

NEWSLETTER

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

OPA! This is the Greek word for acclaim.

OPA! was the salutation given in the letter inviting the Pink Chair Project-RVA/ The Hawthorne as one of the four honored charities for Greek Festival 2023.

OPA! also led the way to our two colorful, eye-catching presentation tables on Saturday, June 3rd, and later being recognized with a generous donation check of \$5000 to continue our philanthropic work.

Impressed by our enthusiasm, members of the Greek Festival Charities' Committee expressed, "You all knocked this out of the park!" In other words, OPA!

We dedicate this edition to the momentous occasion when the Pink Chair came to the Greek Festival to forge warm relationships. We presented the OPA! moment for the many visitors who shared their own stories of the cancer journey, acts of resilience, and the needed support of loved ones and the community. We appreciate the wide public platform, marking a milestone in the history of our nonprofit organization. OPA!

EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS

Excerpt from the formal invitation to founder Linda Caruthers:

"I am pleased that Pink Chair Project RVA has been chosen as a recipient of a \$5,000 donation from our 2023 Greek Festival this year. We admire the work you do in our community and are pleased that we can offer our support."—Andrea Junes Baker, Festival Charities' Committee

Letter of gratitude by Steve Thornton, Executive Director of The Hawthorne Cancer Foundation:

"I hope this letter finds you in good health and high spirits. I am writing to express my heartfelt gratitude for the support and generosity extended by St. Constantine & Helen Greek Orthodox Cathedral towards our organization, Pink Chair Project RVA. The impact of your assistance has been immeasurable, and I am truly grateful.

Pink Chair's mission is to bring comfort and aid to those fighting breast cancer by providing specialized chairs that enhance their quality of life during treatment. Our vision is to make a lasting difference in the lives of individuals battling this disease. With your help, we have been able to take significant steps toward achieving this goal.

The support that Pink Chair received as a beneficiary of the festival funds was invaluable. Your decision to include us as a recipient demonstrates your commitment to making a difference in our community. It is with deep appreciation that we acknowledge your belief in our cause and your willingness to support our endeavors.”

Letter of gratitude to the Parish Council from John Clair, Board President, The Hawthorne Cancer Foundation/Pink Chair Project RVA:

“On behalf of the Hawthorne Cancer Foundation, I would like to express our heartfelt appreciation for the financial support and benevolence extended by St. Constantine & Helen Greek Orthodox Cathedral via the 2023 Greek Festival.

It was an exciting time for all participants and an honor to be chosen as one of the charities sponsored in the event. The \$5,000 donation will go a long way toward supporting our local cancer community.

My best wishes to all.
Respectfully “

QUOTATIONS & REFLECTIONS ON THE EVENT

From Linda Caruthers, Founder, Pink Chair Project RVA:

“I love this opportunity to reflect on this event. This gives me reason to stop and think about all that has transpired with the Pink Chair in the last two years, especially during and after COVID. We are all still reeling from COVID residual effects. I believe that kindness is contagious and helps to cure the most terrible disease of all: loneliness, especially when facing a life-changing diagnosis. As I looked around the crowds at the Greek Festival, I realized how wonderful it is to work with like-minded community members. My heart was smiling the whole time. This was what occurred to me Saturday night when we stood on the stage. I was moved to tears.”

From Stephanie Theofanos, a Greek Festival volunteer, parishioner, and Pink Chair Project RVA Director:

“It was great to see more people in the community learn about Pink Chair RVA. Every time I passed the tables, volunteers were busy sharing information.”

From Boni Simmons, Pink Chair Project RVA director:

“I met six breast cancer survivors who all stopped by the table to tell us what a great idea the Pink Chair is. I also had three ladies who quilt stop by and volunteer to help us make quilts for chair recipients.”

