

## Friends Supporting Merakey AVS



The Pittsburgh Vintage Grand Prix (PVGP) was once again a success! 10-days of racing events, including car shows, parades, a gala, a party in an airplane hangar, vintage races, and Race Weekend at Pittsburgh's Schenley Park, brought many supporters and car enthusiasts. For more about the Pittsburgh Vintage Grand Prix, visit [www.pvgp.org](http://www.pvgp.org).



Merakey AVS family members Heather and Paul Siffri (pictured above) hosted their 6th annual Kentucky Derby Party to benefit Merakey AVS. This year's event brought the six-year total to more than \$70,000 raised!  
*Photo by Jason Ayers*



The 2018 Day at the Races was filled with exciting kart racing, great food, wonderful company, and amazing auctions and raffles! Kevin was thrilled to wave the flag to start the races. We are grateful to the UBS Walnut Wealth Management team for making it a fun and festive day.

## We are Thankful for Our Donors

For a full list of Merakey AVS and Merakey Foundation donors from July 1, 2017-June 30, 2018 visit [avs.merakey.org](http://avs.merakey.org).

## 2019 Save the Dates

- PVGP Dancing with the Cars - February 14
- 14th Annual Goals for Giving Event - Flyers Skate Zone, February 10
- 5th Annual Merakey Bowling Tournament - March 8
- 21st Annual Merakey Corporate Golf Classic - June 3
- Merakey AVS Day at the Races - Pittsburgh International Race Complex, June 22
- Merakey AVS Night at the Pirates Game - PNC Park, Spring/Summer
- PVGP - July 7-21 (July 20-21 Race Weekend)
- Friends of Merakey AVS Golf Open - Chartiers Country Club, September 16
- Merakey Foundation Gala - Vie, November 3

Merakey is celebrating their 50th Anniversary in 2019! We will be celebrating all year long with events and activities. Visit our website and social media throughout the year to learn more.

## Connect With Us!

412-299-7777    [avs.merakey.org](http://avs.merakey.org)    [merakey.org](http://merakey.org)



## Perspectives

December 2018

### New Name - Same Mission



State Rep. Anita Kulik is joined by others from Merakey AVS to unveil the new sign at Kennedy Program Center.

On April 1, NHS changed its name to Merakey and Allegheny Valley School became Merakey Allegheny Valley School (AVS). Merakey is inspired by the modern Greek word "Meraki," which means to put something of yourself into your work, or to do something with soul, creativity, or love. It also positions our organization as a "key" to helping individuals and communities open doors to their future. The name change is coupled with a new logo of connected hearts conveying our integrated approach to care, and new tagline "Innovative Care and Educational Solutions." Both components highlight Merakey's integrated and unique approach to care, founded on the commitment and compassion of its more than 10,000 employees. Alongside the introduction of a new name, logo, and brand, Merakey has also launched redesigned websites: [avs.merakey.org](http://avs.merakey.org) and [merakey.org](http://merakey.org).

## Community Participation

Individuals supported by Merakey AVS have been busy engaging in their communities. They frequent museums, athletic events, and parks, and volunteer with local organizations including the Coraopolis Foundation Food Pantry, Coraopolis Library, Shade Tree Commission, Salvation Army, Sisters of St. Joseph and West Hills Food Bank.

Several people have also joined community groups: Kiwanis Aktion Club, McKees Rocks Rotary Club, Life Span Imperial, Robin Hill Senior Connection, Capital Area Therapeutic Riding Association, and more.

Through this engagement individuals are developing relationships with members of their community and feeling a sense of accomplishment while helping others.

Along with volunteering and memberships, several individuals are employed in the community and many others are in the process of identifying their work interests.



Rusty and staff member Paige volunteer for the Salvation Army's Red Kettle Campaign.



Jerome helps to plant herbs in the garden at Sisters of St. Joseph.



## Learning Institute Prepares Merakey AVS for Program Transformation

During 2018, 40 Western PA staff members participated in a Learning Institute that is building our internal capacity and collective will to transform our services. From March to October there have been 14 full-day sessions with national experts who have demonstrated how increased individualization of services and community inclusion can help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) to live the "Good Life." Eight participants have also completed an online curriculum in Citizen Centered Leadership through the Institute on Employment and Disability at Cornell University.

