



**Advice nurse Robin Thompson, RN, BSN, MEd, NBCSN,** is the founder and director of The ART of Driving. Now also a full-time school nurse in Alexandria City Schools, Robin previously served 20 years in the U.S. Air Force.

## A LASTING LEGACY of LOVE

### Lives change in an instant.

**Ashley Renee Thompson, 16,** died in a single-vehicle crash on her way to school in June 2003. She was alone in the car, on a road she knew well, and not under the influence of any substances.

Left behind, a grieving family tries to make sense of their sudden loss.

Ashley's mother, Robin Thompson, an advice nurse at the Kaiser Permanente Mid-Atlantic States clinical call center, chose to honor her daughter's memory by creating something positive from the tragedy.

"Ashley had a wisdom about her, a gift for seeing something positive in everybody and every situation," Robin explains. "I learned more from her than she did from me. She taught me to always look at my glass as half full."

Within three months of Ashley's death, Robin was talking to students in driver's education classes, doing her part to combat what Robin—and the Centers for Disease Control and the National Safety Council—emphasize is a public health crisis.

Vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15 to 20 year olds, more than homicide, suicide,

drugs, or alcohol combined. Six thousand teens are killed in vehicle crashes each year, with another 300,000 seriously injured or permanently disabled. Only 25 percent of such fatalities are due to alcohol. Robin's focus is on what causes more than 70 percent of the accidents, with inexperience and distractions leading the list.

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"As a mother and a health provider, those statistics are unacceptable to me," Robin states. And so The ART of Driving was created.

The ART of Driving is the educational outreach program of the Ashley Renee Thompson Memorial Foundation. The foundation's mission is to make teens and parents more aware of the unique risks faced by young,

novice drivers and to advocate for improvements in driver education.

Robin's own background and education guided her down the right path to establishing the evidence-based program. She started by researching, attending and presenting at symposiums of the National Transportation Safety Board and the U.S. Department of Transportation, talking to experts, and studying examples of successful wellness and safety programs on topics such as smoking cessation and seatbelt use. As a result, The ART of Driving is strongly rooted in behavioral science. It involves educating teens and parents about risks and empowering them to take ownership of the problem. This is accomplished through three separate education programs Robin developed: one for teens, one for parents, and one for the ART of Driving Teen Task Force.

"It was important to me to fully understand the issue and to ensure the program was evidence based," Robin explains.

"As health care providers, we are in a key position to make a difference and provide prevention messages to adolescents and their parents.

I believe knowledge is power. The more teens and parents know, the better choices they can make."

Robin shares her message with anyone who will listen, and she's been fortunate to do so via "The Today Show," and local and regional radio and TV programs.

She presents her program at high schools, youth groups, conferences, and civic events. "My goal is for this to become a national awareness program." Well on its way to achieving that goal, The ART of Driving received the 2009 Governor's Transportation Safety Award for Youth Traffic Safety in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Each year, the foundation also awards a college scholarship to a graduating senior at Lake Braddock High in Burke, VA, Ashley's alma mater. "All teens should have the chance to fulfill their dreams and achieve their goals," Robin says.

Robin believes health care providers have an opportunity and obligation to help create a culture of traffic safety. "When we elevate traffic safety to a societal value, we'll know we've made headway. Every teen deserves to 'thrive.'"

**Learn more about The ART of Driving:** [www.theartofdriving.org](http://www.theartofdriving.org).

# Behind the scenes of the Educational Theatre Program

The name Kaiser Permanente can be found on more than just the signs of our medical office buildings. It is often “in lights” at the region’s schools when the Educational Theatre Program (ETP) visits.

ETP provides live theatrical performances to school-age children in our service area, free of charge, as part of KP’s commitment to improving the health of our communities. Part of KP’s Community Benefit Department, ETP performs four productions that entertain and educate children on critical health and wellness issues:

- “Professor Bodywise’s Traveling Menagerie” is an interactive production for grades K–3 that uses life-size puppets, music, and dance to teach about healthy lifestyles.
- “The Amazing Food Detective” is for grades 1–5. The live performance employs comedy, music, and dance to promote nutrition and exercise.
- “The R-Files” is a play incorporating role-play and audience participation to teach older kids how to deal with peer pressure and develop personal power.

- “Secrets” is a powerful, live production for teens, blending drama and humor to share facts about HIV, AIDS, and other sexually transmitted infections.

**BRIAN TARRAN**



True to their personalities and their art, the cast members work hard and have fun combining a love of performing with health and wellness education.

## Lynn Bandoria

An academic advisor in college recommended a theater class to Lynn Bandoria, a psychology major at the time, as an outlet for stress. “I’ve been hooked ever since that first day of class,” she says.

Lynn has been a performer with ETP since 2007 and loves it because it offers a creative, exciting, and entertaining opportunity for kids to learn.

“It is a great feeling after a show because the kids are

so excited. They were entertained, they enjoyed it, and they learned something.”

