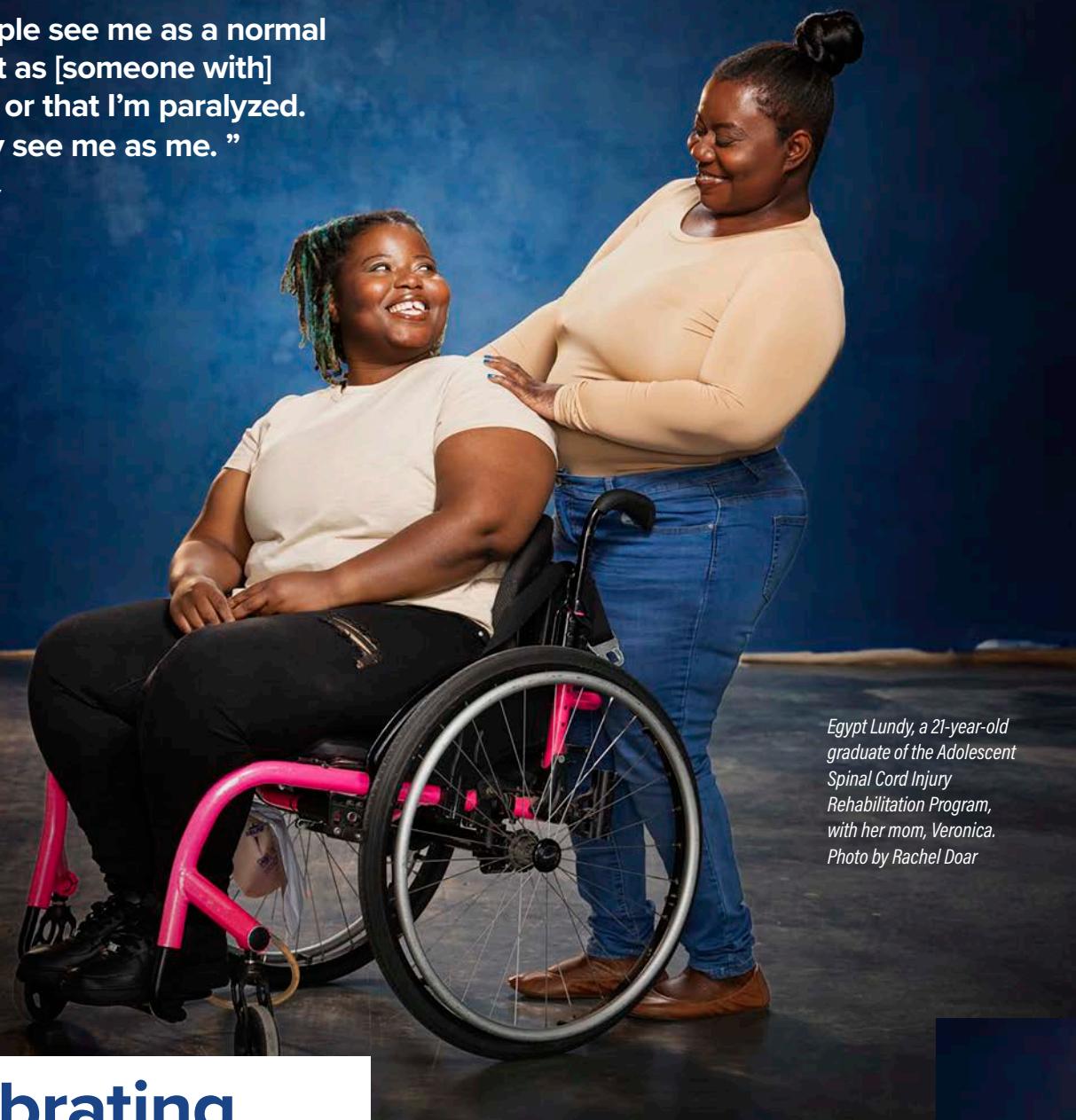


# Portraits of Hope

Capturing Strength, Spirit,  
and Story in Photos

**“I hope people see me as a normal person, not as [someone with] a disability or that I’m paralyzed. I hope they see me as me.”**

— Egypt Lundy



*Egypt Lundy, a 21-year-old graduate of the Adolescent Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation Program, with her mom, Veronica. Photo by Rachel Doar*

## ‘Celebrating One Another’

Most days, getting off the elevator on the 10th floor of the Marcus Center for Advanced Rehabilitation might feel like you’ve taken a wrong turn. The floor is only a shell, with bare concrete floors stretching to the exterior walls of the building, waiting to one day turn into office space, research labs, or an outpatient clinic. But for five days this spring, the 10th floor came to life.

Music bumping, dozens of artists — photographers, production assistants, hair and make-up specialists — zipping across the floor, camera flashes bouncing off 12-foot backdrops. The blank space, it turns out, is the perfect setting for a photoshoot.

The 10th floor was home base for Portraits of Hope, a photo project spearheaded by producer Sarah Howell and photographer Stephanie Eley, known as Eley. Portraits of Hope celebrates the courage, resilience, and individuality of Shepherd Center patients. Hospital staff nominated patients from across

treatment programs, who were then invited, along with their families, friends, and Shepherd staff members, to take part in a professional photoshoot, complete with hair and makeup, personalized playlists and photo sessions, and an opportunity to share their stories.

For Sarah, a patient in Shepherd’s Andrew C. Carlos Multiple Sclerosis Institute, creating the portraits was her way of giving back.

“Some patients come back and volunteer, some do advocacy work, some raise money,” she says. “What I know how to do is organize photo shoots.”

Sarah met Eley at an American Photographic Artists (APA) Atlanta event, where Eley mentioned taking photos at Shepherd Center. Sarah told her about her idea for Portraits of Hope, they shared it with Chris Walker, Shepherd’s director of digital strategy and marketing, and from there, the idea took on a life of its own.



*Mark Quick, a longtime Atlanta fire lieutenant, completed rehab at Shepherd for brain and spinal cord injuries. Photo by Steph Heath*



*Married couple Jamie and Justin McLarty came to Shepherd Center after surviving a house fire. Photo by Rachel Doar*

In addition to spotlighting the resilience and tenacity of Shepherd Center patients, the project presented emerging photographers in the Atlanta area with an opportunity to hone their skills. “We focused on emerging photographers, so people at the beginnings of their careers — primarily women and people of color who don’t always get opportunities of this scale early in their journey — and they’ve been incredible,” Sarah says.

The project culminated in a gallery opening in July, where the photographers, patients, their families, Shepherd staff

members, and other community members got to see the portraits on display at the Marcus Center for Advanced Rehabilitation. Since then, the portraits have traveled to the Atlanta History Center for the hospital’s 50th anniversary celebration, and in fall 2026, the portraits will be on display for three months at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, where 26 million travelers are expected to pass through.

“I’m hoping that the takeaway from individuals seeing the final project is a space where we are celebrating one another,” Eley says.

