

The Episcopal Church Women of the Diocese of Southern Virginia invite you to a celebration of Autism Acceptance Month

Please join the ECW for a special celebration of Autism Acceptance Month. A virtual program will take place beginning at 10 a.m. on Saturday, April 29, 2023 (please see Zoom meeting information below). The ECW is highlighting the Maverick Learning Center, a Virginia Beach school for children with autism. The keynote speaker is Maegan Cahoon, who, with her husband Josh, owns and operates the Maverick Learning Center. In preparation for the event, please enjoy the following article about Maegan and Josh and the founding of this unique learning environment inspired by their son.

What happens when school in its traditional form isn't right for your child? After years of searching, Josh and Maegan Cahoon asked themselves that question. The answer they came up with was this: ***let's build it.*** "I thought we can just sit around for the next 10 years and wait for someone else to do it, or we can just build it ourselves," Maegan says. "I've lost a lot of sleep and cried plenty of tears to make this happen."

In just seven months, the Maverick Learning Center came to life. For the school's name, Josh and Maegan Cahoon didn't have to look far. Of her own eight-year-old son, Maegan says, "Maverick means 'one of a kind' and my son Maverick really is a one-of-a-kind child."



Maverick and Maegan Cahoon

When he was four years old, Maverick Cahoon was diagnosed with autism, a diagnosis every 1 in 44 children receives, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

"When you can't understand your child and give them what they want, it's tough," says Josh Cahoon. Maverick had many struggles in school. "You really have two options: You have a self-contained classroom for the children, and you have an inclusion class where you may have a child or two with autism mixed in with typical learners," says Josh. Maverick's parents say neither option met their son's needs. Schools outside the public realm didn't check the boxes either.

Maegan and Josh opened the Maverick Learning Center in a 4,200-square-foot former medical office on First Colonial Road, just north of the Hilltop neighborhood in Virginia Beach. Josh, a contractor, was able to renovate the space on evenings and weekends. The paint was barely dry when the first students filed in. Today the Maverick Learning Center serves children on the autism spectrum and is currently accepting students for grades kindergarten to fifth grade, with plans to expand to middle school and high school grades.

The Cahoons call it "a specialized school for students diagnosed with autism." Maverick Learning Center is a sensory-friendly environment, including a calm room and areas for therapy and outdoor instruction. Teachers are certified in special education.

"I wanted to create a safe place for my son Maverick and for kids like him, where they can come and they can be exactly whom they want to be every day and build a school for the non-typical student," says Maegan.

The Cahoons have taken steps to attract local students and have partnered with the Eliza Hope Foundation in order to provide financial aid for those who may not be able to afford the tuition.

The school features open enrollment, so students can start at any point during the school year. Maverick Learning Center provides a unique niche and a little bit more help for the needs of "in-between" kids in a one-of-a-kind way.

Source material from Eric Hodies (Virginia Pilot) and Anthony Sabella (WTKR News 3)

Zoom information for Saturday, April 29, 2023, at 10 a.m.:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6866309176?pwd=VlxPZ2RoZ2d5WENhTW4vTkZFMnowQT09>

Meeting ID: 686 630 9176

Passcode: 848600

For more details or support, please reach out to Ronda Toll at 757-869-8873 or rtoll@cox.net