From Billy Lambrinides, a Greek Festival volunteer, parishioner, and Pink Chair Project RVA Director:

As I reflect on recent events that have led me to become a part of the Pink Chair Project...from bumping into Linda after too long of a “hiatus”, and then soon after, having a pink electric recliner practically fall into my lap looking for a home, to a very successful first annual event at River City Roll and now being recognized and honored with a generous donation by my own place worship, Sts. Constantine & Helen Greek Orthodox Cathedral, I have no doubt that a higher power has brought us together to serve our community in this way. Being at the Greek Festival and educating the public on what we do was certainly rewarding. But even more so was the outpouring of love and overwhelming feedback from strangers sharing their stories and validating our efforts to provide a much needed service. I would have never guessed... a simple chair... could have provided so much comfort.

It was truly inspiring to have strangers stop by our table, eagerly listen to what we do, and then share their very own heartfelt and personal story... and then leave us no longer a stranger, but a friend.

I am so grateful to be a part of this organization and a member of this community that chose to recognize the Pink Chair Project-RVA.”



From Dori Abell, a Pink Chair Project RVA Director:

“I loved everything about supporting the Pink Chair Project at the Greek Festival this year! I am a new board member at PCP, so this was my first year participating with events. Our organization is filled with warm-hearted, compassionate people, and the members of Saint Constantine & Helen Greek Orthodox Church mirror the same energy. It was wonderful to see so many smiles and hugs from those passing by our table. We even had the opportunity to meet a few breast cancer survivors, as well as women who were actively battling cancer. Being able to hear their stories and see our care team provide them with encouragement was powerful. I feel so blessed to be a part of the Pink Chair Project, because I truly believe we are doing God’s work; one chair at a time ❤️”



Screen capture from an 8News report on the the 44th annual Richmond Greek Festival.

SPECIAL FEATURE Q & A INTERVIEW



Interview with Andrea Junes Baker, Chair, Greek Festival Charities, followed by a list of charities honored by the Greek Festival from Kathryn Helen Geranios:

Q: Andrea Junes Baker, may I express our heartfelt thanks for your instrumental part in having the Pink Chair selected at this year's Greek Festival?

A: It is my pleasure. The Pink Chair Project RVA is most deserving.

Q: Andrea, what is your involvement in the Greek Festival and at Richmond's Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Cathedral?

A: I am public relations coordinator for the Richmond Greek Festival and a past parish council president, and a past and present parish council secretary. I have been involved for well over a decade chairing the charities committee for the Greek Festival.

Q: Andrea, your dedication is impressive. How did the Greek Festival evolve to include giving to charities as well as sharing of ethnic foods and culture?

A: If you look back over the history, we started with a church bake sale where the proceeds went to Richmond Children's Hospital. From the very first bake sales to the Greek Festivals known today we have been giving to various local charities. We gave to Richmond Children's Hospital for many subsequent years; then, one of our parishioners introduced us to Noah's Children, which became a recipient. Since the year 2000, we have selected and donated to at least four local charities; one is highlighted on each day of the festival. Ideally, we like to recognize four charities, one on each day of the festival.

Q: What do you think is important about giving to charities?

A: This is the most important committee I have ever worked on—church, community, work, and personal. We love to give back to the community that has given us so much. Collectively, "we" give. Speaking for myself, I am so proud that we have consistently given back over 45 years. The Number One check we write and the first check we write is—for charitable giving. This committee, by far, is the most heartwarming and fulfilling volunteerism I have done to date. I consider the Pink Chair a stellar charity, and we were pleased to select it as one of the charities this year.

INTERVIEW (CONTINUED)

Q: Andrea, thank you for explaining the meticulous process in determining the charities for a festival. It sounds like you and your committee have quite a sophisticated application process and detailed spreadsheet of possible charities to choose from that meet specific criteria. How did the Pink Chair gain notice as a possible charity?

A: The Greek Festival Charities' Committee consists of our pastor Reverend Nicholas Bacalis, Maria Bartz, Mike Pantele, Sasa Howard, and myself as chair. We use local Central Virginia charities that would like to be considered. Applications and requests are accepted January 1st. We also ask for recommendations from our parishioners since they can personally vouch for the integrity of specific Charities. In 2019, we used social media as a tool to reach out to qualified Charities. Validation of the charities takes time. We carefully look at where specifically our donations would go. We tend to select charities where our donation would make a significant impact. Linda Caruthers had approached us much earlier about the Pink Chair, and this year, we contacted Linda. We were impressed with the professionally presented materials the Pink Chair provided for our consideration that showed a complete package of its mission and impact. Beyond the personal connection, this stellar charity which Linda founded has made a difference. It was a pleasure reviewing and accepting this application. I have provided a list of charities that have benefited to date. Looking back over this list validates our mission to do good to those who also do good.

