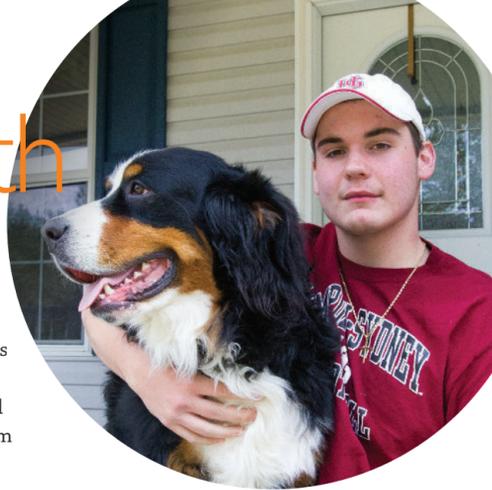


OUR CHAMPION

Mark Smith



MARK SMITH has been working hard to create a bright future for himself. "I don't want to be another statistic," he reflects.

Many of the statistics for youth in foster care are grim. Nationally, only 50 percent of foster youth complete high school by age 18, and less than nine percent of them graduate from college. Mark is on track to shatter these statistics.

Things didn't always look so rosy. Mark had a rough childhood, which included the imprisonment of his father and the death of his mother. He entered foster care at age nine, and he moved between several foster care families and a residential facility before he became part of UMFS' treatment foster care program in 2014. Like many foster youth, the turbulence in his life had taken a toll, leaving Mark behind one grade level in school. He was also struggling to deal with anger and aggression.

In April 2015, Mark Smith needed a new foster family. Just a few months before, Don and Charon Price had completed the training to become foster parents at the UMFS South Central Regional Center in South Hill.

The Prices had heard about the urgent need for foster families for teens. After their two sons graduated and left home, they decided it was time to make the commitment. UMFS Community Based Services Supervisor Heather Schwartz knew she had a good match. Both Mark and the Prices are huge sports fans with a passion for football, and they

share a love of sarcasm. "Mark fits so well in our family. If we could have ordered a-la-carte, we would have gotten him," says foster mom Charon Price.

With strong support from the Prices and his UMFS social workers, Mark started to flourish. "I'm so impressed by his determination to do well. He's inspiring," shares UMFS Intake Coordinator & Senior Social Worker Abby Spence.

His foster parents worked with Mark and his school to develop a plan to help him catch up. Mark was able to complete core classes for grades 10 and 11 in one year, and that hard work will allow him to graduate on time in June 2017. Even more impressive, Mark made the honor roll and achieved a 3.5 GPA. Colleges noticed. Mark was accepted to six local colleges, and he earned a scholarship to attend his first choice Hampden-Sydney College in the fall.

Mark is looking forward to college, and hopes to major in biology with an environmental science focus. He is also excited to play football at Hampden-Sydney. Mark started his football career on a fifth grade recreational league team. By his freshman year of high school, he was playing varsity. The Prices attended every one of Mark's games, and Charon is as quick to quote Mark's football statistics as he is.

In the midst of his triumphs, Mark faced another time of sorrow. In October 2016, his foster father, Don Price died. Earlier in his life this major loss might have derailed him, but with his strong support system, he is working toward his future.

When asked who supported him to achieve his goals, Mark smiles and says, "A lot of people, but mainly these two (pointing at Charon Price and UMFS social worker Abby Spence). They see potential in me that I sometimes don't see."

Mark Smith wants other foster youth to know that they can succeed and achieve their goals as well. He advises, "Don't let anybody tell you that you can't be something and don't let your past hold you down. Advocate for yourself and let others advocate for you." He adds, "A lot of kids go back to where they came from: a life of crime or being in the system for life. I don't want to be part of that. I will be the first to go to college in my family." ✨

UMFS has offices across Virginia supporting youth in foster care, like the South Hill office that works with Mark Smith. For more information about treatment foster care or to learn more about becoming a foster parent, visit www.umfs.org/get-involved/become-a-foster-parent.

Charterhouse Student to Perform in LIVE ART Show

BY CONNIE DYE

SOPHIA PUT HER HEAD DOWN, not wanting to talk about being "famous." She grabbed her child-sized scissors and began cutting the Target ad into small pieces. Her teacher, Jessica Nelson, tried to engage Sophia, hoping she would warm up enough to answer questions. "Do you like your drama class?," I asked. "Do you have friends there?"

"No," Sophia said. "I like to watch."

Sophia isn't always shy. She is a Charterhouse School cheerleader and is excited about turning 13 in May. This summer, Sophia will be the only Charterhouse School

student to perform in School of the Performing Arts in the Richmond Community's (SPARC) LIVE ART program. LIVE ART is a Broadway-style performance where students of all abilities come together with national recording artists for a performance at the Altria Theatre in Richmond each June.