The self-acknowledged shopaholic says her true nature is that of

an introvert, but her career aspirations are that of a film star. “I love theatre and it is a passion of mine, but I currently want to pursue more film work.” She recently played the love interest in “The Russian Cowboy,” a film shot locally that is being submitted to the Sundance Film Festival. Lynn also loves to design and sew her own clothes.

Lynn’s perfect day?

One that includes rain and a nap under a cozy blanket. “I fully enjoy each and every day, but I can always use more sleep.”

## Brian Tarran

Stand up comedy was this actor’s entrée into the world of theatre. Brian Tarran says he had a zest for getting in front of people and making them laugh. But he never thought his comedy would lead him to a career as an actor.

The Maryland native trained and worked as an auto mechanic out of high school, but landed at KP with ETP in 2003. In the early 1990s, he starred as Chuck E. Cheese at the

well-known pizzeria by the same name in Laurel, Maryland, so puppeteer experience was already on his resume. The veteran of the KP cast, he says he has enjoyed working with many different performers over the years. “It’s been a great mix, and I’ve found a way to fit in.”

Brian has stuck to children’s theatre over the years. “You can really make an impact with kids, teaching them important things about wellness and living right.”

Outside of his day job, Brian spends fall weekends cheering at FedEx Field for the Washington Redskins. “It’s going to get better, I just know it,” he says. His passion for football, old movies, and classic rock music is shared with his two sidekicks, Peanut and Zippy, both 10-year-old dogs. “They are my light.”

**JERI MARSHALL**



**LYNN BANDORIA**

## KERRI HEIDKAMP



### Kerri Heidkamp

**The newest** cast member of ETP says her first time on stage was at age 5 in a production of “Brigadoon” at the local high school where her dad was assistant principal. “He volunteered me to be in it because I was loud,” Kerri

Heidkamp laughingly explains. “And I was hooked on performing from that moment on.”

A history buff and a Chicago native, Kerri is thrilled with her recent move to the metro DC region. She’s been settling in since her move in August and acclimating to her work with ETP. She plans to begin auditioning and expanding her theatre resume with other projects and performances next year.

The role of Helena in an off-off-Broadway production of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* while in college in New York was a pivotal point in her career, she says. “I knew I could do this; I can make a living at this.”

ETP is not her first foray into children’s theater. She traveled across the United States with the Missoula Children’s Theatre Company, based in Montana.

“I love children’s theatre because I feel as if I’m making an impact,” Kerri adds. “Kids are honest. If they like what they are seeing, you’ll know it.”

### Jeri Marshall

“I’ve always been an artistic person. I fell in love with acting along the way.”

Jeri Marshall began her college education pursuing a career in broadcast journalism, but realized the stage was her true calling. And it is the center of her life now. “Acting is all I do. You have to be a little bit crazy to do what we do, but we do it.”

During a November production with American Century Theatre, titled “A Piece of My Heart,” Jeri sang on stage, too. “Singing is a passion I really want to pursue more in the future professionally.” She says she is a big fan of classic R&B, soul, and pop.

Jeri has been a performer with ETP for a little more than a year. She has also toured with two other children’s theatre programs.

“I came to acting rather late in life compared to others, but I’ve been doing it ever since. I took the plunge and it has been great,” she adds.

## ETP at a GLANCE

### Lynn Bandoria

**ACTING SINCE:** college

**FAVORITE ETP PRODUCTION:** “Secrets.”

“It deals with an intense, serious issue—HIV.”

### Brian Tarran

**ACTING SINCE:** 1999

**FAVORITE ETP PRODUCTION:** “Professor Bodywise’s Traveling Menagerie.”

“There’s nothing else like it. The puppets, the full body costumes—kids love it.”

### Jeri Marshall

**ACTING SINCE:** college

**FAVORITE ETP PRODUCTION:** “The R-Files.”

“It is challenging to reach these kids at such an impressionable age. You really have to use your imagination with this one.”

### Kerri Heidkamp

**ACTING SINCE:** age 5

**FAVORITE ETP PRODUCTION:** “The Amazing Food Detective” and “Secrets.”

“I get to act like a kid in ‘The Amazing Food Detective’ and that’s fun. Secrets has a more dramatic tone, so there’s a good balance and it’s a great way to teach about an important issue.”

### Meredith Kaunitz

**ACTING SINCE:** 1994

**FAVORITE ETP PRODUCTION:** “The Amazing Food Detective.”

“I have loads of fun playing a little kid. I’m sure that speaks volumes about me.”

### Noreen Hughes

**ACTING SINCE:** 7th grade

**FAVORITE ETP PRODUCTION:** “Professor Bodywise’s Traveling Menagerie” and “The Amazing Food Detective.”

“They are just so delightful—entertaining and educational at the same time.”

### Skylar Sanders

**ACTING SINCE:** high school

**FAVORITE ETP PRODUCTION:** “The R-Files.”

“My character gets to be super goofy and outlandish. It is so fun for me.”

### Tracey Farrar

**ACTING SINCE:** elementary school

**FAVORITE ETP PRODUCTION:** “Secrets” and “The Amazing Food Detective.”

“Secrets is so informative and entertaining at the same time; but ‘The Amazing Food Detective’ is so high energy.”

