

# Gate-Gateway to Independence

## 2025 Fall Newsletter



### *Welcome Back to The Gate!*

The first half of the 2025-2026 Gate year has been truly enjoyable! In August, we temporarily relocated and are thankful to Madison Avenue Baptist Church for accommodating us while the floors in the Activities Building were being renovated. In September, we joyfully returned to our regular location, and the floors look amazing!

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### *TailGate for the Gate 2025*

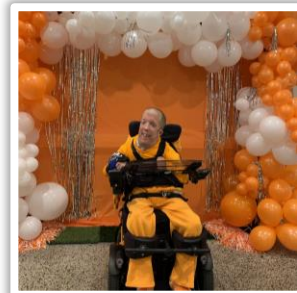
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On October 25th, the annual TailGate event took place at Green Meadow Country Club. This fundraiser for the Gate successfully raised over **\$14,000** this year, which will be allocated to programming for Gate participants.

Thanks to a generous donor, just like last year, Gate participants and their families were able to attend the event free of charge.

Attendees enjoyed watching the Tennessee Vols compete against the Kentucky Wildcats on a big screen. They also savored delicious food, engaged in fellowship, participated in games, and won prizes.

Those present shared that they had a fantastic time enjoying the food, having fun, and spending quality moments with their friends.





## *Tidal Wave Auto's Charity Day for the Gate*

Tidal Wave Auto Spa in Alcoa graciously invited The Gate to be the beneficiary of their Charity Day on September 19th! During this special event, The Gate received 50% of all proceeds from single wash car washes. Participants from The Gate were present to collect donations and represent the organization! Scott Blackstock, owner of Tidal Wave Auto Spa stopped by the event and talked to participants, family and staff.

This wonderful event raised a total of **\$2,971.09** for The Gate! We are truly grateful for the support from Tidal Wave Auto Spa and the community.

## *Life Skills*

We are thrilled to welcome back Program Assistant Lily Winebarger to the Gate! This year, Lily has been facilitating Life Skills groups, covering essential topics such as **Conversational Skills**, **Internet/Al Safety**, **Social Skills**, and **Balancing a Busy Schedule**. Participants appreciate the structured group environment and the enjoyable, engaging manner in which Lily leads the discussions.



## *Joyful Fitness*

Program Assistant Jessica Lewis has introduced her fitness initiative, **Joyful Fitness**, to the Gate.

Throughout this semester, Jessica has engaged participants in enjoyable games and physical activities. These activities encourage both movement and mental engagement, all while fostering an atmosphere of fun and laughter. Thank you, Jessica, for bringing Joyful Fitness to the Gate!

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## *Fitness with Chip and Jean*

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Volunteers, Chip and Jean have dedicated their Thursday mornings to helping Gate participants maintain their fitness for the past several years. Jean has been leading fitness and coaching Special Olympics basketball for over 15 years and Chip has been involved for 5 years. The workout sessions kick off with a warm-up, followed by weightlifting and a series of strength and balance exercises. Participants then transition to the hallway, where they finish with a robust routine that includes walking with a medicine ball and practicing balance on the Bosu ball. The weekly exercise program has become a highlight for everyone involved, with over 20 participants joining in on the fun.



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## *Craft Fair Preparations*

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In September participants began making ornaments, cards, and other holiday items to sell in two November craft fairs and a Pop Up Shop at the Gate. All the sales were a huge success! We made over \$1,300 from these events. Thank you to all who purchased items and helped make these events successful!

Greeting cards are available to purchase through the Gate's website throughout the year. Cards can be picked up at the Gate or shipped.





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## Summer Picnic

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In July, Gate participants were invited to a fun summer picnic! We gathered at the Springbrook Recreation Center, where we enjoyed a dance party, played charades, shot some hoops, and danced the day away. It was a wonderful experience to spend quality time with everyone!

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## Touch a Truck

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On October 21st, the Maryville Fire Department, Maryville Police Department, and AMR Ambulance visited the Gate. Attendees had the chance to engage in conversations with firefighters, police officers, and ambulance drivers. They enjoyed an up-close view of the vehicles and were able to inquire about the first responders' roles, uniforms, and trucks.



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## Mini Tailgate

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Gate participant Shellie Vance proposed the idea of a Mini Tailgate, which she shared with the Planning Committee, generating a wave of excitement! On the day of the event, participants enjoyed various activities including cornhole, ladder ball, and a football target game, while we watched the 1998 Championship game between UT and Florida on the big screen. It truly was a delightful day filled with fun!

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## Special Olympics Bowling

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This year's Special Olympics bowling competition was on September 23<sup>rd</sup>. The Gate's team did an amazing job! Friendships were made while participants showed perseverance, teamwork, and sportsmanship. Participants look forward to this event every year.

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## Special Olympics Athlete Hall of Fame

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We are thrilled to share that Gate participant **Noah Prats** was honored as *Special Olympics Athlete of the Year* at the 2025 Blount County Athlete Hall of Fame Banquet! Noah has been a dedicated Special Olympics athlete since childhood, competing in basketball, track and field, and bowling. His journey reflects incredible confidence, perseverance, and teamwork—and along the way, he's built lasting friendships.

Want to see this achievement up close? Noah's award, along with other Hall of Fame recognitions, is proudly displayed at the Blount County Public Library. Join us in celebrating this amazing achievement.

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## Power Partners

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Power Partners Shellie Vance, Noah Myers, and Brad Davis never cease to impress us! These dedicated athletes lift weights weekly, and their hard work is evident. On November 1<sup>st</sup>, they had the chance to demonstrate their progress at their new venue located at 2146 Big Springs Rd., Maryville.

- Shellie achieved a deadlift of **137 pounds**
- Noah accomplished a deadlift of **248 pounds**
- Brad excelled with a deadlift of **352 pounds**

It's exciting to witness their improvements between competitions!

The Gate's Aktion Club chose Power Partners as their recipient of the January-May 2025 Coke Machine Project. From the project, the Gate donated \$627.36 to Power Partners. We are excited to support this magnificent project!



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## Staff Interview with Abby Thomas

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**What was your job before working at the Gate?**

I was a teacher and then a caregiver for my special needs son.

**Why did you want to work at the Gate?**

I wanted to make some new friends.

**What is your favorite activity outside of work?**

Exercise, reading, and cooking.

**What are some of your favorite things?**

**Color:** Dark Green

**Food:** I love to eat at the Cheesecake Factory

**Show:** Big Bang Theory

**Movie:** Lord of the Rings

**Candy:** Blue Raspberry Jolly Rancher