

Highlights & Headlines

SEPTEMBER 2026

from
HILLTOPPERS, Inc.

NEWS ♦ NARRATIVES ♦ NOTES ♦ NOTIONS ♦ NECESSITIES ♦ AND NONSENSE



Tired but thrilled, Austin reaches the Atlantic Ocean!

Once upon a time a group of friends from Hilltoppers, Inc. decided to visit Orlando. Some had been there before and some had never been. Some were sweethearts, and others were single. So Ken and Caroline, Austin and Debbie, Susie, Mary, and staff members Marsha and Tina all climbed into a Hilltoppers van and made the 11-hour drive to Florida. There were a few glitches to be sure (like torrential thunderstorms the way drive down) but by everyone's account it was a trip of a lifetime!

The gang rented a 5-bedroom house from VRBO complete with a private swimming pool just outside the back door. The house had plenty of space to stretch out and relax. But relax is not something they did much of. The gang shopped and shopped, and walked the Boardwalk at Daytona Beach. They ate out together at places like I-Hop and Joe's Crab Shack, and had a feast with a personal chef at Benihana. Friends and food, they agreed, make for a great time!

For Ken and Caroline, who have been dating for over nine years, this was their first vacation together. They enjoyed walking hand in hand, shopping for matching t-shirts, and romantic lunches. For Susie and Mary, just getting away and enjoying the company of friends was great vacation fun. Austin, on the other hand, had definite plans for this trip. And girlfriend Debbie was excited to be along for the ride (and the shopping!) of course.

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Austin & Friends

An Excellent Summer Vacation

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The gang at Benihana Restaurant.



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Austin is a determined young man. He had a couple of must-do “bucket-list” goals to achieve on this Florida vacation. The first was to visit the Harry Potter exhibit at Universal Studios. A lifelong fan, Austin has read all the Harry Potter books, has seen all the Harry Potter movies, has played all the Harry Potter board games and video

games, and is arguably the #1 Harry Potter fan in the world. So when he learned about the exhibit at Universal Studios, that was a primary destination. While the others relaxed in the pool at the rental house, Austin and Debbie, along with house manager Marsha, spent an entire day at Universal Studios devouring anything and everything Harry Potter. They visited Hogsmeade Village and Diagon Alley, rode the Hogwarts Express train, and drank butter beer. They even went on a treasure hunt under Hogwarts Castle.

Austin bought a replica of Harry Potter’s wizarding broomstick—a prized possession—but what he really wanted was a Gryffindor sword, the legendary magic sword made by goblins. That could not be found anywhere. They ventured on a treasure hunt for it under the castle in Hogsmeade Village. They searched at Filch’s Emporium

of Confiscated Goods. The treasure hunt became an adventure and even though the sword was not to be found, other collectible treasures were found, including the magical golden egg and the ruby stone from Gringotts Wizarding Bank. These are foreign concepts to non-Harry Potter fans, but not to Austin, who schooled several of the Universal Studios staff on Harry Potter trivia. They were astonished at Austin’s thorough knowledge of all things Harry Potter!

Of course, a trip to Florida was not complete without a visit to the beach and that, too, was on Austin’s bucket list. So the gang headed to Daytona Beach. A thunderstorm couldn’t break their spirits, because they ate at Joe’s Crab Shack while they waited out the rain and when it stopped, they walked the peer.

The rest of the gang were content to watch the water from the peer, but Debbie and Austin wanted to touch the ocean. And they were insistent. So Marsha, Debbie, and



Hilltoppers, Inc. is governed by a nine member, volunteer Board of Directors who meet the 3rd Tuesday of each month. We are grateful to have these nine directors to review and guide us, and we thank them for their time, talents and governance.

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OUR VALUES

RIGHTS, RESPECT & DIGNITY

A priority at Hilltoppers, Inc. is to teach and practice that all people have **Value**; that all people have **Rights**; and that all people will be treated with **Respect and Dignity**. Everyone should practice and facilitate **value, worth and respect** in their daily supports and communication to others, including providing people with opportunities for: decision making, privacy, exercising their rights and living without unwarranted restrictions.

CHOICE & DECISION MAKING

It is also a priority for the staff of Hilltoppers, Inc. to support all people, their family members, friends, natural supports, and others to share, educate, and encourage the use of supported decision-making strategies. We encourage people to seek and research information that will assist them in learning to make good choices and informed decisions, and how to communicate their choices freely, including complaints.



Debbie & Austin: Universal Studios or bust!



Tina, Ken and Caroline pose at lunch.

