

## VITA LIVING EXPANDS ACTIVITY CENTER TO BETTER SERVE THE IDD COMMUNITY

Renovation adds space for double the number of clients, *enhancing services* for individuals with developmental disabilities



**Vita Living is proud to announce the completion of renovations to its Activity Center, located at South Gessner and Richmond, as of November 2024.** This project marks a significant milestone in the nonprofit's mission to support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) by expanding its capacity and improving the quality of care and services offered.

"With our increased capacity, we can expand our services and help more individuals in need," said Joseph Cooper, CEO of Vita Living. "The remodeled facility will provide more personalized care, encourage greater social interaction, and promote independence—core elements that empower our clients to thrive."

The newly enhanced Activity Center introduces several upgrades, including new sleep areas, a spacious outdoor patio, improved restrooms, and an open floor plan. These additions create a more comfortable, accessible,

and inclusive environment for clients. Final occupancy numbers have been confirmed, and the center can now accommodate up to 160 clients.

Renovations were completed in just four months by O'Donnell/Snider, with design work led by Perrin Projects. Throughout the construction process, Vita Living remained fully operational, maintaining uninterrupted care and services for all existing clients.

With an average resident age of over 50 and 65% lacking family support, Vita Living continues to play a critical role in caring for one of the most underserved and vulnerable populations in Texas. The organization is deeply committed to keeping individuals in the communities they know and love, regardless of behavioral or healthcare challenges.

"At Vita Living, we believe every client deserves the opportunity to lead a fulfilling life," Cooper added. "This expansion reflects our unwavering commitment to building a supportive and nurturing environment where our clients can grow and flourish."

# PEARLS OF WISDOM BRINGS ITALIAN FLAIR

and \$207,000 in Support of Vita Living

On Thursday, May 15, 2025, more than 300 guests gathered at River Oaks Country Club for Vita Living's annual Pearls of Wisdom, Una Notte Italiana, a spirited evening dedicated to raising awareness and support for Vita Living's mission to provide lifelong care for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

The evening kicked off with a festive cocktail hour, where guests dressed in bright, cheerful colors sipped the signature Aperol Spritz and explored a curated silent auction filled with exclusive experiences and items generously donated by local supporters. Standout auction highlights included a six-night mountain escape in a three-bedroom condo on the Eagle River near Beaver Creek Resort (donated by Doug Dawson), a luxurious three-night stay for two in a private casita at Chablé Yucatán Chocholá (donated by Chablé Yucatán Chocholá), and Golden Koi, a striking aluminum-mounted photograph by Joe C. Aker (donated by the artist).

Guests then moved into the ballroom for an elegant seated Italian dinner provided by River Oaks Country Club. Emcee Kip Altstaetter welcomed guests and introduced Vita Living CEO Joseph Cooper, who delivered the Invocation.



Myrla Menn, Roberto Vanegas, and Myrla Vanegas



Event Co-Chairs



Johnny Bravo  
Entertainment Auctioneer

Event co-chairs Kristen Perrin, Pamela Perilloux, and Bryan P. Smith then offered heartfelt remarks before introducing a moving video presentation featuring testimonials from Vita Living Board Members, led by Myrla Menn and Beth and John Hoffman.

The excitement continued as paddles flew during the live auction, energized by this year's dynamic auctioneer from Johnny Bravo Entertainment.

To close out the night, guests enjoyed an exclusive After Event Toast, complete with a festive gelato bar, capping the evening with sweet treats and celebratory cheer.

Infused with vibrant Italian flair, joyful camaraderie, and heartfelt generosity, Pearls of Wisdom raised over \$200,000 to support Vita Living's mission—ensuring compassionate, lifelong care for individuals with IDD.

BOARD MEMBER FEATURE:

# BRYAN P. SMITH

Bryan's passion for supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities began as a high school senior when he volunteered at a Special Olympics-inspired event. He was paired with a non-verbal boy with autism, and though their connection was slow to form, a quiet bond developed over the day. By the afternoon, they were walking hand-in-hand onto the field to participate in events. That experience profoundly shaped Bryan's empathy, awareness, and commitment to inclusion—and left a lasting impact that still fuels his dedication to the IDD community.

