

Making Dreams Come True

by Laura Breen Galante

The Watermark at Vistawilla is helping its residents check off what's on their bucket lists

At The Watermark at Vistawilla, a new Bucket List Club is turning residents' lifelong dreams into reality. The senior living community in Winter Springs launched the program earlier this year and is working to check off its residents' wishes, both big and small.

Former resident Sylvia Reyes and her very simple desire to sit in a classic Volkswagen Beetle was the impetus for the club. Kim Dike, community life director at The Watermark at Vistawilla, was determined to grant Sylvia's wish. Kim also thought the



Sylvia Reyes had a very simple bucket list wish. She wanted to sit in a classic Volkswagen Beetle, so the team at The Watermark at Vistawilla in Winter Springs made that happen.

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community's other residents might have similar aspirations, so she held the inaugural meeting of the Bucket List Club earlier this year.

"We asked residents what they'd like to do and told them that no request is too big," says Kim. "In fact, the bigger the better. There's a lot we can do with modern technology, and when we pool our resources together with the resources of Watermark Retirement Communities, anything is possible."

Sylvia was the first resident at The Watermark at Vistawilla to see her wish come to fruition. In February, the community arranged for Sylvia to visit a car dealership in Lake Mary, where she was able to sit in a 1967 Volkswagen Beetle. Sadly, Sylvia has since passed away, but she loved her Beetle experience.

"She was absolutely beside herself with joy," recalls Kim. "You could see the sheer excitement on her face. The staff truly pulled out the red carpet for her."



Resident Ruth Balke checked off two things on her bucket list – going to a beach and seeing an orange tree in person.

Life's a *Beach*

In April, resident Ruth Balke checked not one but two items off her bucket list – to see an orange tree and visit a beach. Ruth has only lived in the Sunshine State since 2024, when she moved here from Wheaton, Illinois. Her Watermark community arranged for her to visit a citrus grove and roadside stand, where Ruth was allowed to pick fresh oranges.

"I was just thrilled to see a real orange tree," says Ruth. "To be able to pick them and then have orange cake that our kitchen made from those oranges was an extra treat."

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“We tell our residents often that they’re here to live life to the fullest now that they have the time.”

– Kim Dike

Kim is grateful to the Central Florida businesses that have helped make the residents’ wishes come true.

“Allowing her to experience things that engage her senses – like smelling an orange and touching and hearing the ocean – is so impactful,” says Kim. “We tell our residents often that they’re here to live life to the fullest now that they have the time.”

“An unexpected joy of this program has been the generosity of the local businesses we’ve connected with,” says Kim. “Their kindness is humbling, and it’s something we didn’t expect.”

Later in April, Ruth got the chance to visit New Smyrna Beach, which was the first time she’d ever put her toes in the sand. Ruth’s beach experience did not disappoint. In addition, she was treated to lunch at a popular local restaurant.

“I loved the beautiful sounds of the birds and the ocean,” says Ruth, who waded into the water and gazed at the horizon. “To see and experience God’s creation was wonderful. The way the sun glistens off the top of the waves is just amazing.”

Lately, Ruth’s vision has begun to decline, so the orange grove and beach visits were especially meaningful.



Resident Bob Van Dorpe, a former train engineer, wanted to go for a SunRail ride.

Riding the Rails

Recently, Bob Van Dorpe checked off a wish on his bucket list when he took a ride on the SunRail commuter rail system.

Bob was a train engineer for 40 years, working on the route from Albany to Buffalo for the New York Central Railroad (which later became Penn Central and then Conrail). Bob’s father encouraged him to work for the railroad, and he quickly grew to love it. Bob retired in 1994, and that was the last time he had been on a train – that is, until June.

That’s when Bob hitched a ride on SunRail from the Altamonte Springs station to the Sanford station. To make the trip happen, his Watermark community worked with Deborah Schafer, executive assistant to Seminole County Commission Chairman Jay Zembower.

Bob also visited the switching station and operations center, where he spoke with several engineers during a behind-the-scenes tour.

“Being on the train again brought back many good memories of my work days,” says Bob. “When we visited the operating station, it was very interesting to learn how things have changed. It is so different how trains operate now.”

Every member of the Bucket List Club leaves their experience with a sterling silver bucket-shaped charm and a swag bag. Next, Kim plans to arrange a trip for a recently widowed resident to visit the Daytona International Speedway, where her husband worked for 25 years. Here’s to making dreams come true!

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