**“I hope [people] see that anything is possible, and attitude makes a difference... we can always celebrate our milestones, our progress, and each other.”**

— Jamie Matos



*Jamie Matos (left) with Kimberly Emmanuel, her mentor from the Amputee Coalition. Photo by Michelle Carmona*

**“Hope for me means that all of the people I know who are struggling with all the problems that I’ve been struggling with... will get the help and finally... feel better about their lives.”**

## **Bob Suter**

*Graduate, SHARE Military Initiative*

Bob Suter is a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, nurse, dog trainer, and avid reader who served three tours in Iraq. During his service, he sustained multiple traumatic brain injuries and spinal injuries, later compounded by PTSD. For years, he endured symptoms like dizziness, vision issues, and emotional dysregulation — what he describes as “white-knuckling life.”

His turning point came when the emotional toll became too heavy to ignore. “I couldn’t stop crying,” he recalls. “That’s when I knew something was really wrong.”

In 2022, Bob enrolled in the SHARE Military Initiative at Shepherd Center. SHARE helped him slow down, shift his mindset, and gain tools to manage his physical and mental health.

Today, Bob is a nurse on Shepherd’s Acquired Brain Injury Unit and gives back through his work with Shepherd’s Men. His journey has come full circle, from seeking help to becoming a source of support and hope for others on a similar path.

### **About the Portrait**

Bob (left) is featured with his close friend and fellow veteran, Adam Del Priore, and he titled his portrait “Thank You.” Photo by Immanuel Laidlaw



## **YaMya Johnson**

*Patient, Andrew C. Carlos  
Multiple Sclerosis Institute*

YaMya Johnson has been a patient at Shepherd Center for three years. She describes Shepherd Center as her “happy place,” where the compassionate staff and personalized attention have made a profound difference in her journey. YaMya’s portrait reflects her story of transformation and resilience. Inspired by childhood memories of watching caterpillars turn into butterflies, the portrait symbolizes the inner beauty and strength that defines her.

Reflecting on her experience, YaMya says her time at Shepherd has nurtured not only her physical well-being but also her kindness and compassion. The supportive environment has inspired her to spread positivity and be a source of encouragement for others. To those facing their own struggles, YaMya’s message is one of resilience and gratitude: stay strong, focus on positive thoughts, practice daily gratitude, and be your own cheerleader.

### **About the Portrait**

YaMya titled her portrait “Beautiful Butterfly.”  
Photo by Michelle Carmona

**“Hope means to me [that] better days are ahead. It gives you energy and enthusiasm to look forward to the next day.”**





## Roberto Jimenez

*Graduate, Comprehensive Rehabilitation Program*

Roberto Jimenez began his rehabilitation journey at Shepherd Center in November 2023 after a forklift accident that caused incomplete paraplegia and below-the-knee amputation. He spent 10 months as an inpatient at Shepherd Center, participating in daily therapy sessions before continuing outpatient therapy.

Roberto hopes his portrait conveys a message of bravery, showing that while fear is real, pushing through it is possible. He wants his story to inspire confidence and hope in others facing difficult challenges. For him, hope means believing in progress beyond grim predictions and meeting challenges with faith, work, and self-trust.

To others on similar journeys, Roberto's message is clear: fight relentlessly, believe in your strength, and maintain positive self-talk to overcome adversity. He expresses heartfelt gratitude for the Shepherd Center community for its expert care and the encouragement from staff, fellow patients, and family that made his recovery possible.

### **About the Portrait**

*Roberto titled his portrait "I Leg Rob." Photo by Eley*

**"If you believe in a higher up and you do pray, you have to remember you can't just pray on it and not act on it. You have to put in some work and meet Him halfway in order for [your goals] to happen."**



## Josh Dowd

*Graduate, Brain Injury Rehabilitation Program*

Josh Dowd offers a joyful and hopeful outlook on life after sustaining a traumatic brain injury during an attack in 2021. Josh was in a minimally conscious state for nearly three weeks. Given the severity of his injury and his remarkable progress, those around him regard Josh as a true medical miracle.

Josh deeply values the close friendships that he credits with saving his life during difficult times. His recovery has been a steady journey, with the goal of walking independently again. Embracing resilience and humor, Josh's portrait reflects his personal growth and determination.

### **About the Portrait**

*Josh is featured with paramedic Jacqueline Wabler, occupational therapist Jena Kelly, speech-language pathologist Maddie Earley-Pizarek, and chiropractor Ryan Cedermark. He titled his portrait "Josh's Journey." Photo by Rowin Hernandez*

**"I just want people to be happy about something in their life... it's all about what makes you happy."**

## Jennifer Davis

Graduate, Spinal Cord Injury  
Rehabilitation Program

Jennifer Davis, a 75-year-old realtor from Powder Springs, Georgia, began her journey at Shepherd Center after sustaining a spinal cord injury in July 2023. Before her injury, Jennifer led an active lifestyle, riding horses, hiking, and staying on the go. Following the accident, she spent five and a half months as an inpatient at Shepherd Center and continues to return for outpatient therapy.

Her portrait reflects her belief that no matter your age or circumstances, hope and resilience are always possible. For Jennifer, healing was more than physical recovery — it meant accepting change, staying grateful, and drawing strength from her support system.

While a photo can't fully capture her sense of humor or quick adaptability, Jennifer hopes people see in her portrait a woman who embraces life with strength and purpose. Her message to others facing similar challenges: protect your mental health, take it one day at a time, and surround yourself with people who lift you up.

### About the Portrait

Jennifer titled her portrait "Hope Has No Boundaries or Age Limits." Photo by Sky Meeks

**"Hope means that you  
don't ever give up.  
You don't ever say,  
'That's it, I quit.'"**



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**APA Production**  
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**Photographer**  
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# Turning Tragedy into Action



After sustaining traumatic injuries from being hit by a car and losing someone close to her, Veronica Watts turned her experience into action through advocacy.

By Damjana Alverson

## Veronica Watts, 28, is a passionate communicator and advocate at heart.

After studying international affairs and human rights at the University of Georgia, she worked as a legislative assistant at the Georgia State Capitol and then as an assistant director of state affairs with Emory University. Her path has always involved advocating for healthcare and education through policy and bringing people together.

On Saturday, Feb. 9, 2024, Veronica experienced something that would change her life and make her an even fiercer advocate for those who need it most. While walking home in Atlanta, she crossed a large intersection.

"I started to walk while the pedestrian light was flashing, and a car crashed into me. I smashed my head on the windshield. The driver braked, and I was thrown 38 feet while my face skid across the concrete," Veronica recalls.

Eight hours later, Veronica woke up at Grady Memorial Hospital with a tube in her throat. Bones in her face and her teeth were broken, and she had sustained a mild traumatic brain injury, commonly called a concussion.

When the head is hit hard enough, the brain can be shaken around inside the skull. This movement can cause changes to how brain cells function and communicate. In Veronica's case, this led to general memory and word memory loss, migraines, sensitivity to light and sound, and motion sickness. The nerves that connect her eyes and ears to her brain were also impacted during the crash.