Austin, who uses a wheelchair, descended from the peer onto the sand to make their way to the water.

They knew there might be logistic issues with bringing the wheelchair down to the water, but they had observed bikes and scooters that were traveling in the sand, so why not an electric wheelchair? Well, as luck would have it, the wheelchair got stuck in the sand at the edge of the peer and the three were not able to “unstuck” it. Onlookers on the peer tried to help the gang get the chair out of the stuck sand but to no avail. A small crowd of onlookers had gathered on the peer just to see what was going on.

Sadly, it appeared for a moment that the Hilltoppers vacationers might not be able to feel the ocean water on their skin. Austin, undeterred and more determined than ever to fulfill his bucket list dream of sitting in the ocean, scooted himself out of the wheelchair, and using his upper body strength, slowly crawled over 150 feet in the wet Florida sand to reach the Atlantic ocean, where the cool water refreshed him and gave him great satisfaction. As Austin reached his destination—without assistance and crawling on the sand—a spontaneous outpouring of hollering, cheering and applause came from the assembled crowd on the peer. They witnessed and cheered on Austin’s accomplished feat. What a triumph for self-determination and actualization!

In the end, kind onlookers were able to release the wheelchair stuck in the sand, and the whole gang ventured home to the house rental for a very deserved good night’s sleep. Austin and friends all agreed they had an awesome vacation that will last in their memories forever.

Thank You



In July, the **Fairfield Glade United Methodist Church Men’s Prayer Breakfast** sponsored pontoon boat rides and lunch for all who were able to attend. The boat rides were provided by private owners and sailed on Lake St. George in Fairfield Glade. Lunch was hotdogs, baked beans, potato salad, watermelon, cookies and ice cream. Thank you to all the wonderful volunteers that provided a boat and captain, and those that prepared and helped to serve lunch as well as those that helped with the boat rides. We had a great time!



A huge thank you to **Stubbs Construction Services** for their very kind gift of sweet treats and pastries from **Carpenters Brew**. Why? Just because... We love being recognized by the wonderful business community in our area who support the work we do. ***These are the businesses that make our community so great!***



EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

Shining Stars

Congratulations and thank you to each of our Employees of the Month. These team members are recognized for the exceptional compassion and care they show the people we serve. Each of them contributes to our shared success and their efforts are deeply appreciated.

These Hilltoppers' employees reflect the values of Hilltoppers, Inc. and offer compassionate and professional care for those who need support most. Their dedication to the mission sets them apart, and we honor them as examples for us all. The work is not always easy, but its rewards are reflected in the smiles and hugs they receive.

Thank you, outstanding employees, for your excellent work!

If you know a standout employee who exemplifies dedication to care and want to nominate them for employee of the month, please email our director at jeanene.houston@hilltoppersinc.com.



MAY 2025

ADMINISTRATIVE HEROES!

DANA EVANS, ROBERT BOLIN, KIM TABOR, ALLI KING, & BOBBIE EVANS



APRIL 2026

KIM COIA

DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL



MAY 2026

REBECCA MURPHY

HOUSE MANAGER



MAY 2026

SHERRY ELMORE

DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL



MAY 2026

SUSAN TROGLIN

DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL



MAY 2026
MALINDA WATKINS
DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL



JUNE 2026
KAYLA DAVIS
DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL



JUNE 2026
PETRA METOYER
DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL



JUNE 2026
MISTY DENSON
DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL



JULY 2026
MARIE TINCH
DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL



JULY 2026
REBECCA HASTON
DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL

**WE'RE
HIRING!**

We need **Direct Support Staff** and **LPNs** to work with adults who have intellectual and development disabilities. Download an application from our website (www.hilltoppersinc.com) or stop by our office at **86 Duer Court** and fill out an application. We offer a new starting rate of \$16 an hour for DSPs, \$20 an hour for LPNs, plus paid training and opportunities for advancement.



DIGNITY OF CHOICE AND DIGNITY OF RISK

One of the most important tenets of Hilltoppers, Inc. philosophy and practice, is the notion that all people—including disabled people—have the right to make choices about their own life. After all, life is about choices. And choices involve risk. These two concepts are related; you don't have one without the other.

At Hilltoppers, we believe in **Dignity of Choice**. What does that mean? It is the right of a person to make an informed decision to engage in experiences of his or her own choosing, which are necessary for personal growth and development. Informed decisions are those where the person has had meaningful discussion and is aware of potential outcomes, both good and bad, that may result from the choices he or she makes. In other words, there are risks involved with every choice we make. Risks come with living life to one's best potential and there is dignity in taking reasonable risks.