Staff Development Executive Carol Erzen is the project manager for Merakey AVS. We have also engaged two consultants who bring unique knowledge, resources, experiences and perspectives:

Christopher Liuzzo's experience is grounded in principles informed by Social Role Valorization and person-centered practices. Liuzzo developed and led the Learning Institute that has brought us experts in the field including: Carol Blessing, Joe MacBeth, Dr. Beth Mount, Dr. John O'Brien, Dr. David Pitonyak, and others.

Candy Vazquez's experience includes helping individuals ensure that they are receiving appropriate services and supports to live self-determined and person-centered lives. Located in Western PA, Vazquez is the project's local consultant and implementation agent, conducting trainings and forums for the individuals we support, their families and our staff, and supporting "pathfinders" for whom new service prototypes are being developed.

This is an exciting time for Merakey IDD services and we are grateful to have the opportunity to thoughtfully and carefully transform our programs and services to make impactful changes that will improve the opportunities and the quality of life for the individuals that we support.

*The program and transformation project has been made possible by a grant to Merakey AVS from Polk Foundation.*



Jan Harvilla, Lori Schibner and Courtney Sargent during a Learning Institute breakout session.

"Pathfinders are people with developmental disabilities who want more in their lives than their communities and available forms of assistance currently offer and choose to risk a quest in search of a better life."

*Pathfinders, by John O'Brien and Beth Mount*

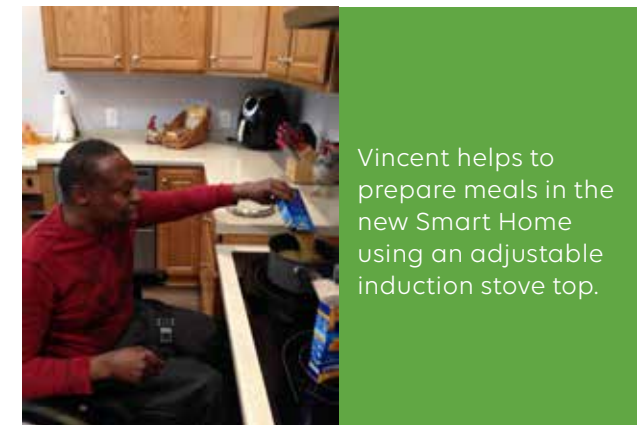
"True transformation involves a serious challenge to existing practices and assumptions about supports for persons with disabilities. It often means turning those assumptions on their heads and disrupting familiar practices and rituals. It does not mean tinkering around the edges."

*Christopher Liuzzo*

## Innovations at Merakey AVS

Merakey has developed an Office of Innovation. Highlights from this past year include:

- Opening our second smart home in April 2018.
- Hosting Micheal Gamel-McCormick from Senator Bob Casey's Office, who visited several locations to learn about our technology projects.
- Continuing as an Innovation Partner with AbleLink Technologies. This software is used by nearly 350 individuals company-wide as part of the Communication Technology Project.
- Merakey's Technology and Innovation Manager Shaleea Shields and Senior Clinical Analyst Richard Lewis are participating in AbleLink's Steering Committee for an Accessible Transportation Technologies Research Initiative funded project. Merakey has been asked by AbleLink to work on this initiative in the Pittsburgh area.
- The Remote Patient Supports Project is still thriving since its launch in September 2017. The focus is for further integration into our programs.
- We are working on the launch of a hub for optimized handling of medical needs for those we support.



Vincent helps to prepare meals in the new Smart Home using an adjustable induction stove top.

## Events at Merakey AVS



### Friends of Merakey AVS Golf Open

On October 1, Merakey AVS held its 27th annual Golf Open at Chartiers Country Club. The event raised \$130,000 for Merakey AVS programs throughout Pennsylvania that support adults with IDD. During the event, the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (pictured left with organizational leadership) was honored as the 2018 AVS CHAMPION for its 25 years of performing community concerts at Merakey AVS.

### 171st Airwing Visit

In July, representatives from Merakey AVS were guests of the 171st Air Refueling Wing for the unveiling of the third iteration of The Terrible Towel® image on the nose of a KC-135T military aircraft.