Veronica spent five days at Grady. Her mom, Laena Karnstedt, a doctor, recognized that she needed specialized care to continue to progress. After researching several programs, she decided the best place for Veronica was Shepherd Center's Complex Concussion Clinic (CCC).

From the end of February through May 2024, Veronica attended occupational, speech, and physical therapy at the CCC. Among other goals, she wanted to be able to attend a loud live music show, hike, and use a bright computer screen or go to a grocery store without wearing sunglasses.

"I can go on and on about how grateful I am that my mom pushed me to go to the CCC," Veronica says. "They were experts. It wasn't as much, 'This is the plan and how we're doing it,' but more, 'What do you need, and we'll go from there.' They put lots of emphasis on you being your own person and not grouping everyone into one way of doing things."

In speech therapy, Veronica worked on memory activities and communication. Occupational therapy focused on vision therapy. As she puts it, "We were literally exercising my eyeballs. Moving left to right to up and down." Physical therapy was hands-on and offered some unique experiences.

"I was really impressed by some of the technology there. There was this balance machine. I remember being like, 'What the heck is this giant circular thing in the corner? Woah!'" she laughs. "I've been in PT before, but not anything like this."

As Veronica progressed, another unthinkable event happened. Tragically, her mom Laena passed away unexpectedly.

"I was in the bathroom at the CCC when I found out my mom died," she recalls. "I was with three of my therapists and

every single one of them was so understanding. We were able to work through both grief and rehabilitation therapy. That's not their expertise, but in a way, it helped me not only heal in my injury, but also my grief. It was hard, but every time I went in the CCC, everybody was really so kind."

Veronica graduated from Shepherd's program and put her energy into healing from grief. Ever the advocate, she also engrossed herself in research on pedestrian and cyclist safety in Georgia.

**“** My dream is to work with experts to create and run mental health programs where people can feel safe to be vulnerable. **”**

"Every part of the system that was supposed to help me in cases like this let me down. This is still considered only a traffic violation," she explains.

She decided to create a resolution in partnership with a Georgia senator and lawyers at the Georgia State Capitol. While the resolution was not prioritized during this cycle, Veronica plans to continue the conversation about pedestrian and cyclist safety so that it gains traction.

"My dream is to work with experts to create and run mental health programs where people can feel safe to be vulnerable," she says. "Whether that's through creating connections or helping enact policy, I want to improve people's opportunities to grow and flourish."

Today, Veronica says she's fully healed from her traumatic injury symptoms. She is currently attending the University of Toronto, pursuing a master's degree in social justice education and development, policy, and power.

"A lot of really life-changing things happened to me in a short time. It was a frustrating and hard process, but it was worth pushing through," she says. "If I can use my story to help somebody who may not have the resources or the same mindset in a similar situation, that's what I want to be doing." \*



(Opposite page) Veronica Watts poses for a portrait near the crosswalk where she was hit by a car in February 2024. ▶ (above) Veronica and her mom, Laena. Tragically, Laena passed away unexpectedly during Veronica's rehabilitation at the Complex Concussion Clinic.

Photo by Jason Getz/The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

# Shepherd Alums: On a Mission

By Phillip Jordan and Erin Kenney

## Gloria Bone

Woodstock, Georgia

For Gloria Bone, managing her multiple sclerosis (MS) means maintaining independence. With help from Shepherd Center's Driving Evaluation and Rehabilitation Program, she's doing just that.

Gloria was diagnosed with MS about 15 years ago, and for the last 10 years, she's been going to Shepherd Center's Andrew C. Carlos Multiple Sclerosis Institute. There, she's participated in physical therapy and pain management, which have helped her maintain her active lifestyle as a retired IBM administrator and educator, mother, and dedicated volunteer in her community.

A few years ago, however, MS symptoms began interfering with Gloria's ability to drive. She started experiencing drop foot, characterized by difficulty lifting the front part of the foot. She made the decision to stop driving until her MS team referred her to the Driving Evaluation and Rehabilitation Program.

Gloria says that going into the program, she wasn't expecting to get on the road right away. But with the help of Lakisha Gray, MSOT, OTR/L, CDRS, an occupational therapist and certified driving rehabilitation specialist, she was back in the driver's seat. Gray taught Gloria how to use hand controls rather than foot pedals, allowing her to drive safely even when experiencing drop foot. She also helped Gloria manage her hesitation and anxiety toward getting back on the road.

After driving one of Shepherd Center's adaptive vans, Gloria moved on to driving her own vehicle using hand controls. She says Gray met her at her car dealership the day they installed the controls to do a test drive, followed by a couple of additional practice sessions.

"[The support] matters a lot for a person like me, coming in being an older woman who's used to doing what she pretty much wants to do," she says. "Lakisha is so soft-spoken and patient and encouraging ... I think that's part of her DNA."

It's been a little over two years since Gloria finished training in the program, and her ability to drive has made a world of difference. She credits Gray, as well as her family's support, for giving her freedom back.

"[Driving rehabilitation] has been the most beneficial to me. With the progression of the disease, and the inability to be as mobile as I want to be, [driver training] has provided me with the will and desire to continue to do things — it gives me joy to know this is one thing that hasn't been taken," she says.



## Kaeden Everhart

Statesville, North Carolina

The way to Kaeden Everhart's heart typically follows a path worn by horses, dirt bikes, and four-wheelers. Yes, it takes a lot to get Kaeden Everhart indoors. For anything other than a line dance, that is.

The 18-year-old from Statesville, N.C., goes by K-Lo among his friends at the rodeos where he ropes and the stables where he rides. Throughout high school, you'd just about always find a cowboy hat on his head and boots on his feet. Except for fall Friday nights when the talented cornerback donned a football helmet instead.

"If it's outdoors, I'm up for it," Kaeden says. "That's where I'm happy. That's where I'm me."

On Oct. 13, 2024, however, Kaeden sustained several serious injuries in a car accident, including a traumatic brain injury (TBI). His always-in-motion life came to a standstill, with a ventilator helping him breathe and operations to repair broken bones and brain bleeds.

The great outdoors seemed very far away.

Kaeden eventually transferred to Shepherd Center's Adolescent Rehabilitation Program. His care team set to work right away, getting him mobile again. As Kaeden's brain awakened, his therapists challenged the young athlete with activities to help him re-learn to think, speak, and walk.

As part of his therapy, Shepherd Center staff even took Kaeden to a horse ranch to practice his skills. And they spent extra time addressing his right-side motor deficits, a consequence of his TBI.

"That meant the most to me," Kaeden says. "They got my arm moving again. It doesn't straighten all the way, but I can use it for all the things I enjoy doing."

Indeed, he's back to roping and riding once again, his most important and peaceful pastimes. This fall, he's working at a ranch where he drives a horse wagon. The job is just a part-time one, as he's now in his freshman year at Mitchell Community College, with plans to transfer next year to North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. Kaeden's studying agribusiness with an eye, no surprise, toward a career that will keep him outdoors.