After earning his B.S. in Civil Engineering from the United States Military Academy at West Point, Bryan served in the U.S. Army, where he was awarded two Bronze Star Medals and two Army Commendation Medals for his service and leadership. He later completed his M.B.A. in Energy Finance at Southern Methodist University and brings that same discipline, heart, and strategic focus to his role on the Vita Living board.

Bryan first discovered Vita Living when attending the Pearls of Wisdom fundraiser as a guest of Board Chair Kristen Perrin. Moved by the stories and spirit of the organization, he immediately asked, "How can I help?"



Since joining the board, he has played an active role in supporting initiatives like the renovation of the day-habilitation center and the effort to install emergency power systems across our group homes.

*"To serve this mission is not work—it's a gift," he says. "The impact Vita Living makes is real, personal, and lasting. I'm honored to be part of it."*

What resonates most deeply with Bryan is that many of Vita Living's clients no longer have surviving family—Vita becomes their home and their support system. Whether it's sponsoring a client during the holidays or ensuring critical safety measures are in place during storms, Bryan sees every effort as a direct way to improve lives. We are grateful for Bryan's leadership, perspective, and unwavering commitment to our community.



# BRYAN'S SUCCESS JOURNEY



Bryan's journey to stability and well-being is a powerful testament to the transformative impact of Vita Living's Clinical Services. Having once struggled with severe behavioral issues, homelessness, and a cocaine addiction that left his teeth severely damaged, Bryan's life was in a constant state of turmoil. He lived on the streets, isolated and grappling with the fallout of his addiction, including deteriorating health.

However, in the four to five years since Bryan became a client at Vita Living, his life has undergone a remarkable transformation. With the support of Vita Living's comprehensive services, Bryan has regained control of his health and well-being. His addiction is now in the past, and he has access to consistent healthcare, including regular doctor visits to monitor his physical condition. One of the most significant milestones in his recovery was receiving dentures, a step that not only improved his appearance but also his overall health and confidence. Vita Living has provided Bryan with the stability he needed, ensuring his basic needs are met and his behavioral issues are addressed through specialized care. This support has allowed Bryan to rebuild his life in ways he never thought possible.

*Today, Bryan enjoys a fulfilling life, and in a heartwarming development, he is in a healthy relationship with a girlfriend, further illustrating the positive strides he has made.*

Bryan's story is a powerful example of how dedicated care, and a supportive environment can help individuals overcome significant obstacles and create a brighter future.

# VITA LIVING ARTS INITIATIVE: EXPANDING EXPRESSION THROUGH DANCE AND MUSIC

Vita Living is proud to continue its transformative Arts Initiative Pilot Program in partnership with Hope Stone, Inc., thanks to the generous support of the Megara Foundation.

Founded by renowned dance artist Jane Weiner, Hope Stone has been a pillar of Houston's arts community for over 30 years, driven by its inclusive mission: Art for All. Through a talented team of instructors, Hope Stone empowers individuals of all abilities by building communities grounded in creativity, compassion, and collaboration.

The latest 10-week dance session ran from January 27 through April 7, 2025, at the Institute of Contemporary Dance Houston. Each week, participants took part in a one-hour dance class exploring movement and how music fuels physical expression. Grounded in Anne Green Gilbert's "Brain Dance" methodology, classes began with a seated warm-up to activate both mind and body, progressing to either standing or seated movement tailored to participant needs. The program was led by dance instructor Lucia Del Valle Penell and assistant Nallely Salinas.

The session concluded with a joyful showcase performance on Monday, April 7, featuring Vita Living clients dancing alongside members of Houston Contemporary Dance Company and Karen Stokes Dance. The performance was a moving celebration of inclusion, expression, and shared creativity.

In November 2024, Vita Living expanded its arts initiative by launching a creative music therapy pilot program tailored for a select group of clients with profound and complex medical conditions—a population too often overlooked in traditional IDD services. This innovative program is facilitated by Jason Jackson and Ethan Adkison from Nameless Sound, an organization dedicated to the healing and community-building power of collaborative music-making.

