



## Calendar of events

A LOOK AT THE WEEK AHEAD

### Friday, Feb. 28

**SMILE Ecumenical Ministries Inc. will host Senior Friday** on Friday, Feb. 28, in Lusby. On Fridays, all seniors aged 55 or older, with proof of age, will receive 50 percent off clothing for the person named on the discount card. For more information, go to [www.smileinc.org](http://www.smileinc.org).

**The College of Southern Maryland's Connections Literary Series will host novelist Wayne Karlin** at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 28, at the Prince Frederick Campus, Building B, Multipurpose Room. Karlin will present his book, "Wandering Souls: Journeys with the Living and the Dead in Viet Nam." Tickets are \$3 in advance at the CSM box office and at the door with student ID, or \$5 at the door for general admission. Email [bxoffc@csmd.edu](mailto:bxoffc@csmd.edu), or call 301-934-7828.

**Christian Beginnings Preschool will host registration for the 2014-2015 school year** from 10 a.m. to noon Friday, Feb. 28, in the lobby of the St. John Vianney Church Parish Center, 105 Vianney Lane, Prince Frederick. For more information, call Marie at the office at 410-535-9223.

**The College of Southern Maryland Theatre Company will present "Elephant's Graveyard"** at 8 p.m. Friday, Feb. 28, at the La Plata Campus Fine Arts Center. Set in September 1916, the play combines historical fact and legend, exploring the American craving for spectacle, violence and revenge in this tale of the tragic collision of a struggling circus and a tiny town in Tennessee, which resulted in the only known lynching of an elephant. Cost is \$15 for adults, \$12 for military, seniors and youth; call 301-934-7828, or email [bxoffc@csmd.edu](mailto:bxoffc@csmd.edu).

**St. Mary's College of Maryland will present "Encounters," a performance of spoken word, dance and music,** at 8 p.m. Friday, Feb. 28, in the Bruce Davis Theater. Tickets are \$4 or \$6 general admission. To make reservations, call 240-895-4243, or email [boxoffice@smcm.edu](mailto:boxoffice@smcm.edu).

**Mike Callahan, president of the Southern Maryland Audubon Society, will lead an "Owl Prowl!"** at a private farm in Charles County on Friday, Feb. 28, or Saturday, March 1, determined by the number of responses for each date. Respond to [raptorsrulemc@gmail.com](mailto:raptorsrulemc@gmail.com) with a preference and to register. There is a suggestion donation of \$5 per person.

### Saturday, March 1

**The American Legion Gray-Ray Post 220 will host a night of fellowship and games** from 6 to 11 p.m. Saturday, March 1, at the post, located at 2105 Sixes Road in Prince Frederick. Games include bid whist, spades and more. Cost is \$10 per person. Appetizers will be available for sale. Prizes will be awarded to best three-out-of-five winners. For more information, call 410-535-1477.

**The 15th annual United Way of Calvert County Mardi Gras fundraiser** will be from 7 to 11 p.m. Saturday, March 1, at Annamarie Sculpture Garden and Arts Center. Themed "In the Garden," this year's event features the backdrop of the "New Orleans Garden District," a speakeasy, cuisine with a New Orleans flair, a live auction, live musical entertainment, the crowning of the king and queen, a raffle for a chance to win \$7,000 in jewelry and accessories, and more. Attire is black tie or optional festive costume. Tickets are \$160 per person, \$300 per couple. Sponsorship packages and tickets can be found at [unit-edwaymardigras.com](http://unit-edwaymardigras.com), or by calling 410-286-0100 or 443-968-2731.

**IBEW Local 26 will host a labor rally** at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, March 1, at Patuxent High School in Lusby. Members from Calvert, Charles and St. Mary's counties are encouraged to attend and stay for the Public Service Commission hearing for the upcoming Dominion Cove Point Liquefied Natural Gas project. The hearing begins at noon in the auditorium.

**Artworks@7th Gallery will host a "Gallery Swap" with calvART Gallery for the month of March, featuring an opening reception** from 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday, March 1, at 9100 Bay

See CALENDAR, Page B-2

# First step

## ■ New group sets out to promote more social and recreation opportunities for those with developmental differences

By **SUSAN CRATON**  
Staff writer

It wasn't just another concert, dinner and dance.

The Jan. 18 event in Solomons started off with a concert by St. Marie's Musica Minstrels, where members of the audience had the chance to participate in some of the songs. Afterward, there were pizza rolls and cookies, and about 135 guests were encouraged to get out on the dance floor and try the Electric Slide and other dances. They visited with old friends and many made new ones.

"It was a wonderful time," said Bonnie Elward of California, Md., executive director of Southern Maryland Community Resources, the group that, along with Helpful Hooves Equine Therapy, sponsored the event — A Winter Gathering at Our Lady Star of the Sea Church.

On the surface, maybe not so unusual. But the event was special because it was the first.

It was the first event sponsored by the fledgling Southern Maryland Community Resources group, a private, nonprofit organization incorporated in July. It was set up to promote social, recreational and educational opportunities for people with developmental differences. The group wants to provide events where older teenagers and adults can have fun and places where they can learn.