"God has something for me, ahead of me," Kaeden says. "I'm thankful I get to see what it is now."



## Jennifer Boston

Morrow, Georgia

Private First Class Jennifer Boston knew who she was pre-injury. Outgoing. Bubbly. Miss Get Things Done.

She designed clothing and shoe lines. She traveled extensively, especially as a civilian employee following her separation from the Army — to places like Japan, South Korea, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Cuba. And she wrote children's books, including one about relocating her family from Atlanta to Tokyo, written from the perspective of her then 5-year-old daughter, Juju.

Jennifer did not recognize who she was post-injury.

A traumatic brain injury she sustained while working in a civilian role in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, seemed to sap her of her confidence and her motor skills. She became reserved. Paranoid. At times, she wanted to disappear.

Thankfully, a referral led her to Shepherd Center's SHARE Military Initiative. The program serves military veterans, service members, and first responders with traumatic brain injuries and mental health concerns.

Jennifer was skeptical. Still guarded, still reticent to share. But, she soon felt at ease among the camaraderie of her fellow veterans.

"Next thing I know, I started opening up. We're all connected through our service, our injuries. Once I started participating, everyone was so supportive," Jennifer says.

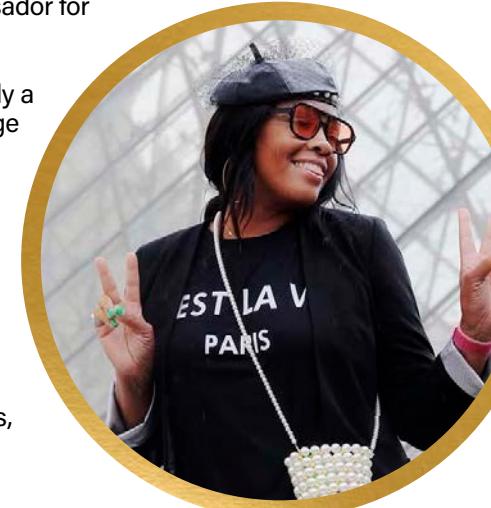
Similarly, Jennifer was unsure, at first, about all the activities available within SHARE. "I mean, it was awesome. But tai chi in the pool? Music classes? Yoga? Horticulture? What is this place? How is all this helping my condition?"

Slowly but surely, Jennifer realized the answer. Paired with her new treatment plan and therapy sessions, these activities were helping her heal. And showing her that living life was possible again.

"I went from totally withdrawn to fully immersed. From 'why' to 'wow,'" Jennifer recalls. "I started feeling like a person again. Not a shell, not an outcast."

She also considers herself a lifetime ambassador for SHARE.

"Our time in service is usually a small percentage of veterans' lives. We have families, we have lives post-service. We need to take care of ourselves, for the sake of those around us, too."



## Mike Hynes

Chantilly, Virginia

Upon Mike Hynes' arrival at Shepherd Center, he remembers meeting Elliot Scott, his charge nurse, as well as the other nurses on his floor.

"They were just super friendly and very smiley," he remembers. "Laughter was such a good medicine with them, just to distract from my world being turned upside down. But their professionalism and customer service was just as good as their personalities."

Mike was living in Virginia and working as a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent in 2024 when he was assaulted, resulting in a spinal cord injury (SCI). He was in the intensive care unit at the University of Virginia Health University Medical Center for a month before transferring to Shepherd Center.

During his inpatient therapy, Mike's girlfriend and sister took turns staying in family housing to support him. After inpatient therapy, Mike stayed for a month of outpatient therapy in the Spinal Cord Injury Day Program, which he said helped prepare him for his transition home.

"Not only was it nice to have that extra therapy, but [to stay in] housing, just to kind of transition to being on your own a little more, having a little kitchen to use ... it's a nice transition period," he says.

Mike also went on several recreation therapy outings, including a trip to an Atlanta Braves game and to the Atlanta FBI office, where he practiced navigating the building using his wheelchair. He also fondly remembers Tuesday night family dinners as a time to meet with other patients and their families.

After Day Program, Mike returned to Virginia, but his transition has not been without its challenges. Unfortunately, Mike couldn't return to his job as an FBI field agent, and the agency didn't have an available office position compatible with his qualifications and pay grade. He's also had to navigate a divorce.

But his friends and former FBI colleagues have continued to support him, coming by for visits or going out for dinner or a movie. Mike has also continued physical and occupational therapy, working to increase his strength and independence.

"It's been a rough year or two, but I think I'm out of the worst part," he says. "[My goals for the next year] are maybe finding another job, and continuing to build strength in therapy, and to continue to become more independent."



# A New Era for Junior Committee

## Inaugural Shepherd Social a Success



By Erin Kenney

Shepherd Center Junior Committee (SCJC) is gaining momentum. The group of young professionals has been an integral part of Shepherd's fundraising network for years, raising money for the hospital's Recreation Therapy Program. This September, the group held its inaugural Shepherd Social, a fundraiser and social event at Sweetwater Brewing Co. The event, in addition to being widely attended and exceeding its fundraising goal, signifies a new era for SCJC.

Virginia Brown and Lollie Davis joined the group in 2019. The pair became friends during their time at the University of Georgia and were eager to join the cause when they moved to Atlanta after graduation. But it wasn't long before the group's regular programming hit a roadblock.

"COVID happened and slowed things down," Virginia says. "It was almost like troubleshooting, coming back to being in-person and figuring out, 'OK, what is Junior Committee?' We took a lot of time to meet with members and see what people wanted more of."

Virginia and Lollie decided to apply for SCJC's executive committee, and began coordinating events for the group. They said members were looking for ways to connect with people – both other members of the group and Shepherd patients and families. So, they started hosting a yearly kickoff party at Buckhead Art and Company. They also started coordinating Shepherd Center tours for new members. And they began ironing out a signature event that would be a highlight of each SCJC fundraising season.

Photos by William Twitty



The signature event has gone through a few iterations, but Virginia and Lollie, now co-presidents of the group, say Shepherd Social is a culmination of the group's efforts from the last five years. In addition to fan favorites like a live band, a wine toss, a silent auction, and raffle prizes, two current Junior Committee members who are former Shepherd patients spoke at the event about the importance of recreation therapy.

"Our members were there, and they know the mission and they feel passionate about it," Virginia says. "But with the widespread word of mouth, we had some people come who were probably not as familiar [with Shepherd Center or the Recreation Therapy Program], and so it was really impactful for them to know, 'OK, this is what my ticket price went to. This is what we're doing.'"

Saylor Petrie, a special events associate in Shepherd's Foundation, echoed Virginia's sentiment, saying that the event helped introduce Shepherd to many new faces. She's also excited about the momentum the group has gained.

"They've been good at making it feel like a community that's for a purpose," she says. "Half of [the exec team] have some personal connection to Shepherd – whether they were a patient or know a family member or good friend who was a former patient. They just have a drive for the mission."

