

Assisting INDEPENDENCE @ Home

Dr. James Barton
Represents Faith in Action

by Greg Lilly, Lifestyle Editor

Williamsburg's Faith in Action is a nonprofit organization that has the mission "to help seniors and adults with a chronic illness or physical disability remain independent in their own homes," says Dr. James (Jim) Barton. Dr. Barton has worked with Faith in Action since its founding eight years ago.

Dr. Barton first came to Williamsburg in 1967 on a William and Mary football scholarship. He attended medical school at the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond. "I did a residency at Riverside Regional Medical Center in Family Practice for three years," he explains, "and then came back to Williamsburg and worked in the emergency room for



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21 years.” After working in urgent care for another eight years, he moved to the College of William and Mary. “I’ve made a full circle,” he says, “I’m now at the college’s Student Health Center.”

The area and its people have kept Dr. Barton here for many years. “I was attracted to the Williamsburg community,” he says. “As a student, I fell in love with the place, and when the opportunity to live and work here presented itself, I decided to do it.”

His work has kept him in touch with the community, and he has seen seniors and people with physical challenges struggle to stay independent. He heard of an organization starting in Williamsburg called Faith in Action and attended an early planning meeting as a representative of outreach programs at Saint Martin’s Episcopal Church.

“What got me interested were the two co-founders, Harry Campbell and the Reverend Ron Riffe,” Dr. Barton says. “I listened to what these guys wanted to do; they were passionate and very enthusiastic about it. I think their enthusiasm and energy was contagious. To think that we could do something through voluntary effort that would keep people living in their homes independently for as long as they can, it just sounded like an exciting prospect. Many churches were behind this.”

That was eight years ago, and the program has grown thanks to the volunteers who contribute their time, talent and resources.

“People have an inherent goodness that if given the opportunity, they will respond,” explains Dr. Barton. “Faith in Action sounded like a nice opportunity to have a pool of volunteers and to be able to match them with needs within their own community. It was a great idea.”



Q & A

An Interview with Kathy Chambers

PRESIDENT OF WILLIAMSBURG AREA ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

Email Kathy at info@waarealtor.com

What did the recent survey reveal about the local real estate market for those buying or selling a home?

CHAMBERS:

Recently the Williamsburg Area Association of Realtors® published a survey in two community publications and the website to find out more about how locals shop for a home and use the services of a Realtor®. National trends have shown a steady growth of Internet home shoppers. According to *Realtor.org*, 90% of people use the Internet as an information source when looking for a home and 87% rely on a real estate agent. At our local Association we believe in continually assessing the needs of our customers and clients in order to best serve them. This means understanding consumer behavior in Williamsburg when it comes to real estate decisions and not relying solely on the national trends.

The recent real estate survey resulted in over 170 com-

pleted surveys. While this number of respondents is not a representative sample of the entire market, it does give us some insight into how local consumers think in regards to having

their real estate needs met. In Williamsburg, people shopping for homes rely on the Internet, print publications and Realtors® to help them understand the market and determine what inventory is available. In addition, the survey showed that one third of the locals who responded to the survey do not use the Internet. Thus, these individuals are more likely to rely on print publications to view available homes and to request the assistance of a real estate professional early in the process.

The home shopping experience is not simply transactional; while the process may begin with Internet searches or viewing homes in local publications, many Williamsburg consumers (like those in the national survey) still want a real estate agent to guide them through the process.

In an effort to stay current with consumer needs the Association recently enhanced its website to include sections entitled “Find a Home” and

“Open Houses”. The “Find a Home” section of the site includes a condensed version of all listings in the Williamsburg multiple listings database. This includes details about the property, photos, some virtual tours and listing company contact information. The “Open House” section includes properties that are open to the public with dates, times and directions. Both of these sections are electronically updated throughout each day giving the consumer an up to the minute view of available properties in our area.

When you go to www.waarealtor.com, you can find everything you need to learn about the local real estate market and to begin your home search. The website can help you find a Realtor®, and it provides you with current home sales statistics, news and information about real estate, and more.

We would like to thank those in our community who took the time to respond to the recent survey. Several prizes were offered and the winners will be drawn in mid-July and recognized in our local publications and on our website. We invite you to visit our website to learn more about how the Association and our members can serve your needs!

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Volunteers share stories of inspiration with each other, stories that build the desire to keep working to support the group's mission. "The stories are something that someone did that made a difference in another person's life – it never made the newspaper, never hit the radio – but it made a significant impact in two people's lives, both the care receiver and the caregiver."