Through Nameless Sound's Special Needs Ensemble, participants engage in structured musical sessions that emphasize listening, coordination, peer connection, self-expression, and non-verbal communication. The program fosters a safe and empowering space where every participant's voice—musical or otherwise—is valued.

This ongoing music therapy initiative is also made possible through the support of the Megara Foundation.

Together, these programs embody Vita Living's commitment to providing meaningful, person-centered enrichment that inspires joy, connection, and creativity.



# MORE THAN ONE WAY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE:

## SMART GIVING OPTIONS THAT EMPOWER LIVES

At Vita Living, we believe that creating lasting change starts with community—people like you who care deeply about empowering individuals with disabilities to live full, dignified lives. And while traditional donations are always appreciated, there are a variety of impactful (and often more tax-efficient) ways you can support our mission.

Here's a look at several ways you can give—and make your generosity go even further:

### 1. GIVE STOCK

Donating appreciated stock is a powerful way to support Vita Living while potentially avoiding capital gains taxes. It's a win-win: you may receive a full charitable deduction for the fair market value of the stock, and we receive the full value to fund vital programs and services.

### 2. RECOMMEND A GRANT FROM A DONOR ADVISED FUND (DAF)

A Donor Advised Fund allows you to support the causes you care about while maximizing your philanthropic impact. If you have a DAF, consider recommending a grant to Vita Living—it's a simple and strategic way to give.

### 3. MAKE A QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTION (QCD) FROM YOUR IRA

If you're 70½ or older, a QCD allows you to donate directly from your IRA to Vita Living without increasing your taxable income. It also counts toward your required minimum distribution. This is one of the most tax-savvy ways to give.

### 4. MONTHLY GIVING

Want to make a sustained impact? Becoming a monthly donor is one of the most effective ways to support our work year-round. Your reliable contributions help us plan ahead and respond quickly to emerging needs.

### 5. CORPORATE MATCHING GIFTS

Many employers match charitable donations made by their employees—doubling (or even tripling!) the impact of your gift. Check with your company to see if they offer a matching gift program.

Your generosity helps Vita Living provide housing, support, and care to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the Greater Houston area. Every gift—whether it's a one-time donation, a gift of stock, or a QCD—helps open doors and build lives of purpose and belonging.

**Together, we can continue to build a community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.**



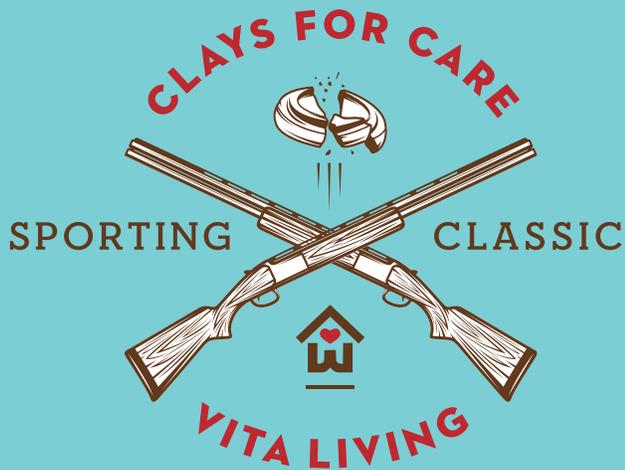
### READY TO GIVE?

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EXPLORE ALL YOUR GIVING OPTIONS:  
[WWW.VITALIVING.ORG/PLANNED-GIVING/](http://WWW.VITALIVING.ORG/PLANNED-GIVING/)

*"Within each of us is the power to ensure that every human being has an equal right to a decent life...the greatest power on Earth is the human heart."*

**Irving Pozmantier**  
Board Member

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**PEARLS *of* WISDOM**

# Una Notte Italiana

**SAVE THE DATE  
THURSDAY  
MAY 14, 2026**

# VITAVISTAS



CREATIVE CARING FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

SUMMER 2025

no. 66

*Vita Living provides lifelong services and supports for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities to promote personal growth toward a safe, satisfying, and meaningful life in the community.*

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3300 S. Gessner, Ste. 150  
Houston, TX 77063  
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