What is **Dignity of Risk**? At Hilltoppers, we believe that the benefits of Choice and Risk foster independence and better decision making. The idea that self-determination, which is a person's right to make choices for him/herself, and the right to take reasonable risks are essential for dignity and self-esteem. As caregivers, it is our duty to ensure the health and welfare of the people we serve. Part of that means honoring a person's right to make choices and engage in activity that may involve risks. Our responsibility is to assist, not to insist, with helping the person consider and implement strategies to mitigate potential negative consequences of the choices they make. At Hilltoppers, Inc., instead of trying to eliminate all risks, we use this approach that values the dignity and self-determination of the individual.



2026 was a hot summer. And we're not just talking about the weather!

Our gang had loads of fun soaking up the sun or, when it was too hot, enjoying indoor arts and crafts projects. We ventured out to the Lake Tansi pool; we saw movies at the Palace Theatre; we had a blast at summer camp; we went to the county fair; and much more!

In June, many of the Hilltoppers gang attended The Arc Cumberland County's Family Picnic & Awards Presentation at First Baptist Church gym. There was plenty of good food, thanks to The Flying Pig BBQ, and everyone had a wonderful time.

Project Funway was one of the highlights of Summer Camp. The theme was "Lions & Tigers & Bears, Oh My" and the challenge was to draw a creature name, use the supplies provided to design a costume, apply make up to look like that creature, and then tell a story about that creature. There were four teams—Team Ogre, Team Lion, Team Gnome, and Team Deer—that competed. The winning team was Team Deer!





Canoeing at camp.



Left to right: Lion Jason, Deer Amber, Ogre Eddie, and Gnome Reba.



Ogre Eddie gets finishing touches.



The fish that didn't get away at summer camp.



Good company; good conversation.

Farewell & Best Wishes, Old Friend



Hubert Cummins has been a staple in our Hilltoppers, Inc. family seemingly forever. He came to live and play with us in 1991, and now after 35 years, Hubert has decided to move back to Nashville. We can't blame him; he wants to be closer to his family, which includes his father and several cousins. His dad, Hubert, Sr., has been making regular drives from Nashville to Crossville for visits, but that is getting harder for him as he ages, so Hubert—forever a good son—has decided to move to Nashville to be closer to his dad.

While we certainly wish him well, Hubert will be greatly missed by friends and staff alike. We can hardly remember a time when he wasn't part of the Hilltoppers' gang. A regular at the Day Center, Hubert enjoys playing tambourine with the Cluckers musical revue and especially loves the Christmas parties put on by the staff.

Around the house, Hubert is very helpful and will put energy into any task asked of him. He especially loves to help cook and is the first to volunteer to stir the pot on the stove. Roommates James and Jerry are sorry to see him go. Hubert is a quiet guy at first, but don't let that fool you. Once he's got you figured out, he's a sharp wit and has a great sense of humor. Longtime staff member Tammy Montgomery commented that it seems like Hubert is always in a good mood.

Of course, there are those of us that believe Hubert may have an ulterior motive to relocate to Nashville. Hubert is the lifelong #1 fan of country music star Reba McEntire and guess where she lives? Yes, Music City Nashville! Who knows, maybe they'll meet!

We wish Hubert the best and are in hopes he will come back to visit often. ❤️



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Visit us at <http://www.hilltoppersinc.com>
Questions? Call (931) 484-2535

SAVE THE DATE

ARC OF CUMBERLAND COUNTY SPECIAL NEEDS MINI CONFERENCE & RESOURCE FAIR AT CCHS

October 3 from 9:00 am-3:00 pm
(Use front entrance to Library, A&B Wings)

HALLOWEEN PARTY AT THE DAY CENTER

October 30

THANKSGIVING CELEBRATION AT THE DAY CENTER

November 30

ADMIN OFFICES & DAY CENTER CLOSINGS

Thanksgiving: November 26-27

Christmas: December 24-25

New Year's Day: January 1

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LIKE WHAT WE DO?

We can always use **extra volunteers** or people who have a heart for our clients. We welcome your **donations** of time and money anytime; no need to wait until the end of the year. You can donate online at our website: hilltoppersinc.com. Click on **"Funding Sources" (How You Can Help)** after landing on the home page. Click and follow the instructions.
Thanks in advance!



....our Community's Clothing, Furniture and Treasure Emporium

Your donations = *Opportunities*

Remember to shop and donate at the
Thrift Store located at
154 East First Street!

"Your Community Emporium" for Bargains!