Q: Andrea, speaking as a Cathedral representative, what was your response to the Pink Chair Project RVA on Saturday of the Festival?

A: I walked in and saw the happy, attentive, and vivacious group of people, and the beautiful quilts, I was drawn to the Pink Chair presentation tables. It meant so much to me to have a group of people at the tables. The volunteers looked excited. For me, it was game-changing to see a group so energetic and talking with people on a personal level. Linda's personal connection with the church helped with the experience of welcoming Festival visitors as guests to the Pink Chair tables. The welcoming spirit was contagious. I was amazed at how many of our guests stopped by the table to learn more and to engage with Pink Chair. The encounters seemed warm and welcoming and spiritual. The Pink Chair volunteers were impressive. Their visible presence and palpable enthusiasm showed this was a worthy cause that touched our hearts. It was our pleasure to present the donation check later that evening. The Pink Chair volunteers modeled how to share their charity with others.

Q: Andrea, thank you so much for your time and efforts for charity- giving at the Greek Festival. If you had one parting thought or reflection for future festivals, what would it be?

A: The pleasure was mine. This was fun! Our parish voted early on to earmark a total donation of \$20,000 each year for local charities during our Festival. This is the first check we write—for charities. I would love to challenge other Festivals and fundraisers to give back to the Greater Richmond community. Wouldn't it be great to take into consideration the local Richmond area charities, and to give more back to the community that has given us so much? That thought fills my heart.



STS. CONSTANTINE AND HELEN GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL

ORGANIZATIONS AND CHARITY RECIPIENTS OF FESTIVAL PROCEEDS

For the past 45 years of hosting our Greek Festival, a portion of our proceeds are donated to local charities that specifically serve Central Virginia and other worthy organizations. We admire the work they do in our community and are pleased that we can offer our support. Since the year 2000, we have donated approximately one third of a million dollars to the following charities:

- Noah’s Children
- Beacon Tree Foundation
- West End Volunteer Rescue Squad
- The Faison School for Autism
- St. Joseph’s Villa
- Camp Comfort Zone
- Gateway Homes of Greater Richmond
- Safe Harbor
- Rebuilding Together Richmond
- Stop Child Abuse Now
- Home Again
- Marmarou Research Fund
- Miracle League
- Northfield Ministries
- Elijah House Academy
- Richmond Friends of the Homeless
- Coordinators 2Adopt Inc.
- The Arc of Hanover
- Neighborhood Housing Services
- ART 180
- Re-Establish Richmond
- Peter Paul Development Center
- Community of Caring
- Jacobs Ladder
- Youth Life Foundation of Richmond
- **Pink Chair Project RVA**
- Rebuilding Together
- Positive Vibe Cafe
- Hospital Hospitality House
- Katie and Friends
- Richmond Children's Hospital
- Alzheimer's Assoc. of Greater Richmond
- Special Olympics Virginia
- Richmond Hill
- Michael's Miracle Workers
- Andrew's Buddies
- ACTS
- Fisher House
- ASK
- Full Circle
- Hope Tree Family Services
- Fresh Start
- Autism Society of Central Virginia
- Neighborhood Resource Center
- Richmond Police Athletic League
- The Healing Place
- Relationship Foundation
- Jacobs Chance
- Sportable
- Assisting Families of Inmates
- Scottish Rite Childhood Language Ctr.
- Central Virginia Legal Aid Society



www.PinkChairProjectRVA.org
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We are committed individuals helping women recover from breast cancer surgery. Our goal is to provide you with a chair that will help you sleep while you recover and cannot lay flat in a bed. Our idea to provide electric recliners in Virginia came from a mastectomy patient, and our leader, Linda Caruthers. With support from the Hawthorne Cancer Center at Johnston Willis Hospital, the idea became a reality.

Support us here :



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