

Serving Smiles

Springs of Catawba Dietary Manager spreads joy in, out of kitchen

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ONE CONTRIBUTOR

"Tammy!" A man's voice barreled through the white french doors of the dining hall at Springs of Catawba assisted living community in Hickory.

A small woman with a big personality responded, calling the resident by name and donning the smile she is so well known for.

"Just wanted to tell you the menu looks good," the man said with a laugh, offering his approval before making his way down the hall.

Tammy Bryant, the dietary manager at Springs of Catawba, said moments like these, sharing a laugh or a smile with the residents of her community, are why she loves her job.

"I love my residents, but that's not what I call them. I call them my people because that's what they are, my people," Bryant said. "They are family. When we're here every day in their home, we should become their family. If we want to do our job the best we can, we should be their family."

Whether it's knowing someone's

juice preference and how they like their eggs cooked at breakfast, or knowing who likes gravy on their mashed potatoes at dinner and who doesn't, Bryant takes pride in getting to know the likes and dislikes of her people.

"She puts her whole heart into every decision she makes," said Jaylee Wilson, regional vice president of operations for Affinity Living Group. "She views these residents as her loved ones and she really gets to know them on a personal level. She knows all of their likes and dislikes down to who doesn't like certain seasonings, which I think is really special."

Along with picture-perfect plates of food at breakfast, lunch and dinner, Bryant also serves up a lot of smiles and laughter with both residents and staff at the community. She is always celebrating birthdays and throwing parties, coworkers said, and those are undoubtedly filled with desserts that are both beautiful and delicious. She describes herself as "loud" once you get to know her, and recalls a

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Photo By Tiffany Fields

Tammy Bryant, dietary manager at Springs of Catawba in Hickory, prepares picture-perfect plates for her residents every day. She believes in treating the residents at her assisted living and memory care community just like family.



Photo By Tiffany Fields

Bryant works to prepare food for "her people" in the kitchen at Springs of Catawba assisted living and memory care in Hickory, get to know each resident and connect with them as if they were her family.



Photo By Tiffany Fields

Bryant's culinary expertise shines in the kitchen while her personality shines outside it into the community as she takes time to get to know each resident and connect with them as if they were her family.

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time when one resident made that especially clear. "We had a little lady here, she has since passed, in here one day doing an activity," Bryant recalls. "And I came in, just bee-bopping in, and they were doing their activity and I was in here just chatting it up."

The activity going on at the time, she said, involved pieces of duct tape.

"This particular resident turned around, took that duct tape and put it right over my mouth, and then wrote my name on it," Bryant laughed as she retold the story. "They got a picture, and I've got that to remember her by. I still actually have the duct tape stuck to my cork board."

Just as her fun-loving, social nature is evident out of the

kitchen, Bryant's passion for all things culinary shines in the kitchen, as well.

"Food is so important to residents," Wilson said. "Each meal is a chance for social interaction and it's what they live for in a lot of cases, especially in our memory care units, the taste of their food prolongs their life, it can help make their life better. I'm honored to know that we have the right person in that role that can make their life better."

Bryant has plans to expand on her culinary degree and become a certified dietary manager, an educational certification that would expand her knowledge of the nutritional and clinical side of her job. In the meantime, though, she plans to keep bee-bopping around Springs of Catawba, shar-

ing laughs and chatting a little too loudly with her people, and continuing to cook the kind of meals she would cook for her own family.

"A general rule I've always used is, 'Don't serve anybody anything you wouldn't eat,'" Bryant said. "You have to take pride in what you do and make sure that what you put out in front of the residents is something you would put out in front of your family, in front of your supervisor, or someone like that. You don't want to skimp for them just because they're residents, you have to look at it like these people are your family and you have to take care of them the same way that you would your family."