Donald loves the cinema, and thanks to your support, he’s able to enjoy the Star Wars movies he loves and so much more.

He likes to sit at his kitchen table and reel off every movie Harrison Ford has been in with a smile on his face. He says his movie collection is too big to count.

“He’s a very approachable guy,” says Carl, Donald’s facilitator. “He’s a caring person, and he loves to joke around. He’s always the most entertaining person in the room.”

Donald has been with Volunteers of America’s Supported Living Services program since 1983. The 64-year-old has a developmental disability, but he has never let that stop him from enjoying life.

“Volunteers of America has helped with a lot of things over the years,” Donald says. “They’ve always been there for me when I needed it. They help me organize my bills, and they help me go where I need to go and do what I want to do.”

Donald lived in New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina, and he would enjoy movies at the Prytania Theater and attend church regularly on St. Charles Ave. He sang in the choir. After the storm, he moved to Kenner and now shares an apartment in Metairie with his roommate, who is also named Donald.

Without Volunteers of America, Donald would not be able to live independently. He happily recounts going on his first cruise several years ago and dancing at the many social events offered by the program.

It’s the little things that most of us take for granted that bring Donald the most joy.

“Donald is a special person,” says Carl, who has worked with him for nearly 34 years. “He just needs a little help to live independently. Honestly, he puts a smile on my face because he remembers things that surprise me every day.”
Thank You For Changing Lives For 125 Years

I hope you and your family are well and are continuing to adapt as we are to these ever-changing times. Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana's staff continues to amaze me with their undying dedication and their ability to adapt to any situation. This organization has been doing that for 125 years and I know that with your help, we can continue our mission to help our most vulnerable neighbors and create hope for those who need it most.

One area near and dear to my heart are individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. You see, I started my career working as a Direct Support Professional in a group home and that experience changed my life forever. We look forward to our consumers being able to participate in the daily programs and activities that they did prior to the pandemic. Since this population was in one of the first groups to be eligible to receive the vaccination, many are now fully vaccinated and ready to get back to normal activities. The first big group activity that they went on was a bowling party at the end of May. The smiles and laughter filled the alley!

More than ever, I am thankful to everyone who participated in our annual GolfStar Classic, which was held in March 2021 and is vital to the Adoption and Maternity program as it is the primary source of funding. The support Volunteers of America receives—be it your time, your treasure, or your talent, is very much appreciated. Year 2020 was very difficult for everyone but especially Volunteers of America as we could not hold our major fundraiser, Reach for the Stars.

This year, we are grateful to those of you who attended this year's Reach for the Stars virtual breakfast and donated. You are helping transform the lives of the 40,000+ people we serve in southeast Louisiana each year. If you would like to continue to support Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana and make a difference in someone's life, please visit www.voasela.org/give to make a pledge today or call (504) 482-2130 to donate your time or talent.

Thank you for all that you do for Volunteers of America!

—Voris R. Vigee
Your Support Helps Change Lives Through Adoption

GolfStar Classic raises more than $106,000 for Adoption and Maternity program.

Your generosity helped make the 29th annual GolfStar Classic a success once again.

The March 9 tournament, held at TPC Louisiana in Avondale, is the sole fundraiser for our Adoption and Maternity program. This year, your support helped generate more than $106,000 to help women facing unplanned pregnancies and couples struggling with infertility. The Adoption and Maternity program, a licensed adoption agency for more than 75 years, has created countless Forever Families and is a respected pioneer in issues such as open adoption. It truly is a community resource for children and families like this year’s feature family—Nicole, Josh and baby Henry.

“He is the most important person in our lives,” Nicole says, about their son Henry. “He is the brightest thing in the morning. He gives us the biggest smile. He’s our child. It’s just that simple. Watching him grow and seeing him discover something new every day has been such a blessing for us. He just melts our hearts.”

Those are the loving homes you help provide by supporting this program. And because of our program’s success, Volunteers of America is also offering adoption-related counseling services to help families overcome any struggles that life might present while also offering maternity services for mothers in need.

HomeBank was the Presenting Sponsor this year. Mossy Motors was the Luncheon and Hole-In-One Sponsor. Other sponsors included Gulf Coast Bank & Trust Company; Retif Oil & Fuel; TruWealth Advisors; Argo Fine Imports; Arthur J. Gallagher & Co.; Lake Lawn Metairie; Viator Wealth Management Group; The New Orleans Advocate/The Times-Picayune; Fore!Kids Foundation; and TPC Louisiana.

Above, HomeBank’s John Zollinger (left) presented a check to Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana President/CEO Voris Vigee (middle) and 2021 GolfStar Chair Christy M. Howley Connois (right) before the tournament began. At right, Nicole, baby Henry and Josh.
Every Wednesday morning, a group of dedicated volunteers don hair nets, aprons, and gloves to make meals for nearly 100 hungry people in St. Tammany Parish, and those meals of hope are only possible because of your support.

