

Meet James Bennett, new member of Piedmont CASA's Board of Directors

*by Cathy Eberly, retired CASA Supervisor
and current CASA Volunteer*



As a new board member, James Bennett brings two very different sets of experiences to Piedmont CASA. He's a technology expert, with a specialty in organizational systems, employed by Charlottesville startup Serqit, Inc. He also gained firsthand knowledge of the local court system when he and his family were involved briefly with the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court. He's determined to bring both experiences to bear in his new assignment.

James came to Charlottesville in 2007 and was involved with the court shortly thereafter. "There was a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) appointed to advocate for my eldest daughter," he recalls. "The GAL met with us only one time and had to make a recommendation based on that one meeting. It became obvious to me that the courts are very overwhelmed and there simply aren't enough professionals available to advocate for kids."

James believes that CASA Volunteers play a vital role in the court system. "They do the groundwork so that the judges get the information they need to make well-informed decisions on behalf of families. In a perfect world, GALs would do more. But there are very few of them and many cases."

He finds the amount of time CASA Volunteers devote to their cases impressive. "Volunteers must see their CASA children monthly throughout the life of the case. That can be a very long time."

To James, volunteer training is one of CASA's strengths — but it can also be a weakness. "It's comprehensive training that requires a significant time commitment," he notes. "At present, only privileged individuals have the ability to free up their schedules to take it on. I'd like to see it become more accessible to more people."

that, James suggests, might be to "streamline the training process, leveraging data from the volunteers to determine how accommodations to the traditional training model could be made." As product manager for Serqit, Inc., which is developing a platform for subscription-based relationship marketing services for small businesses, he's already focused on improving processes and increasing efficiency. Putting those skills to work for Piedmont CASA would be right in his wheelhouse.

"I couldn't agree more with James's concern about the accessibility of our volunteer model," says Kate Duval, Piedmont CASA President and CEO. "I look forward to working with him and our other board members on tackling this challenge. James's keen eye for efficient and effective systems and processes will help guide us as we do this important work."

Although James has already got plenty on his plate — a demanding career; a 21-year-old daughter now a third-year student at UVa; and three young children with his wife, Kelli Palmer — he wants to be part of Piedmont CASA's continued success. "It's always a good time to get involved with an organization that does a lot of good work in the community," he says.



Cathy Eberly served as a Piedmont CASA Supervisor for 4 years, retiring in 2021. She is currently a Piedmont CASA Volunteer.

March 2023 Edition

