



Methodist Homes of Alabama &
Northwest Florida
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Birmingham, AL 35210
(205) 951-2442

www.methodisthomes.org

Methodist Homes News

A Publication of Methodist Homes of Alabama & Northwest Florida

Methodist Homes Communities

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- Wesley Place on Honeysuckle**
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- Wesley Gardens**
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- Mathison Retirement Community**
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- Wesley Haven Villa**
Pensacola, FL (850) 434-1035

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- Wesley Apartments**
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BIRMINGHAM

LeadingAge Executive Of The Year '25



Earnestine Thompson, Residential Administrator of Fair Haven (Birmingham), was awarded the 2025 Executive of the Year Award by LeadingAge Southeast, a network of retirement and health advocates that includes 350 mission-driven organizations, representing more than 600 facilities across Florida, Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi. Earnestine's charge at Fair Haven is administrative oversight of the residential areas of Fair Haven, namely, Independent

Living, Assisted Living, and Memory Care Assisted Living. After more than 43 years in service at Methodist Homes, there's no doubt that Earnestine stands out in a crowd.

"She is an extraordinary individual on so many different levels," said **Christopher Tomlin**, Methodist Homes President & CEO. "I can't imagine a Fair Haven, I can't imagine a Methodist Homes without Earnestine. She embodies everything that you want residents to experience. She's done that her entire career."

A 3-minute video honoring Earnestine can be viewed on the Fair Haven website, fairhavenbirmingham.org.

MONTGOMERY

Outstanding Leadership Award Winner



Randy Allen, Administrator at Wesley Gardens (Montgomery), has been selected as the Assisted Living Association 2025 Sheila Wilson Leadership Award Winner for Outstanding Assisted Living Administrator in the entire state of Alabama! We are so proud to see his dedication, leadership, and heart for our residents and team members recognized in such a special way. This honor reflects not only his hard work, but also the love and care he pours into Wesley Gardens every single day.



PANAMA CITY

Mathison Named 2025 “Best of Bay”

At the Awards Gala held September 9th, Mathison Retirement Community (Panama City) was announced as the winner of the 2025 Best of Bay for Assisted/Senior Living in the Community Choice Awards! Our heartfelt appreciation goes out to everyone who voted for Mathison. Proudly accepting the award on behalf of all residents and associates were **Cindy Wood** (Administrator) and **Donna Robinson** (HR Dir. & Business Office Mngr).



DOTHAN

Pat Poole’s Passion Takes Root



When **Pat Poole** moved into Wesley Place on Honeysuckle (Dothan), she didn’t expect to become an unofficial community gardener. But thanks to a gift from her grandchildren—and more than a little help from God—Pat has discovered a way to keep both her hands and her heart full.

It all started with a single rose bush, a Mother’s Day gift from her grandchildren not long after moving to Wesley Place. Pat asked if she could place it in a nearby garden spot where she could admire it from her patio. With staff approval, the rose bush found a new home—and soon it had company.

“I thought it looked lonely,” Pat said. So she added another rose bush... then another... and now, the patch has grown into a full-fledged rose garden with eleven thriving bushes. “It gives me something to do, as roses need lots of water.”

Her roots in Dothan go deep. Pat’s family moved to the area from Massachusetts in 1949 when she was eight years old, and her mother found a passion for gardening that became part of her Southern lifestyle. Years later, Pat is carrying on that legacy—watering her roses, watching them bloom, and deeply relying on divine help. “When God waters them,” she emphasized, “He does a much better job than I do.”

Pat’s green thumb isn’t her only contribution to community life. Last fall, she gathered pecans from the trees on campus and sold them to raise money for the Employee Christmas Fund.

After careers with both the Department of Human Resources and Trinity Lutheran Church (her family was one of the founding families), Pat has officially retired twice. But at Wesley Place on Honeysuckle, she’s still growing—nurturing beauty, building community, and inspiring others to bloom where they’re planted.

PENSACOLA

Honorary Doctorate



Veridian Christian University bestowed an honorary degree to **Dr. Donna Polk**, resident of Wesley Scott Place (Pensacola). The University confers honorary degrees to individuals in recognition of their significant contributions to society through professional achievements, public service, or support of educational and humanitarian causes. Congratulations, Donna!



Students from the “Classic Jazz Band” at Minds on Music in Gulf Breeze performed at Wesley Haven Villa (Pensacola) as residents enjoyed a meal. Their instructor **Cody Johnson** played with them. The jazz group specializes in songs from the 40’s and 50’s, and is one of 8 bands in their youth student band program. Minds on Music currently has more than 400 students enrolled in private lessons on multiple instruments.



