

## Staying Connected While Staying Apart

Everyone at Merakey AVS is finding ways to stay connected and active while staying safe. Soon after the pandemic required us to temporarily close our day programs in March, our amazing staff members pivoted their efforts to developing a variety of virtual activities over Zoom including: arts and crafts, cooking and baking, sports, Friday Fun Nights, and exercise, to name a few. People have also been spending time outdoors taking neighborhood walks, gardening and more! Many individuals are exploring new interests and hobbies.

To support the efforts to keep people connected, IDD Director of Innovation Shaleea Shields partnered with our administrators and program directors to identify and deploy technology to our community homes and campuses. iPads can now be found in approximately 70 Merakey AVS locations. The devices help the people we support to remain in contact with their family and friends, engage in virtual programming, participate in telehealth, and explore their interests. We are grateful to our Capital Development Fund donors who have made possible this deployment of technology.

*Pictured right: The staff and individuals at our Barclay home created their own week-long camp. Activities included star gazing, carnival games, decorating shirts, fireside stories and much more! Michelle is enjoying one of the outdoor activities.*



*Friday Fun Nights were held over Zoom for friends to socialize, dance and catch-up.*



*Vincent shows off his culinary talent during a Zoom cooking session.*

## Nationwide Dance Party!

The Merakey Bandstand Bash was held on August 13 through Zoom. The event brought together hundreds of individuals supported by Merakey IDD, staff members, sponsors and others - from across the country - for a night of dancing, trivia, and FUN! The event was originally scheduled for June at Heinz Field in Pittsburgh. Due to Covid-19, the in-person event couldn't happen this year, but this gave us the opportunity to open the event up to all Merakey IDD, nationwide.

Planned by a small group of staff and self-advocates, the event went off without a hitch. The evening included shout-outs and song requests from participants. People stayed connected on camera, and by sending messages and requests through the Zoom "chat" feature. Many dressed up in formal attire or in costumes representing their favorite decade. They decorated their homes, and made delicious (and beautiful) food displays. Prizes were given for the Best Dressed, Best Decorations and Best Food Display.

A big THANK YOU to everyone who helped to make the Merakey Bandstand Bash possible!



*The gentlemen from Branchton chose a 1960s theme, while the ladies from Maratta decked out in formal attire.*



Please LIKE and SHARE our Facebook page - @MerakeyIDD or Merakey Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, where you'll learn about amazing things happening throughout Merakey IDD.

## Golf Open Success

Merakey AVS's golf open was held on September 21 at Chartiers Country Club. Chaired by Rick Mongiovi from Mongiovi and Son Plumbing, Excavating & Fire Protection, and Dan Taylor from Dan Taylor Interiors, Inc., the day was a huge success, raising more than \$125,000 for the Capital Development Fund.

This year's AVS CHAMPION award honored our Direct Support Professionals and Frontline Managers. Every day we are grateful to them for putting their heart and soul into their work.

The 2020 event looked different due to COVID-19, including having all participants complete a health screening at check-in, and keeping all activities – including the auctions and post-golf celebration – outdoors. Thankfully the weather was PERFECT! We are grateful to all who made this a fun, safe and successful day.



*Gary Rittereiser, Chris Dunton, Derrick Yacovelli and Tim Reinsel prepare for a beautiful day of golf.*

## Innovation Highlights

During 2020, Merakey IDD launched a Nursing Care Center which will work to centralize nursing services throughout Pennsylvania. Individuals and their staff members are able to call a registered nurse with non-emergency medical questions, do a telehealth visit, and use remote patient supports (Bluetooth enabled blood pressure, weight, temperature, etc.) to respond to individual health needs. The project has been made possible by a grant to Merakey AVS from an anonymous foundation.

In addition, Merakey AVS received a grant from Polk Foundation to enhance our telehealth capabilities. The project has begun with a complete upgrade to our information technology infrastructure at the Pittsburgh Campus. During 2021, the project will continue to expand access to telehealth appointments for the individuals we support throughout Western PA.



In 2020, Merakey AVS turned 60! From our founding in Western PA in 1960, today we provide services to nearly 800 individuals at more than 120 programs and facilities in nine counties throughout the Commonwealth. In all that we do, we aim to provide quality programs and facilities to help individuals with IDD entrusted to our care to live with purpose and dignity, and to provide opportunities and choices to help them grow and function at their full potential as independently as possible.

## Our Many Heroes

We thank our frontline employees for their service and sacrifice as we continue to weather the COVID-19 pandemic. Our DSPs and Frontline Managers work 24-7-365 to provide critical supports, and to help the most vulnerable among us to thrive during these challenging times. Through their work, they exemplify Merakey's core values. HEROES WORK HERE!

In addition to our incredible frontline essential workers, we are grateful to many COMMUNITY HEROES.

- In the early days of the pandemic, when masks and other supplies were difficult to secure, dozens of our employees, family members and other friends got busy making and donating masks to protect our essential workers and the individuals we support. Combined we received more than 8,000 donated masks! We are grateful to all who helped by sewing, donating material and supplies, and collecting and distributing the masks!
- We are thankful to those who have sent meals and other special treats for our staff members and individuals we support.
- And we are also deeply grateful to all who have made financial contributions to support both the COVID-19 Relief Fund and also the Merakey AVS Capital Development Fund.



Staff members are grateful for the community's support.

## New at Merakey

This fall, Merakey announced its new purpose and vision statements, strategic plan for fiscal years 2021 – 2023, website, and its presence on Instagram!

**Purpose** - Putting our heart and soul into exceptional care

**Vision** - To be a nationally recognized provider of the highest quality health and human services

### Strategic priorities FY2021-2023:

Become an  
Employer of  
Choice

Provide the  
Highest Quality  
Services

Optimize  
Resources

Grow &  
Diversify  
Services

Diversity,  
Equity &  
Inclusion

## Connect With Us!

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