“We don’t ask people for donations, but we always have more than enough food for everyone,” says volunteer Anna Bienvenu. “And we don’t give out small portions. These will feed people for several meals.”

Anna is a part of the St. Benedict’s Lunch Ministry in Covington. The ministry is one of 40 different volunteer stations offered by Volunteers of America’s Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).

The menu on this particular day includes red beans and rice, cornbread, salad with tomatoes and a Pina Colada cake for dessert. The ministry recently received a donation of dozens of cans of pineapples, and the group’s skilled bakers couldn’t let it go to waste.

“We have some very talented cooks,” says volunteer Debbie Rapp, as she stirs the red beans. “We take whatever we have and make some home-cooked meals. It’s fun, and it means so much to the people who need the meals.”

The lunch ministry has been around for 18 years, and several of the volunteers have been there since the beginning, including Gayle Palermo. Gayle has had many jobs, but now she’s in charge of desserts. It’s that team mentality that has kept the lunch ministry going with help from our RSVP volunteers.

A grant from AmeriCorps Seniors funds RSVP, which allows St. Tammany residents 55 and older the opportunity to use their skills and life experiences to help meet critical needs. Some volunteers put in countless hours at a daily volunteer job, while others work as their schedule allows.

Every year, more than 400 RSVP volunteers provide St. Tammany Parish with 38,000-plus hours of service.
When Clark was at his lowest point, your support helped him get back on his feet and find the housing and support he needed.

The 56-year-old was homeless when he came to Volunteers of America’s Supportive Services program. He didn’t have a reliable cell phone or a place to call home. He was struggling.

When our care coordinator Robnisha met with Clark, she found that his struggles extended beyond needing to find shelter again. He was struggling mentally because his aunt, who is considered his only family member who has helped him while being homeless, had cancer. It was a gut punch to Clark, one that many people might not have been able to overcome.

“It was a tough situation,” Robnisha says. “I encouraged him to remain positive and to never give up despite the circumstances. That was his key to get back on his feet. He is grateful for our services and is happy that there are still good people in the world who genuinely care.”

Sometimes all someone needs is a supportive advocate to help them get back on their feet.

Soon, Clark’s life started to turn around. He was able to find housing, thanks to our Permanent Supportive Housing program, and now he’s smiling again. That was two years ago, and he’s never looked back.

“What I admire most about Clark is his strength to rebuild,” Robnisha says. “Despite his situation, he has been respectful since our first meeting and grateful for our services. He has come a long way. This is what makes the work that we do so meaningful. Clark’s life is back on the right track because he never gave up, and we never gave up on him.”
Each year, New Orleans Magazine features women who are making a difference across the community. This year, our very own President/CEO Voris Vigee was highlighted as one of the top 11 Female Achievers. Congratulations, Voris, and thank you to New Orleans Magazine for highlighting our work!

The amazing staff at our Creekwood Community Home in Hammond is always looking for new ways to keep our residents happy and engaged in the community. And they love to celebrate every holiday, including St. Patrick’s Day, as the staff and residents dressed up in green with shamrocks.

PORTRAITS of GRATITUDE—How many ways can Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana serve the community? As many ways as there are generous supporters and volunteers. Thanks to all who help make a real difference.
Each year, our **Auto Donation** program provides critical funding that goes directly to the general budget, which funds more than 20-plus social service programs to help America’s most vulnerable. It’s as easy as calling (504) 525-2179 and setting up your vehicle donation today!

Our **Fresh Food Factor** program is still serving up fresh and healthy meals to students across southeast Louisiana, but it is also helping local and national brands grow their business with our Co-Packing service. **Greek Girls Rice Pudding** is made in our kitchen and distributed locally. Revenue from our Co-Packing service also provides funds for our 20-plus social service programs.
Adrena Continues Growth, Earns Master Of Social Work

It’s been nearly 27 years since Adrena Chandler took a part-time position with Volunteers of America’s Supported Living Services program.

It’s incredible what a difference 27 years makes. This May, Adrena graduated with a Master of Social Work from Southern University at New Orleans.

“When I started here, it was just a part-time job for me,” Adrena says. “I had just had my son. I was engaged to be married. It was something that fit my schedule. I did not know where it would take me, but once I got in, every change I made was for a reason. It helped me get to another level of experience.”

For the past five years, she’s worked as the senior service coordinator at the Terraces on Tulane, a 200-unit senior housing complex on Tulane Ave.

“I enjoy working with the seniors,” she says. “As much of a challenge as it can be, I really do like working with the seniors. This position is nothing like what I expected, but I really enjoy it.”

With her MSW in hand, Adrena hopes to implement even more programs.

“Volunteers of America has always been the one that wanted to make sure we crossed all the ‘i’s and dotted all the ‘i’s. They make sure to put the consumers first, and I can’t wait to continue to improve the lives of my residents.”