BIRMINGHAM

Meet Chaplain Steve West

When **Rev. Steve West** began thinking about retirement, he wasn't sure what the next chapter of his life would hold. After 36 years of serving churches across North Alabama, he admits, "I wasn't quite ready for retirement, but because of my dad living here and him needing me, and our daughter living in Irondale... we were feeling the need to move here."

A three-day prayer retreat brought him clarity. "I was struggling with the question, 'what am I going to do if I retire early?' I was not ready for that kind of thing, and I went on a prayer retreat for three days at a monastery and prayed through this. I've never heard God talk verbally, but the message I kept getting from God was, 'Steve, I've got this. I've got something for you.'"

That "something" turned out to be Fair Haven (Birmingham)—though not in a way Steve could have predicted. On his way home from the retreat, he decided to stop by Fair Haven to see his father, Pete. It was about ice cream social time so he went to get his dad some ice cream and ran into the Life Enrichment Director. "I saw **Anna Warner** and she said, and I quote, 'Are you a senior minister or are you a music director?' I said, 'I'm a pastor.' Her eyes got big and she said, 'Before you leave this building I want you to go see Earnestine in the front office...'"

Indeed, Steve walked downstairs and poked his head in the door of the residential administrator's office. **Earnestine Thompson** didn't offer him the job on the spot, but that was the beginning of the conversation. "I really took that as a calling, and I was able to work it out as an appointment."

Steve works Sunday through Wednesday, and was able to defer his official retirement, find time to do some writing, plus he and his wife **Sandy** get the extra time they wanted to be with their young grandbaby. "That's basically how it happened. As soon as I talked to Earnestine I knew that I wanted to do it. I knew it was the right thing."

Steve is no stranger to Fair Haven. He grew up in Bluff Park and attended Birmingham-Southern College. He had an aunt that lived at Fair Haven for a time. And as a pastor serving in several area churches—Chelsea, Vestavia Hills and Hoover—he would occasionally make visits to Fair Haven. But now, Steve has



a chance to combine his experience with preaching with his deep love for music.

"I was a music director before I went into pastoral ministry. In college I studied music and voice and piano and organ, and I thought I was going into music ministry. But half way through college felt called more to the pastoral side. I've always been a minister musician... You know there's just a part in your soul for music, and it's lodged in there."

For Steve, serving as Chaplain at Fair Haven is more than preaching—it's about presence. He not only makes himself available to the residents, but also to their families, as well as Fair Haven staff members. "It's not so much that there's some magic thing that we're going to say. In some ways it's more just what I represent. I represent their faith."

That presence now extends through technology as well. Families, friends, residents, and anyone who is interested, are invited to join and share in worship with Rev. West and the Fair Haven community. Chapel worship services are live streamed on Facebook each Sunday around 10:40 a.m. at <https://www.facebook.com/FairHavenBirmingham> and then uploaded to YouTube by 1 pm that same afternoon at <https://www.youtube.com/@TheGoodShepherdChapelFH>.

NOTE: Shortly after conducting this interview, Rev. Pete West, Steve's father, passed away. Our deepest sympathies to the West family.

PENSACOLA

Board Meeting & Luncheon

The Methodist Homes Board of Trustees held its August meeting in Pensacola, almost 20 years to the day since the Wesley Haven Villa (Pensacola) grand opening celebration in 2005. It has been 10 years since the Trustees held their quarterly meeting in the Gulf Coast city.

Seven of Methodist Homes' current 22 Board members were also serving in 2005: **Mrs. Maudine Holloway** of Anniston; **Dr. John Ed Mathison** of Montgomery; **Mr. Robert L. McKee, III** (now Chairman) of Roaring Gap, NC; **Rev. John Mount** of Birmingham; **Dr. Henry Roberts** of Pensacola; **Rev. Bobby Scales** of Birmingham; and **Rev. Sam Williamson** of Dora, AL.



Administrator **Tess Helton** and her team at Wesley Haven Villa made the Board feel right at home at the post-meeting luncheon.



Thank you 



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PANAMA CITY

“Shoreline” Sculpture Honors Carolyn V. Geczy (1948-2024)



Mathison Retirement Community (Panama City) is privileged to feature a beautiful sculpture titled “Shoreline” in our courtyard, given by **Steve Geczy** in memory of his beloved wife, **Carolyn “Carri” Vanderwilt-Geczy**. Carri was a Mathison resident for four years, when the community became her home during her journey with Alzheimer’s.

The bronze piece reflects Carri’s love of the beach, seashells, and the ocean waves she cherished throughout her life. The plaque includes her favorite saying: “Life’s a beach, enjoy the waves.”

