**New bed and breakfast seeks to provide an escape for those with special needs**

**By MIKE CONLEY**[**nconley@mcdowellnews.com**](mailto:nconley@mcdowellnews.com)

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On a hill in Nebo, a new bed and breakfast seeks to provide a quiet and comforting place where families of special needs children and adults can relax and renew their bonds with each other.

On Wednesday, May 4, the McDowell Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for Jason’s Getaway at Holly Hill. Located on 5 acres, the non-profit bed and breakfast is for families with special needs children or people who live in group homes. It is intended for children and adults who are developmentally disabled or autistic and those who care for them.

The house has two adult bedrooms, two children’s bedrooms and two staff bedrooms. Six meals will be provided with a two-night stay. The meals will be served family-style and will be tailored to the guests’ tastes. Jason’s Getaway at Holly Hill has a game/sensory room and playroom, a large wraparound porch, outdoor games, a spacious front yard and a back yard complete with a fire pit.

This is the fulfillment of a dream, said Executive Director Debbie Hernandez.

“We want a place here where the kids are accepted,” said Hernandez. “We want to pamper the parents because they are stressed out. I want this place to be special.”

She added many of the special needs children she has worked with live in apartments or group homes and never get much of an opportunity to enjoy playing outside. Here at Jason’s Getaway, there is a hiking trail and a fire pit for them to roast marshmallows or s’mores.

Hernandez said this idea began seven years ago when she was a special education teacher. She had previously taught at Black Mountain Center for six and a half years and then worked with special needs students at West Marion Elementary in the multi-handicapped classroom. After that, she got remarried and moved to Charlotte to teach in a resource classroom until her recent retirement.

During that time, she had the dream of opening a bed and breakfast for the kinds of families with whom she had worked with all those years. She was encouraged by her minister, the Rev. Linda Bowman at Derita Presbyterian Church, to follow her dream and start a non-profit organization to get it started. So she promptly began taking classes at Central Piedmont Community College and learned how to begin a non-profit.

Several months later in March 2012, Jason’s Getaway was incorporated as a non-profit organization. The name came from Jason Herring, a man with special needs who has lived with Hernandez and her family these past five years. She is an alternative living provider for Herring.

Hernandez said he loved going to a specialized camp but it is $1,700 for five days so he couldn’t go very often.

“My family began going to Mitchell County for a weekend now and then, where Jason loved to see the train in Spruce Pine,” she said. “I saw how much Jason looked forward to getting away from his daily routine at the workshop.”

Also, while working for over 11 years as a resource teacher in Charlotte, she saw how few of her students got to go on a vacation and how most had never even seen the mountains.

With three small fundraisers and many private donations from friends and relatives, enough money was raised to purchase an historic home in Nebo called Holly Hill. This house is located along U.S. 70 across from Roma’s Italian restaurant.

But just two days after purchasing the house, Hernandez was diagnosed with breast cancer. She underwent surgery, chemotherapy and radiation as she dealt with this health crisis. In addition, her daughter got engaged.

But throughout all this, Hernandez did not give up on her dream. Jason’s Getaway is a non-profit bed and breakfast that was incorporated on March 2, 2012. It became a 501(c)3 in November 2013.

“Our mission is to improve the quality of life for children and adults with special needs and their caregivers by providing them with an affordable getaway,” she said. “We want to pamper these families and offer them the chance to retreat, rest, reconnect and recharge.”

A year of renovation work was done to this structure and site in order for it to become what Hernandez had envisioned.

The house, named Holly Hill, was built in 1928 on a prominent hill on nearly 5 acres in the heart of Nebo. The one-story wrap-around porch offers views of the expansive front and side yards and the backyard offers winter views of the Black Mountain range.

The house was named Holly Hill because of the numerous holly trees dotting the mature landscape and circular drive. This home has side gables and a cross front gable with hardwoods throughout. Hernandez said she wants to keep the original name so her bed and breakfast is named Jason’s Getaway at Holly Hill.

Here, families and groups will be able to customize their visit by choosing their meals from an available menu and also their personal meal times. Each family or group home staying here will have a bedroom with a queen-size bed (for the adults), a bunk room with two bunks (for the kids), and their own bathroom. One family or group home will have these rooms on the first floor and the other family or group home will have their rooms on the second floor. The game/sensory room, the dining room and a den/playroom will be shared common areas. A variety of indoor and outdoor activities will be available as well as the opportunity to explore Lake James and the surrounding area attractions, according to Hernandez.

“Raising children with special needs can be very stressful to the family unit,” she said. “Our lives are so fast paced that we need to take time to relax. [About.com](http://about.com/) studies show that after three days of vacation, physical complaints, quality of sleep and moods improve. Also vacations keep us healthy and lower our stress levels. Also, vacations can strengthen bonds by spending time with our loved ones helps to keep the relationships strong.”

She added statistics show that children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) benefit from outdoor play. It reduces their ADHD symptoms and even their test scores rise at school. The Kaiser Family Foundation reports that children ages 8 to 18 spend an average of 7 hours and 34 minutes daily in front of electronic screens of various kinds.

Jason’s Getaway at Holly Hill seeks to provide these children, adults and their families with a respite and a

change of pace.

“Our mission is to reduce the stress of families who have children with special needs,” said Hernandez. “We want the families to retreat, rest, reconnect with their families and go home rejuvenated. We want a place here where the kids are accepted. We want to pamper the parents because they are stressed out. I want this place to be special.”

Jason’s Getaway will have a staff and a caretaker. In addition, a Website is now being developed but there is already a Facebook page.

“People are searching on the Web for something,” said Hernandez. “How many bed-and-breakfasts allow kids to stay? That makes it unique right there.”

The cost for a weekend stay will be $100 per adult and $50 per child. A typical weekend stay for two adults and two children will be $300. For that, they would get two nights and six meals included. A family or group home can stay there during weekdays as well.

On Wednesday, May 4, the McDowell Chamber of Commerce helped Hernandez, her staff and Jason Herring cut the ribbon for this new place.

“I just wanted to say congratulations on this investment and this opportunity you are giving to families with special needs,” said Chamber Executive Steve Bush to Hernandez and her staff.

And on Saturday, an open house will be held at Jason’s Getaway at Holly Hill from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. This event will be open for the entire community. There will be live entertainment, face painting, s’mores on the fire pit, lawn games, house tours and cookies and tea. Folks can bring a picnic lunch or order food from nearby Roma’s. A silent auction will be held to raise money for Jason’s Getaway.

Plans are for Jason’s Getaway at Holly Hill to open for business on Memorial Day. Families and group homes will be able to make reservations by calling 980-253-3905. You can also visit the Facebook page.

Donations are still being accepted for ongoing renovations or towards developing a scholarship fund for low-income families. Donations can be made out to Jason’s Getaway and mailed to Debbie Hernandez, Executive Director, at 4011 Nevin Road, Charlotte, NC 28269 or make an online donation at [https://www.gofundme.com](https://www.gofundme.com/)under Jason’s Getaway Start-Up.

 