Sophia's therapeutic coach, Alex Ginsberg, is a SPARC drama teacher, UMFS is a SPARC community partner, and students from Child & Family Healing Center participate in SPARC's summer camps, thanks to the generosity of UMFS donors Joe and Sarah Hoyle.



Sophia brings what she's learned in her weekly SPARC classes back to her Charterhouse classroom. She models acceptance, compassion and empathy to her classmates.

With some coaxing from Ms. Ginsberg, Sophia tells me her dream is, "To be nice to the world, kind and loving." It's then that she looks up and gives a big smile. ✨

Programs like SPARC would not be possible for some of our students without our generous donors. To make a gift, please visit www.umfs.org/donate.

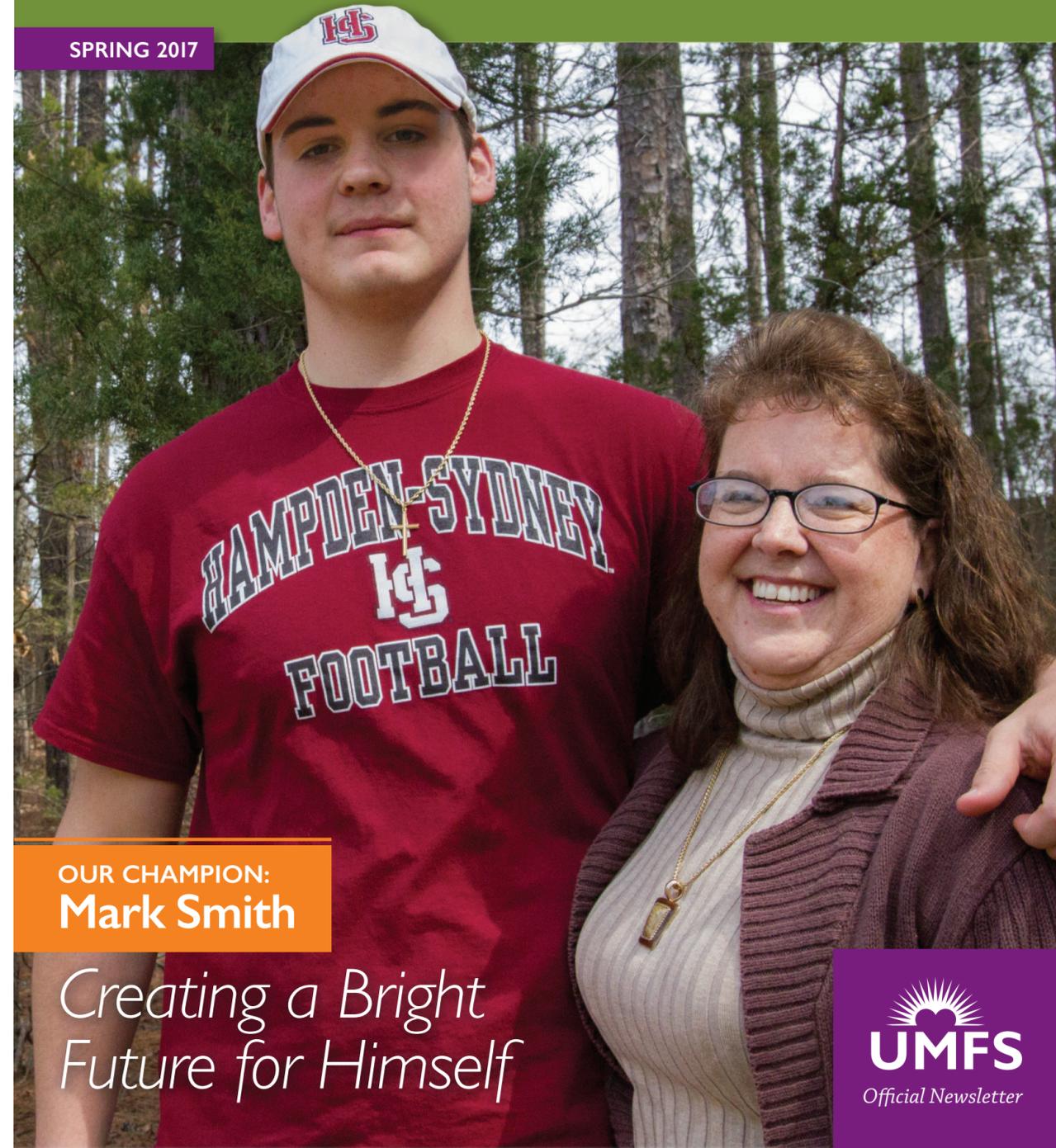


3900 West Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23230



THE CHAMPION

SPRING 2017



OUR CHAMPION:
Mark Smith

Creating a Bright
Future for Himself





Calling All Champions!