At the dedication on August 27, residents, staff, and friends gathered to celebrate Carri’s life and the joy she brought to those around her. Steve’s hope is simple and profound: “I hope this sculpture brings a feeling of joy to anyone viewing it.”

Pictured with Steve are **Diane Carr** and **Alicia Badger**. Read the full story on the blog page of the Mathison website.

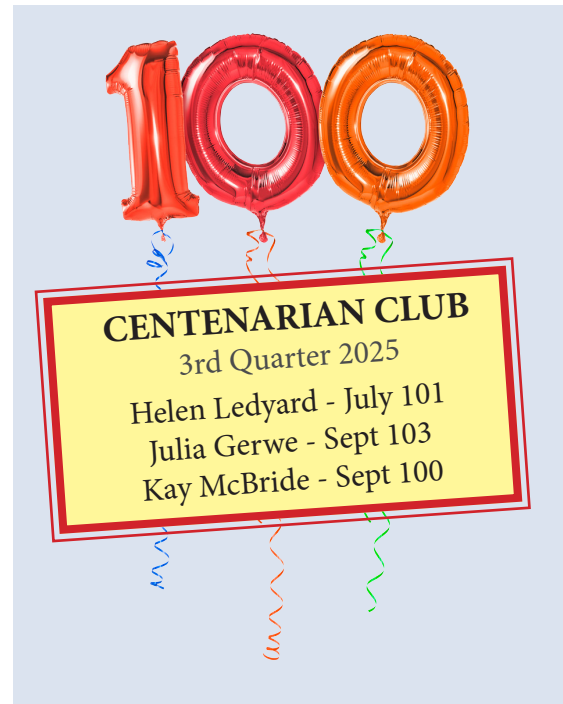


METHODIST HOMES

Meet Jeremy Locklear

Vice President for Affordable Housing

Jeremy Locklear joined the Methodist Homes team in August. He earned his Master of Public Administration from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and brings over 14 years of experience with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, where he provided leadership in asset management, regulatory compliance, and oversight of multifamily housing programs. A veteran of the United States Navy, Jeremy is dedicated to serving our communities through the preservation, development, and successful operation of affordable housing in our efforts to ensure both long-term sustainability for our communities and enhanced quality of life for our residents. Welcome aboard!



MONTGOMERY

Joys & Timeless Traditions



We thoroughly enjoyed Pioneer Week at Wesley Gardens (Montgomery). From making cheese, to churning butter, and shelling peas to milling flour, the first week of September was full of simple joys and timeless traditions. We ended with a quilting demo by **Valla Bryson** and **Cheryl Kirkland** from Anyway Sew, a good reminder that our community is also stitched together with love, history, and connection. Pictured above are **Randy Allen**, **Kim Huffman**, and **Caroline Glover**.



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To enrich the lives of older adults and all those who serve them in faith-based communities, where life is celebrated, relationships are valued, teamwork is embraced, service excellence is expected, and the touch of God's love is ever-present and ageless.

METHODIST HOMES

Brief Guide: Tips For Talking To A Parent About Senior Living



For many families, few conversations feel as weighty as those must-have talks with an elderly parent about deeply personal issues. This includes conversations about the need for the daily help or supervision of a senior living community. Adult children want the very best for their loved one's safety, health, and quality of life—but for the parent, the thought of leaving home can feel overwhelming. It can stir up feelings of loss: loss of independence, of familiar surroundings, and sometimes even of identity.

At Methodist Homes, we walk with families through this tender season every day. What we've learned is this: conversations don't have to end in conflict. With patience, empathy, and a few practical tools, you can begin the discussion in a way that honors your parent's dignity and opens the door to possibilities.

Choose the Right Time and Place

These conversations go best when they aren't rushed or wrapped in crisis. Choose a calm, quiet moment—maybe after lunch or during a relaxed afternoon. Sit together in a comfortable space, side by side rather than across a table.

Lead with Empathy

Start with an acknowledgment of what matters most to your parent—their home, routines, and independence. This builds trust and shows that you understand the weight of the decision.

Ask Before You Tell

Rather than beginning with what you think should happen, invite your parent to share their experiences. What feels harder lately? What brings them joy? Their answers can guide the conversation toward solutions that matter most to them.

Share Concerns with "I" Statements

Instead of saying, "You can't do this anymore," try gently expressing your feelings and observations, such as "I have noticed that...". This keeps the tone caring rather than critical.

A Gentle Invitation

If you are just beginning this journey with your parent, we invite you to take a no-pressure first step. Contact one of our Methodist Homes care communities (see page 1) and join us for a meal, meet our staff, and see what life is like. Sometimes, simply experiencing the warmth of the community makes all the difference.