Southern Maryland Community Resources arose from the special needs ministry established at St. Aloysius Catholic Church last year, as church leadership and the laity began reaching out specifically to members of the community with special needs. SMCR was established to do similar things in the broader community outside of the church.

The organization is starting with a focus on St. Mary's and Calvert counties and plans to soon broaden its programs to include Charles County, too.

As Stephen Riley of Potomac, executive director of Potomac Community Resources and a board member of the new and similar Southern Maryland group, explained, there are opportunities for learning and socializing for folks with developmental differences when they are school aged.

"All of that goes away overnight when the student ages out; when the school bus stops coming to the door," Riley said during a telephone interview earlier this month.

Several families that had children with developmental differences in the Potomac area, like the Rileys, banded together in 1994 to create Potomac Community Resources to continue to provide classes, activities and social opportunities for their out-of-school children. The Potomac group now offers 35 programs 11 months out of the year for older teenagers and adults. Riley's daughter, who has Down



Submitted photo

Participants at A Winter Gathering, the first event offered by the new Southern Maryland Community Resources program, including St. Mary's Ryken students, Melinda Farrell, left, and Marley Murray, along with Rebecca Elwell and, Caroline Heisey (behind Elwell) and students Azara Seek and Julia Heisey and, seated, Patrick Johnson and Kevin Detwiler, foreground, get out on the dance floor.



Bonnie Elward

syndrome, participates in a yoga class, aerobic core exercise and many of the group's special events.

"This has added a texture to [her] life. It adds a social, recreational dimension to her life," Riley said.

Potomac Community Resources is offering its experience about what works, what doesn't, to similar start-up groups in Maryland like SMCR and in Washington, D.C.

SMCR's first event back in January was the group's introduction to the community, and the chance to demonstrate the quality of the programming the group plans to offer.

"We wanted to set a standard," Elward said.

A key component of SMCR's success will be the community's support of its programs. "Volunteers are huge in this," Riley said.

At the Jan. 18 event, for instance, a group of St. Mary's Ryken students volunteered to help. Beth Allen, campus minister at the school, helps set up those kinds of volunteer opportunities for the school's students. In the past, the students have focused on poverty-related and veteran projects. For instance, they make dinner once a month for Three Oaks in Lexington Park and make dinner at Angel's Watch shelter in Hughesville. They help with bingo at Charlotte Hall Veterans Home and work with

SMILE Ecumenical Ministries in Lusby. But to help people with developmental differences was a little intimidating for some — not knowing how to help, how to act.

"This is a new ministry," Allen said. "But I'm pleased that the ladies and gentlemen have stepped up to the plate ... The vision is bringing all of God's children back to the table."

Elward offered training to nine students from St. Mary's Ryken before they assisted with the Jan. 18 dance, so they came prepared. "These young people got out there and had a wonderful time," Elward said.

The mother of one of the volunteer students called Allen after the event and said it had been a life-changing event for her daughter, changing her perspective on what she could do and on what makes life more difficult for those without the same abilities.

"It surprised me," Allen said. "They were shocked at how comfortable they were. ... It was just an awesome thing. We seek to help others, but they change us. They touch us."

Those students are spreading that excitement at the Leonardtown school's campus and have signed up to provide music lessons and dance lessons to SMCR participants. In addition, the school's drama department has invited SMCR participants to attend its dress rehearsal for its spring musical this year.

In addition, SMCR plans to offer a monthly cooking class by Chef Loic Jaffres of Cafe Des Artistes. The Medically Oriented Gym in California, Md., will host an exercise class once a week, and plans are underway to offer art and ceramics classes at a church in Owings.

"It's very, very heartwarming," Elward said of the community's quick response to the new organization. "It's very exciting. I can't believe it's happened so quick."

### To learn more

To sign up for classes or events offered by Southern Maryland Community Resources or to learn more about volunteer opportunities, visit [www.somdcr.org](http://www.somdcr.org) or call 301-997-8143. Those who sign up with SMCR will be alerted about the organization's special events.

Elward said she is hoping to hear from more businesses and members of the community, like the St. Mary's Ryken students, who can assist in SMCR's efforts with their "time, talent and treasure," she said.

Andy Geisz of Solomons, president of Bowhead Engineering and Information Technology Group in Great Mills, is serving as chairman of the board of directors for SMCR. Although he doesn't have anyone in his family with developmental differences, he is a member at St. Aloysius and observed the benefits of the church's special needs ministry.

He became so convinced of the value of the community making sure everyone can participate in community life, he agreed to chair the new group when Elward approached him.

"This is something that needs to be taken care of," Geisz said during a telephone interview earlier this month. "We all have special needs at any certain time."

Geisz noted that the support for this group stemmed from a church group and that faith has something to do with people's inclination to reach out to others. But "I think we are all called to help each other out ... to make that sense of community more broad. Make it more inclusive for everybody," he said.

[scraton@somdnews.com](mailto:scraton@somdnews.com)