The Junior Committee raised \$24,244 at this year's Shepherd Social, with their annual fundraising total at



(Clockwise from opposite page) Attendees look at raffle prizes. SCJC members got raffle prizes donated from sponsors and other local businesses. Offerings included gift bags from brands like Onward Reserve and passes for yoga studios and golf courses. ► George Stradtman, Lollie Davis, Charlie Stewart, Virginia Brown, and JJ Brown serve on the committee's executive committee. ► Attendees enjoyed a wine toss game, another popular component of the event. ► Virginia Brown and Lollie Davis, pictured with Elise Otto, are co-presidents on the executive board. ► An attendee fills out a raffle ticket for a prize. Virginia says the Shepherd Social incorporated popular activities from other events, like Derby Day, to make sure attendees had a great time.

nearly \$40,000 as of Dec. 1. Next year's programming will begin in spring – to stay up to date on all the group's events and activities, **scan the QR code.** \*



# The Best Monday of the Year

## Five Memorable Moments from the Shepherd Center Cup Golf Tournament

From Derby Day to The Legendary Party, all of Shepherd Center's events received a 50th anniversary makeover this year. On Sept. 15 at Cherokee Town & Country Club, it was Shepherd Center Cup's turn.

Since 1984, the golf tournament has been one of the hospital's most beloved fundraising events. This year's iteration was no different, and the day felt extra special as participants and attendees celebrated five decades of Shepherd Center. From initial planning to post-event tallying, this year's event was unforgettable.

### Careful Preparations

The tournament committee began planning in January to ensure a successful event. Committee members included Miller Peer, who served as the event chair, as well as Paul Pilcher, Hays Evans, Street Nalley, David Mills, Woody Gayle, Craig Lucie, Andy Vance, and Bill Rasmussen. Under the committee's leadership, and with help from Porshia Lee, cause and community relations associate in Shepherd Center's Foundation, the tournament gathered 216 attendees and raised over \$240,000.

### Brunch Before Birdies

New to this year's tournament, players enjoyed an earlier start time, beating the mid-September heat and giving them a head start against rush hour traffic at the tournament's conclusion. Players were offered grab-and-go brunch items to snack on before the tournament's



Photos by William Twitty



(Clockwise from top) Members of the tournament host committee (from left) Andy Vance, Street Nalley, John Ross, Hays Evans, Bill Rasmussen, Miller Peer, Woody Gayle, Paul Pilcher, Craig Lucie (not pictured, David Mills). ▶ Attendees enjoyed a beautiful day on the course while raising money for a great cause. ▶ Alana Shepherd and Timothy Miller share a fist bump at the golf tournament.

shotgun start and once play commenced.

### An Iconic Performance

Before players headed to their starting holes, tenor Timothy Miller performed the national anthem and "God Bless America." Known for singing the latter during the seventh inning stretch at Atlanta Braves baseball games, Miller has a busy schedule performing in operas and with symphonies, on top of working as an assistant professor at Morehouse College. His performance



was a special treat for attendees, kicking off the tournament with a bang.

### A Mission Moment

During the event, Duane Morrow took a moment to share his Shepherd story. Duane was living in London when he sustained a spinal cord injury in 2004. He was airlifted back home to Atlanta and spent three months at Shepherd

Center for rehabilitation. Ever since, he's been a regular fixture at the hospital, getting involved as a volunteer, competing with the Alias Family Sports Teams, and serving as chairman of Shepherd's Advisory Board and a member of the board of trustees. Duane's story reminded attendees that their day on the green supported a good cause.

### Something to Look Back On

Attendees wanting to relive this year's tournament don't need to set up another tee time. Craig Lucie, a member of the planning committee and owner of marketing agency Lucie Content, brought along one of his company's videographers to capture footage from the day. The video shows off all the highlights from this year's tournament, combined with memorable moments that happen every day at Shepherd Center. To see the video, scan the QR code.\*



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# Conlan Company Supports Shepherd on the Green

Fourth annual tournament benefits Shepherd Center patients



The Conlan Company hosted its annual golf tournament benefiting Shepherd Center in September, bringing its total raised over the last four years to nearly one million dollars.

The construction company has a special connection to Shepherd Center. David Staley, the recently retired chief operating officer at Conlan, underwent rehabilitation for Guillain-Barré syndrome at the hospital. In appreciation of the care he received, the company launched the Conlan Cup to give back to the Shepherd community.

For the first three years of the tournament, the money raised benefited the Patient Assistance Fund, which helps cover basic needs that insurance does not pay for or that a patient cannot afford. This year, the funds raised will be split between the assistance fund and Shepherd's Recreation Therapy Program. The largest program of its kind in the country, the Recreation Therapy Program engages patients in adaptive



activities and community outings to prepare them for fulfilling, meaningful lives back home.

"The Conlan Cup embodies what it means to Prosper Together. It brings our employees, partners, and clients together to support a cause that impacts the lives of others," says Mark

(Clockwise from left) Conlan Company staff smile for a photo while managing check in at the tournament. ► (From left) Former patient Duane Morrow, Conlan Senior Vice President Mark Kunst, and Conlan Chief Executive Officer Gary Condron. ► Participants at the tournament practice their swings.

Kunst, vice president of the Conlan Company. "Hosting this event and witnessing this shared experience is a highlight of our year." \*

# RPM 9/11 5K Raises Over \$200,000 for SHARE

## Annual Memorial Run Unites Community

The RPM 9/11 5K has been a staple for the Brookhaven community for nearly 15 years, and this year's race proved to be no different. On Sept. 6, 300 runners participated in the race, with additional community members gathering to watch and cheer the runners on.

The race is named for Brookhaven native and Army service member Ryan Patrick Means, who died of cancer in 2009. The race also memorizes best friend, Adam White, who died during the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in New York City. To honor Ryan and Adam, the race raises money for Shepherd Center's SHARE Military Initiative, a donor-funded rehabilitation program for veterans, service members, and first responders with traumatic brain injuries and mental health concerns. Since the race's inception in 2011, it's raised over \$1.5 million for SHARE.

To learn more about Ryan's legacy or find race information for 2026, visit [rpm911race.org](http://rpm911race.org). \*

Participants take off from the starting line. 300 people took part in the race. ► (Below) Alfie Means (bottom row, far left) and his wife Liz Means (bottom row, far right) help organize the race each year to honor Alfie's late brother, Ryan.



# A Heart of Bronze

Former NFL Player Crafts Sculpture to Honor Patients, Staff



*(Clockwise from left)* Mike says the idea for the sculpture's heart shape came from Elizabeth Allen, who suggested it because of Alana Shepherd's trademark heart drawing next to her signature. ▶ Mike Hamby and Alana Shepherd look on as the sculpture is installed in The Home Depot Foundation Courtyard. ▶ Shepherd Center's facilities team and construction workers from Choate and T&D Machine Handling installed the sculpture, which was lifted into place by a crane. ▶ Mike's signature on the finished piece. He is an acclaimed sculptor and retired NFL player for the Buffalo Bills.

