

Brookwood Community citizens, including (back row, from left) Hayley, Kurt, Richard, Stuart, Matthew, Monica, Grant, (front row, from left) Hillary, and Alexis

A group of eight Brookwood Community citizens are posed in a greenhouse filled with various potted plants. In the back row, three people stand: a woman in a red shirt on the left, a man in a yellow shirt in the center, and a man in a red shirt on the right. In the front row, a woman in a red shirt stands on the left, holding a large bouquet of white flowers, and a woman in a black and white patterned shirt sits on a green metal chair on the right. The greenhouse has a white frame and is filled with lush greenery and colorful flowers.

The Faces of the Brookwood Community

Citizens with disabilities live, learn, work, and give back in this welcoming environment



Written by Mary Hogan | Photography by Jason Lehecka

Visiting the Brookwood Community, just a short drive from Katy down I-10, you will notice the many smiling faces of citizens working in the café, garden, craft departments, and gift shop. As a community for adults with disabilities, Brookwood is centered around creating meaning in every aspect of their lives. The community serves 110 residents and an additional 70 citizens enrolled in the day program. "It's giving them purpose and meaning," shares Brookwood's Executive Director Vivian Shudde, who is the daughter of founder Yvonne Streit. She adds, "With God's help, we are helping them discover their gifts to be used to serve others." Katy Magazine invites you to meet some of the faces of the Brookwood Community and experience their many successes and accomplishments.



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Alex adds the finishing touches to a statue she is creating

ALEX | Ceramic Artisan

As a recent graduate of Brookwood's work-study program, Alex is enjoying finding her own path in life and testing her newfound wings. Welcoming shoppers with her warm smile and positive attitude, she has added much value to Brookwood. She has spent the past six years in the stone-casting shop, creating statues, coasters, plaques, and cowboy Santas for customers around the world. "I love my job and my bus rides with friends," Alex shares.

All of her experiences at the Brookwood Community have helped her to shine and better develop her expressive language and communication skills. "Once you feel good about expressing yourself, it makes you a better worker, which makes you feel good about giving back," shares Rick DeMunbrun, director of citizens. "Then, that feeling makes your expression get even better, so that the circle of reciprocity keeps going."

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CHRIS | *Ceramic Craftsman*

When Chris unexpectedly lost his mom, he was still living with his dad but found himself growing up and becoming increasingly isolated. As a young adult, he needed to launch out on his own and experience life for himself. With help from his dad, Chris decided to move to the Brookwood Community. His dad felt secure knowing Chris would be learning and working. "It creates a win-win situation," shares DeMunbrun. "Brookwood has expanded his circle of friends, and now he's got a whole community that caters to exactly what he needs."

Chris now works in every aspect of ceramics making, working each day to perfect his skill. In his free time, he loves attending Chapelwood United Methodist Church, as well as dancing, bowling, wrestling, and even baking chocolate cake. His positive outlook on life is contagious, and he always looks for ways to spread happiness through his upbeat attitude. He was once overheard telling friends, "Guess what? Today is my favorite day. I get a paycheck and a Diet Coke!"

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GRANT | *Nursery Cultivator*

When Grant moved to the Brookwood Community from New York City a little over a year and a half ago, he instantly became a singing sensation. Now, he loves entertaining others at concerts and helping with music lessons. "Since he's been here, he's really come out of his shell," shares DeMunbrun, adding, "His language skills have rocketed." Grant is now focused on his academic skills, including learning how to read by starting off with lessons that incorporate sight-reading. "He never had the opportunity, because of his inability to express himself," says DeMunbrun, explaining, "People didn't know how they could find out his real potential."

During his time at the Brookwood Community, Grant has enjoyed working in the horticulture department, moving and staging thousands of plants in more than 40 greenhouses. He has stepped up as a leader, showcasing his talent and his positive, caring attitude. He often touts all that Brookwood has to offer, sharing things like, "Do you like broccoli pizza? My home makes the best!"



Grant helps maintain and stage thousands of plants in the gardening center

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Monica's attention to detail on every craft project makes her a valued artisan

MONICA | *Crafter Extraordinaire*

As a successful graduate of the Tuttle School in west Houston, Monica came to the Brookwood Community, a sister facility, shortly afterward. She experienced her first job at Brookwood, and after 14 years at the community, she has become well known for her attention to detail and dexterity in handcrafting. "I love my teachers," she shares. Along with a love of country music and computers, she is very outgoing and enjoys visiting with guests.

Faced with weak knees and little strength in her legs, getting around can sometimes be difficult for Monica. The Brookwood Community has helped provide creative solutions for her in that area, though. "We have provided her with an environment that allows her to be acceptable in any way, shape, or form," shares DeMunbrun. "There are no barriers in terms of her physical mobility. She also has the opportunity to be much more in the public eye, because she's a hostess at our café and gets to use part of her personality that she's very gifted at."

RICHARD | *Superb Server*

When Richard first came to the Brookwood Community from southern Florida 10 years ago, he had a small social network and group of friends. He was an only child, and his parents, who were retiring, wanted him to connect with others his age. "When he came to the Brookwood Community, Richard was very shy and reticent to be around people," shares DeMunbrun. "What the Brookwood Community brought him was a social construct, just like going off to college."

Now, Richard loves greeting visitors at the Brookwood Café and helps train new café servers. Brookwood is his first full-time employer and he is truly thriving with the responsibility his position requires. He is proud of the chance to help others, and enjoys spreading smiles with his comedic imitations. He brings his good-natured humor to his job, introducing himself to visitors with greetings like, "Welcome to the Brookwood Café. My name is Richard and I will be your best server today."



Richard enjoys greeting and welcoming customers in the Brookwood Café

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE COMMUNITY

These are just a few of the many adults served by the Brookwood Community. "Many people from around the area don't have the time to volunteer, but they ask about what they can do to help," shares Shudde. "You can come shop and eat, because all of that revenue goes to help underwrite our community." Donations are also welcome, and the main hall can be rented out for weddings, with revenue supporting the community's programs. **KM**

MARY HOGAN enjoys being associate editor of Katy Magazine. She has visited the Brookwood Community several times and is always inspired by its friendly and talented citizens.