One example that Dr. Barton likes to use is an illustration of what some would consider a simple act, but turned out to be a major service for one couple. A woman, whose husband had Alzheimer's dementia, wanted to cook a birthday cake for him. The overhead light was out in their kitchen. Her vision was such that she needed bright light to read the recipe and measure the ingredients.

"She called us [Faith in Action]," Dr. Barton says. "And the wife said, 'This is embarrassing, but I don't know who to call to change a light bulb.' And who do you call? You don't turn to the Yellow Pages to Light Bulb Changers. That was the call I like to recount. We said 'No problem' and sent a volunteer out."

"Many times it's just lending a hand. Helping people do something that they're having difficulty doing for themselves."

- Dr. James Barton

The organization offers services like transportation, assistance with chores, home visits and reassurance phone calls. "Simple transportation is probably the thing we do the most," Dr. Barton explains. "People are taken to doctors' offices and dentists' offices, grocery shopping, and we take people out to pick up prescriptions and get their hair done. A lot of people, as they get older, lose the ability to just hop in the car and do something on their own. They can become homebound. Transportation is a big help for many people."

Several of the volunteers like to visit with people and assist in light housework or help around the yard. "I know one man had a

wheelchair and needed a ramp," Dr. Barton says. "There was enough knowhow in the volunteers that we could complete that project for him."

Other services are simply giving someone else a break. "There are a number of couples where one will have a dementia, like an Alzheimer's dementia," Dr. Barton explains. "They really require someone in the house with them 24-7. So, the caretaker, after a while, just needs a chance to get away, to have a break, to do some errands. That's a nice service we're able to provide."

The volunteers handle reassurance calls too. "Sometimes people move down here and don't have their family or friends with them as support," Dr. Barton says. "Just a weekly call from a volunteer, someone to be in touch with them, usually there's not a need generated by the phone call, but just a communication."

Another example he cites is a person who couldn't get their garbage from the porch to the dumpster once a week because of physical limitations. "Now, we have a volunteer going



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out and doing that," Dr. Barton says. "A lot of these efforts aren't complicated; many times it's just lending a hand. Helping people do something that they're having difficulty doing for themselves." When Faith in Action's volunteers help with tasks like these, those actions allow people to remain in their own homes.

There is no fee or eligibility requirement on who can receive these services. "If they call, and the request sounds reasonable," Dr. Barton explains, "and we can provide it, we do it. We assist all income levels. We go into gated communities. The biggest group we serve is the older folks, at any income level."

The area produced a need that the organization has filled. "I've watched Williamsburg... gray, if you let me label it that way," Dr. Barton explains. "The over 65 population nationally is about 12.5 percent. In our town, we're over 20 percent. That one in five people being over 65 years old is the national prediction for 2030. That's one of the things that has our attention: We're ahead of the national trend in terms of our older population." He adds that is also a great resource for the area. "But what's fun about that older population is that a lot

of these people are retired and energetic. They have talents. They have experience. There is a fascinating group of retired people here, and a number of them are our volunteers."

Because volunteers have many other responsibilities, Dr. Barton, Faith in Action Director Rita Smith and her staff, and the Board of Directors have structured the volunteer effort so that people may offer one hour or several hours a month to help. "Volunteers are allowed to say no," Dr. Barton says. "I think people appreciate the flexibility to help as much as they can, when they can."

Volunteers go through a criminal background check and a Department of Motor Vehicles check. Training sessions are also required. "Client confidentiality is important," Dr. Barton says, "and we ensure the volunteer training class covers those issues. Despite the fact we're called Faith in Action, we're a non-proselytizing organization. The volunteer's role is not to convert someone to a certain religion, but to help and assist."

Dr. Barton's personal rewards arise from knowing how he and the volunteers make a difference. "I love the stories," he says. "It makes

me feel good that I'm part of a worthwhile effort when I hear the stories. People on both sides are benefitting: the care receivers and the volunteers. People who truly have a desire to help, which is a large part of our community, are able to find something they enjoy doing that can assist other people."

Although the volunteers can meet many needs, they refer requests too. "We know the other non-profits in the area," Dr. Barton says, "and can direct the person to the group or agency that can best help them."

Dr. Barton says Faith in Action can always use volunteers to assist with its mission of helping people stay independent in their own homes for as long as possible. "With everything the volunteers provide," he adds, "the biggest thing is hope, compassion, lending an ear to someone who hasn't talked to someone in a while. [These are] very basic things, but very important things." NDN

For more information about services from Williamsburg Area Faith in Action or to volunteer visit: www.wfia.org

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