By Erin Kenney

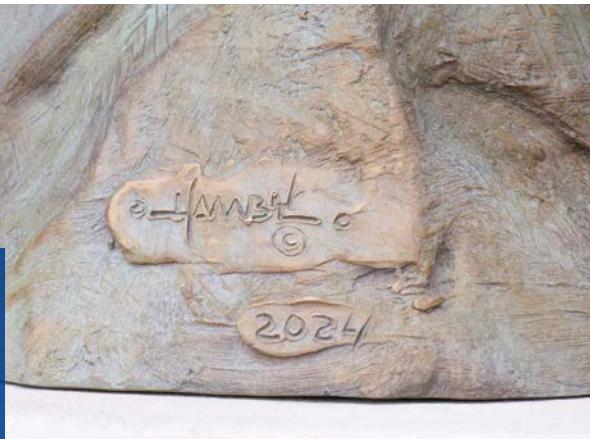
Mike Hamby, an acclaimed sculptor and retired NFL player for the Buffalo Bills, has crafted dozens of sculptures inspired by the American West, from monumental depictions of wildlife like elk and grizzlies to smaller figures featuring cowboys and Native Americans. But his favorite sculpture he's made is a little different from his usual style.

The piece — a blue-green heart forming out of a rocky foundation, with doves flying in and around it — stands proudly in The Home Depot Foundation Courtyard at Shepherd Center. Mike had crafted a bust of Carl that was on display at the service, and, impressed by his skill, Alana asked him to design a sculpture for Shepherd Center. She invited him for a tour of the hospital, which he says was hugely impactful.

Alana Shepherd, led him on a tour of the hospital.

Alana first met Mike at a funeral for a mutual friend, Carl Allen, a longtime supporter of Shepherd Center. Mike had crafted a bust of Carl that was on display at the service, and, impressed by his skill, Alana asked him to design a sculpture for Shepherd Center. She invited him for a tour of the hospital, which he says was hugely impactful.

Photos by Shepherd Staff



"My wife and I were very emotional through the whole experience, because of the great work they do for some of these folks that are struggling," he says. "[The patients] were so inspiring, because they were trying so hard. They had the fight within them."

Mike got to work on planning for the sculpture when a suggestion from Carl's wife, fellow Shepherd Center advocate and board of trustees member, Elizabeth Allen, helped him determine the defining element of the piece.

"Elizabeth said, 'Mike, if there's anything you can do with a heart, it would be awesome, because when Alana signs her name, she always draws a little heart,'" he remembers. "So, once she said that to me, it hit me immediately what I wanted to do."

Elizabeth's heart idea wasn't her only contribution to the sculpture project. She, along with her children and grandchildren, generously gifted the sculpture to Shepherd Center in honor of Carl. His legacy will live on through the sculpture, which will instill hope in countless future patients and visitors.

On March 25, 2025, the sculpture was installed in the courtyard, with the help of a crane to lift it into place. Mike was able to join for the installation.

"The foundry I use is in Loveland, Colorado, and they're called Art Castings of Colorado ... they had it shipped to Shepherd Center," he recalls. "We were there for the whole [installation] day, and it was an amazing install because of a lot of local folks that were helping. It went like clockwork... there are so many hands that touched that sculpture to give it its life."

He hopes the sculpture will honor staff and encourage patients during their recovery journey.

"It's one of my favorite pieces," he says. "It represents the patients, the doctors, and the therapists going in and out of the hospital. Especially with families going through such a hard time, [this piece is] to give them some hope." \*

# Taking a Swing for SHARE



## Buckhead Lions Club Annual Golf Tournament Supports Veterans and First Responders

The SHARE Military Initiative at Shepherd Center relies on the support of generous individuals and groups to provide life-changing care for military veterans, service members, and first responders with traumatic brain injuries and mental health concerns.

The Buckhead Lions Club is one of those generous supporters, and in its 2024 annual golf tournament, it raised \$50,000 for SHARE.

Under the leadership of David Merritt, the 2024 golf tournament chair, the tournament and post-tournament reception boasted a combined 100 attendees. The club extends a thank you to its main sponsor First Horizon Bank, lunch sponsor, Chick-fil-A, as well as silent auction sponsor, Miller Brothers Ltd.

The Buckhead Lions Club is one of Georgia's biggest chapters of Lions International, a service-based organization pro-

Buckhead Lions Club leaders and golf tournament sponsors pose with Shepherd Center leadership during the check presentation this spring. (From left) Jon Roxland, Cary Sullivan, Jamie Shepherd, David Merritt, Quill Healey, Steven St. Paul, and Gray Campbell.

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 **July 1, 2025 through Sept. 30, 2025**.



Anna and Hays Mershon have left their mark on another garden at Shepherd Center — they graciously donated this sculpture, *Solace*, by renowned sculptor David Landis, for the Hazel Family Garden at the Arthur M. Blank Family Residences, where it will be enjoyed by families for years to come.

**Don Alexander**  
Mr. John Hrom

**Gertrude "Trudy" Alexander**  
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**Jennifer Coleman**  
Ms. Irene Coleman



Former Shepherd patient Marlon Shepard (right) lives in the United Kingdom now, but on a recent visit to the States, he stopped by for a visit. Now an occupational therapist, he caught up with his former psychiatrist, John Lin, M.D., during his tour of Shepherd.

**Thomas "Tom" Cousins**  
Mrs. Alana S. Shepherd

**Sandy Ergas**  
Ms. Arbutus Blough  
Ms. Suzanne Catanese  
Mr. Howard Graitzer  
Mr. Karen Hurtack  
Mr. Rich Kamel  
Mr. and Mrs. Sandy Morrison

**Senator Hugh M. Gillis**  
Mr. and Mrs. Donald W.  
Gillis, Esq.

**Rodney Godwin**  
Mrs. Nancy D. Isenberg

**Janice Griffin**  
Mr. and Mrs. Jeff G. Griffin

**William Gurley**  
Mrs. Susie Gurley

**Joe N. Guy**  
Mr. C. Read Morton, Jr.

**Richard Haar**  
Mr. and Mrs. James H. Evans



A special thank you to barber Jalyn Sizemore (right) for stopping by to offer haircut tips to Elliott Scott, Chris Ready, and Brian Tanner, while giving patient Josh Harper a fresh haircut and shave.

**Commemorative  
Book Celebrates  
50 Years of  
Rebuilding  
Lives**

There is no shortage of monumental moments to celebrate from Shepherd's 50-year history. That's why the commemorative book, "Mission Moments," celebrates both the headline-making events from Shepherd's history and the everyday victories of patients, staff, caregivers, and volunteers. Order your copy today to reflect on Shepherd Center's first fifty years and to look ahead to its bright future.

**Order yours today!**

[Visit shepherd.org/mission-moments/](http://shepherd.org/mission-moments/)



## 2026 Facility Dog Calendar

In the 2026 facility dog calendar, the dogs explore the Marcus Center for Advanced Rehabilitation. Order yours today at [shepherd.org/about/shepherd-merch/](http://shepherd.org/about/shepherd-merch/).