You are part of our powerful network of unwavering champions who relentlessly support high-risk children and families. We cannot help foster care youth like Mark Smith achieve his full potential without support from volunteers like Brian Purcell and donors like Mike and Kim Giancaspro, all of whom are featured in this issue of The Champion.

UMFS has regional centers across the state of Virginia working to empower foster care youth like Mark Smith to beat the odds. Every child deserves that support.

Will you be a champion for high-risk children and families in Virginia and support the life-changing programs at UMFS? Every time you make a donation, volunteer your time, or sign up to foster a teen you are making a difference. We are grateful for your partnership.

Thank you,

Greg Peters, LCSW
President and CEO

RICHMOND CAMPUS

3900 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23230
804.353.4461 • richmond@umfs.org



SPRING 2017 VOLUNTEER CHAMPION

Brian Purcell

“WE WERE STARVING! It was terrible. I was sitting in the classroom thinking, ‘I’m so hungry,’” lamented Charterhouse School student Desire D.

Charterhouse School was founded to educate the residential youth living on the UMFS campus. Over time, the staff realized that the school’s specialized programs could also benefit day students struggling with emotional, behavioral, or developmental challenges, and autism or other neurological differences.

Today the Richmond campus has more than 120 students, and the majority of them are bussed in for the day from Richmond, Henrico, Chesterfield, and other surrounding counties.

While the residential students have breakfast in their cottages before

coming to school, the staff discovered that many of the day students did not get breakfast at home. They shared their concerns with Principal Kay Currie. “When you’re hungry, you’re not focused and not able to be your very best,” said Currie.

Not long before Principal Currie identified this need, Brian Purcell came knocking on the door at UMFS. Every day Brian or one of his volunteers visits Wawa, Starbucks and other local restaurants to collect food, and he was looking for organizations that could use it. He came to UMFS because his father lived here for a while as a boy. Brian appreciates the connection, “I’m walking some of the steps my dad walked.”

Brian Purcell is an ordained pastor who founded The Way to help

others. He is also a popular wedding officiant, conducting up to 150 weddings each year. The money he earns from weddings is plowed back into the ministry.

When Brian heard about the need for school breakfasts he jumped into action. He’s been faithfully delivering breakfast to the school ever since. Student Cameron T. greets Brian each morning, then helps sort and deliver the food to his fellow students. “People definitely have their favorite items,” shared Cameron. The breakfasts have made a huge difference. “Since Brian started delivering the breakfasts, our mornings are less chaotic, and there has been a major improvement in the students’ attitudes,” raved Student Services Manager Sherry Glover.



Volunteers like Brian Purcell make a huge difference in the lives of our children across the state. To learn more about volunteer opportunities at UMFS, visit www.umfs.org/get-involved/volunteer.

SPRING 2017 DONOR CHAMPIONS

Mike & Kim Giancaspro

MIKE AND KIM GIANCASPRO first heard about UMFS at an informational dinner. They were attracted to the UMFS mission, and almost a decade later, they remain committed to the vital work of the agency.

Mike and Kim both graduated from Virginia Tech and attended VCU for their master’s degrees, where Mike earned an MBA and Kim, a master’s in social work. They are lifelong Hokie football fans. They are also committed to community service. When a family member was diagnosed with mental illness, Mike and Kim became advocates for community mental health services.

Through Charterhouse School and Child & Family Healing Center, UMFS helps children struggling

with emotional, behavioral, or developmental challenges, and autism or other neurological differences. That resonates with Mike.

“I want to be involved in something that’s a good fit. We understand mental illness and can add that perspective,” he says.

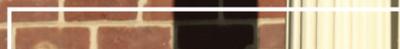
Mike and Kim have been faithful UMFS donors since 2007. They feel it’s important to give. “How well we care for the vulnerable members of society is reflective of who we are as a community,” reflects Kim.

In addition to the couples’ monetary contributions, each year Mike donates season tickets to the Richmond Flying Squirrels baseball games. As a child, Mike’s father

took him to baseball games, and he wants to share that experience. His donation gives local foster care families the opportunity to enjoy family baseball outings together.

Mike joined the UMFS board in 2012. Kim agrees that it’s a great match, “Mike brings compassion for the cause as well as business experience.” Mike is the UMFS board secretary and a member of the executive and investment committees. Mike feels it’s important to experience the mission first hand, so he has also served as a tutor at Charterhouse School.

Thank you Mike and Kim Giancaspro for being faithful UMFS donors and unwavering champions for high-risk children and families! ✨



Donors like Mike and Kim Giancaspro make a critical impact in the lives of high-risk children and families. Join them by making a donation with the enclosed envelope, or visit www.umfs.org/donate.