**Jane Hailey**  
Mrs. Carolyn Caswell  
Mr. and Mrs. Dell B. Sikes

**Charlie Harrison**  
Mrs. Alana S. Shepherd

**Father Jim Harrison**  
Mrs. Alana S. Shepherd

**Nathan Andrew Hurst**  
Mrs. Linda R. Hudson

**Gleaton Jones**  
Mr. and Mrs. Laurence Jones

**Oliver Jones III**  
Ms. Maureen A. Werner

**William Kan**  
Ms. Karin Bailey  
Ms. Sarah Baurle  
Ms. Ellen Bradley  
Mrs. Vicky Clayton  
Mr. Mark Duckworth

**Ms. Mechalla Goerlich**  
Mr. Larry Haynie  
Mr. Eric Nicoletti

**Shepherd Center Board of Directors**  
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Mr. Jeff Welch  
Jeb Zella

**Jessica Elizabeth Lane**  
Mr. Brent Bracewell

**Ms. Bonnie Dury**  
Mr. Joey Fievet  
Ms. Kelly Frye

**Mr. and Mrs. John J. O'Neil**  
**Connie Moore**  
Ms. Candace Hermsmeier

**McKee Nunnally**  
Mr. and Mrs. Dell B. Sikes

**Geoff Nolan**  
Mrs. Carolyn Caswell

**Laura Carter Overstreet**  
Mr. and Mrs. Michael A. Overstreet

**Bernard Marcus**  
Mr. and Mrs. Dell B. Sikes

**Ryan Means**  
Ms. Ann Crane

Mr. James Feiber  
Mr. Alex Holt

**Gloria Mendoza**  
Mr. Lawrence McAlpine

**Tammy Meredith**  
Ms. Vicky Hoebing

**Bill Reese**  
Mr. Alfredo G. Munoz

**Connie Moore**  
Ms. Candace Hermsmeier

**Nancy Jo Saver**  
Mr. Margaret Gray

**Peggy and Emory Schwall**  
Mr. and Mrs. Dell B. Sikes

**Harold Shepherd**  
Mr. And Mrs. I. Arnold Hoge

Mr. and Mrs. Dell B. Sikes

**Juan Perez**  
Ms. Kristina Olmsted

**Katie Preuss**  
Anonymous

**Robert Proctor**  
Mr. and Mrs. Cal Ratcliff

**Michael Reed**  
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas E. Herber

**Bill Reese**  
Mr. Alfredo G. Munoz

**Connie Moore**  
Ms. Candace Hermsmeier

**Nancy Jo Saver**  
Mr. Margaret Gray

**Peggy and Emory Schwall**  
Mr. and Mrs. Dell B. Sikes

**Geoff Nolan**  
Mrs. Carolyn Caswell

**Harold Shepherd**  
Mr. And Mrs. I. Arnold Hoge

Mr. and Mrs. Dell B. Sikes

**James Shepherd**  
Mr. and Mrs. Dell B. Sikes

**Hubert "Bert" Shuler**  
Anonymous  
Pledgeling Foundation

**Larry Sigler**  
Anonymous  
Ms. DeDe Guest  
Ms. Christine Kaba  
Ms. Cathy Ottley  
Mrs. Patricia Reed  
Ms. Lisa Smith  
Ms. Colleen Welch

**Spencer W. Smith**  
Mr. and Mrs. I. Arnold Hoge

**George Stewart**  
Ms. Sharon Hiner Franklin  
Mrs. Reta V. Stewart

**Sandra "Sandy" Unruh**  
Ms. Norma J. Ellis

**Mr. Bud Whitmire**  
Ms. Marianne Woerner  
Mr. Robert Zecher

**Patricia Sims**  
Ms. Isabella M. Parish

**David M. Wheeler**  
Ms. Sally Wheeler

**Howe Whitman**  
Ms. Clinton B. Kennedy

**John B. Withers**  
Mr. and Mrs. John B. Withers III

**Stanley Willis**  
Mr. and Mrs. Robert G. Willis

**Jay Woodruff Memorial**  
Mr. and Mrs. Clint P. Owens

**Goodloe Yancey**  
Mr. and Mrs. Dell B. Sikes

**Barbara Young**  
Ms. Tamatha Camm

**Looking for a way to show your Shepherd pride?**

Shepherd Center specialty license plates are available now. The plate, bearing the hospital's name and logo, is available for vehicles registered in Georgia. To get your own, simply reserve your plate and pay the manufacturing fee online. Then, bring your voucher to your county tag office.

Scan the QR code to reserve yours today.



**Shepherd Center License Plates Available Now**



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 **July 1, 2025 through Sept. 30, 2025**.



Thanks to the recreation therapy team, the Jack Trottier Foundation, and the crew at Impossible Dream Sailing, former patients and community members got to set sail aboard this fully accessible boat earlier this year.

**Dr. David Apple's 50th Anniversary with Shepherd Center**  
Mr. and Mrs. George L. Hewes

**Dr. David F. Apple, Jr.**  
Dan and Merrie Boone Foundation  
Mrs. Blanchette C. Maier  
Ms. Anna Schwarzkopf  
Mr. and Mrs. Dell B. Sikes

**Edward Apple and his family**  
Mr. and Mrs. Greg Dabov

**Cyndae Arrendale's Birthday**  
Mr. and Mrs. Steve A. Williams

**Jim Balkcom**  
Mr. John Davis

**Marla and Thomas Bennett**  
Mr. And Mrs. Thomas J. Bennett

**John Carlos**  
Mr. and Mrs. Jay M. Davis  
Mr. and Mrs. Herbert J. Rosenberg II

**Dr. Udaya Chintalapudi**  
Ms. Subbiah Dharmar  
Venkateswara Dikkala  
Jith Palacherla  
Vijitha Prasad  
Akshat Saxena  
Jyoti Sinha

**Alexa Connolly & Family**  
Ms. Brooke Benson

**Gloria Cooley**  
Ms. Kanika Cloud

**James Curtis' Volunteer Work**  
Mr. and Mrs. Dell B. Sikes

**Sean Dwyer**  
Ms. Stacy L. DeLoach

**Jane Earl**  
Mr. Andrew Earle

**David Ewing**  
Mr. Timothy Ewing

**Kacey Floyd**  
Mr. and Mrs. Travis N. Fulk

**Jane Flynn**  
Ms. Lynda Campbell  
Ms. Anna L. Margeson  
Ms. Jean H. Willis

**Paula and Allen Freedman**  
Mrs. Phyllis Arogeti

**Kiley Gardner**  
Mr. and Mrs. Steve Dilley

**Marilyn Kaufman**  
Mr. and Mrs. Todd Starks

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

**Amanda Gropack**  
Mr. Joseph DelMedico

**Brian Gross**  
Kimberly Rath

**Elijah Harkins**  
Ms. Sandra Quinton

**Connie Hart**  
Mr. and Mrs. Luther Kelley

**Gary Herber**  
Anonymous

**Keith and Kathy Holland's Anniversary**  
Ms. Margaret Kilpatrick

**Nicolas Horne**  
Mr. Dameon Horne

**Oliver Jones**  
David J. Munro

**Marilyn Kaufman**  
Mr. and Mrs. Fred B. Aftergut

**Emily Kendrick's Birthday**  
Mr. and Mrs. James S. Thomas, Jr.

**Mr. and Mrs. Henry Waszkowski**

**Milton Kirby**  
Mr. John Nuckolls

**Dr. Michael Link**  
Mr. and Mrs. Richard Krewinghaus

**Adam Malone**  
Ms. Donna Wolff

**Paul Martin**  
Mr. Chris Martin

**Karen Mathews**  
Ms. Anna Schwarzkopf

**Dr. Allen and Ann Carter McDonald**  
Ms. Suzanne Money

**Alfie Means' Birthday**  
Mrs. Lloyd L. Byars

**Liz and Alfie Means**  
Mr. and Mrs. Keith Wood

**Hays and Anna Mershon**  
Mr. and Mrs. Bill Moore

**Dutch Minor**  
Mr. Charles Schoen

**Col. J. Harry Mobley, USA Retired**  
The Roderick S., Flossie R. and Helen M. Galloway Foundation

**Andrew Munoz**  
Mr. Alfredo G. Munoz

**Ryan Narramore**  
Anonymous

**Don Nelson**  
Ms. Eleanor Agan  
Kendall Nelson

**Josh Ozley**  
Mrs. Kim Ozley

**Craig Powell's Birthday**  
Mrs. Janet Powell

**Dan Rather's Birthday**  
Mrs. Marie Landis

**Jamie Reynolds III**  
Mr. and Mrs. James G. Strickland

**Jake Rogers**  
Ms. Lily Etemadi

**Bobby Rosenbleeth**  
Ms. Elizabeth Cordes

**Sheryl Sellway**  
Mr. Joseph Moore

**William Shaw**  
Mr. Phillip Jarrell

**Todd Sheckley**  
Anonymous

**Shepherd runners in the Peachtree Road Race 2025**  
Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence P. Kelly

**Alana Shepherd's Birthday**  
Mr. and Mrs. John F. Akers  
Mr. and Mrs. Jay D. Mitchell  
Mr. and Mrs. Douglas F. Reid

**Alana and Harold Shepherd for their remarkable legacy in the birth and development of Shepherd**  
Mr. and Mrs. Dell B. Sikes

**Alana Shepherd**  
Mr. Josh Harris  
Mrs. Blanchette C. Maier

**Jamie Shepherd**  
Dr. and Mrs. O. Anderson Currie

**Julie Shepherd**  
Dr. and Mrs. O. Anderson Currie

**Joyce Stevens' Birthday**  
Mrs. Alana S. Shepherd

**Neil Swenson**  
Ms. Anne H. Swenson

**Brad Thompson**  
Terri Thompson

**Paul Webber**  
Mr. Matthew Gutman



Recreation therapists from the '80s and '90s visited Shepherd in November for a reunion and a tour of new facilities.

## Shepherd Center Needs Your Feedback!

We would like your feedback on your experience with Shepherd Center. Please **scan the QR code** with the camera on your phone to participate in a quick survey. Thank you!

For a paper survey, contact [QOM@shepherd.org](mailto:QOM@shepherd.org).



# Save the Date

## Upcoming Shepherd Events

**Shepherd Center Junior Committee 2026 Kickoff**  
Spring 2026  
*Date To Be Announced*

**Shepherd's Men Intimate Concert featuring Trace Adkins**  
April 22, 2026  
*Atlanta, Georgia*

**Adventure Skills Workshop**  
May 15-17  
*Camp ASCCA Jackson's Gap, Alabama*

**Project Rollway**  
June 26, 2026  
*Shepherd Center Atlanta, Georgia*

**Derby Day**  
Saturday, May 2, 2026  
*Chastain Horse Park Atlanta, Georgia*

**Atlanta Journal-Constitution Peachtree Road Race**  
July 4, 2026  
*Atlanta, Georgia*

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**Michael Yochelson, M.D.\*** – Chief Medical Officer, Shepherd Center

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**Elizabeth Allen**, Civic Volunteer

**John A. Carlos**, President & COO, National Distributing Company, Inc.

**Bill Marcus**, Civic Volunteer  
The Marcus Foundation, Inc.

# Thank You!

To our staff, patients, community members, and partners, for helping us celebrate our 50th anniversary year.



**Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled**  
August 26

Happy 50th Anniversary, Shepherd Center! We love collaborating with the fine professionals at Shepherd Center to support people with disabilities and help them live their best lives through providing accessible reading materials. Not only that, but our own GLS Atlanta Manager Barnaby Camp worked as a library assistant from 2014 to 2018 in the Noble Learning Research Center at Shepherd. Here's Barnaby in his BARDman guise during a recent visit back to his former workplace.

Shepherd Center and 29 others

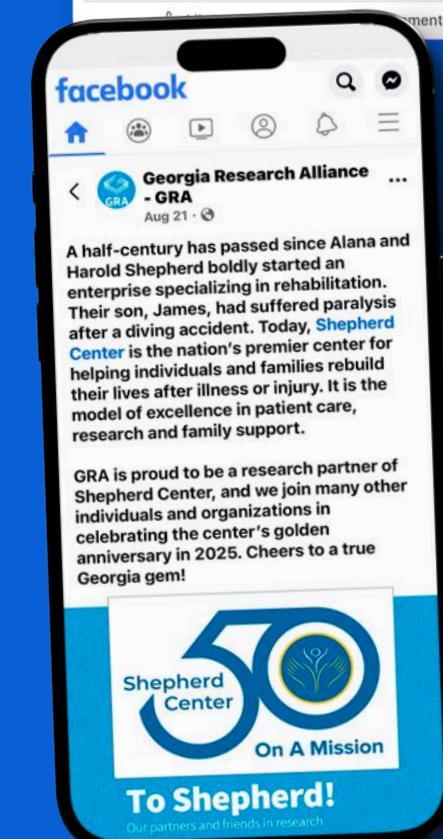
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**Piedmont** Follow  
Congratulations to our Piedmont Clinic partners and neighbor @shepherdcenter on their 50th anniversary!

**Center for Puppetry Arts** Follow  
August 7

Happy 50th Anniversary to our friends at Shepherd Center! For half a century, they've been at the forefront of rehabilitation care, research, and family support, helping countless individuals and families rebuild their lives after injury or illness. We're excited to see what the next 50 years will bring. Join us in spreading the word about their incredible work! #Shepherd50 #ShepherdCenter



To stay up-to-date with all things Shepherd Center, including patient stories, staff updates, and events, follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.



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Photo by Eley

Hospital co-founders Alana Shepherd and Dr. David Apple flip through the special 50th anniversary issue of *Spinal Column*. Read more about anniversary celebrations on page 4.