### Shannon Dorsey

**ACTING SINCE:** age 3

**FAVORITE ETP PRODUCTION:** “Secrets.”

“I’m a DC native, so the reality of HIV hits close to home in this region. There is a problem here and this play has an important message.”

# Also starring

As with any film or theatrical production, there are people who play important roles, yet are never seen or heard by the audience. ETP is no different. A team of four work diligently behind the scenes to ensure the cast is where they need to be, with the props and sets they need, delivering high-quality shows with strong messages to the right audiences.

Rick Tharp is the director of ETP. Alongside him, backstage, are Rob Hopson, administrative supervisor, Robb Pearsall, technical coordinator, and Natalya Brusilovsky, program coordinator. "Nobody sees us, but we are there lending our support to the program," Rob explains. They work from the Kaiser Permanente Beltsville warehouse facility and fall under the auspices of the Community Benefit Department.

The parts they play in ETP are not glamorous, but they're critical all the same. There is database information on almost 3,000 schools in the metro DC region, research studies on the effectiveness of the program, schedules for entire academic years, budgets and reports, and vehicles, sets, and props to maintain.

"I wear many hats," Rick notes. "But my main job is to make sure we produce a quality product for the community."

And it's working. Studies last year on "The Amazing Food Detective" showed message retention above 70 percent for four weeks following a production.

"We do make an impact," says Rick. "If we can get just one child to hear and understand the message, then we've done our job."

Rick and Rob agree that watching the shows with the kids is a bright spot in their jobs. "It is so much fun to see their reactions," says Rob. "They are so impressionable."



## Meredith Kaunitz

A recent transplant to the DC area from New York, Meredith Kaunitz prides herself on a diverse theatre background and a wide range of work experience outside of acting.

"I've done musical theatre, Shakespeare, comedies, improv radio shows, produced, directed—you name it." She says her varied jobs before and in-between acting jobs have given her the skills to better manage her career.

Sensing this skill set was not something all professional actors have, she founded a non-profit organization, Home for Theatre Performers ([www.homenyc.org](http://www.homenyc.org)), to support and provide training for auditioning actors. "My goal is to help simplify life for my fellow actors. If I can make skills training and resources more accessible and affordable, with less angst, I know it can make a difference for people," she explains.

The aspect of community was the draw to a career in theatre for

MEREDITH KAUNITZ



Meredith. "I'm interested in universal truth and helping communities heal. Entertainment is more than just something frilly."

ETP is the perfect example, she says. "We have the opportunity to go into schools and present live theatre to kids who may not get to see that anywhere else. And they learn, too."

## Noreen Hughes

"I don't know what else I would do with myself if I didn't perform. I've always hoped to have a job I love."

And love it she does. Noreen Hughes says she is blessed with gifts and abilities and she wants to use them in a positive way. Her job with ETP lets her do that.

"We can teach important concepts in a way children can learn playfully and creatively," Noreen explains. "We are in schools where kids may not be exposed to theatre or the information we share. Our program also proves the arts are important; the arts can teach."

Noreen studied music theatre in college so she could act,

NOREEN HUGHES



sing, and dance. She grew up competing internationally in Irish dance, and works part-time at a local tap school. She is also very active as a volunteer in Catholic youth ministry. "I believe it is a privilege to serve others."

### Skylar Sanders

A West Virginia native, Skylar Sanders started acting during his sophomore year in high school. When it came to careers, it was a toss-up between sports and theatre.

#### SKYLAR SANDERS



"Theatre seemed to be the best choice," he says, but his love of sports is still there. He plays basketball as much as he can in his spare time.

Skylar also plays guitar, is an avid reader, and a writer—of both songs and plays.

"I like to release myself in different art forms—song writing, music, writing plays, and acting."

Working with kids every day is the best part of his job as a performer with ETP. "Kids have a natural energy and wonder of the world about them. They are not jaded; everything is new and fun to them.

"We are teaching kids about important things, about nutrition and healthy choices. It is very rewarding work." Skylar says he's learned a lot, too.

Like many of his colleagues, his passion for the theatre takes him beyond his work at Kaiser Permanente. He just recently finished a production of "The Glass Menagerie," with a theatre company in Silver Spring and is looking for his next project.

### Tracey Farrar

Her mother says she's always been dramatic, even without trying to be. So it makes sense that Tracey started acting at such a young age. Plays at church and school led to a major in theatre at college.

"I enjoy making people laugh," she says. "I love being on stage."

Though she just completed a role in a Baltimore production of the

Greek comedy "Lysistrata" and is currently auditioning for new projects, acting is not her only form of artistic expression. Tracey writes poetry and is working on a fictional novel in her spare time.

Tracey says it is fun and interesting to delve into a character's head and bring things to life. "I like finding out what makes the character tick."

Her job as a performer with ETP has many rewards. "This is important stuff, not just entertainment. It makes me feel good when a child tells me she had carrots with her lunch because of the show 'The Amazing Food Detective.'"

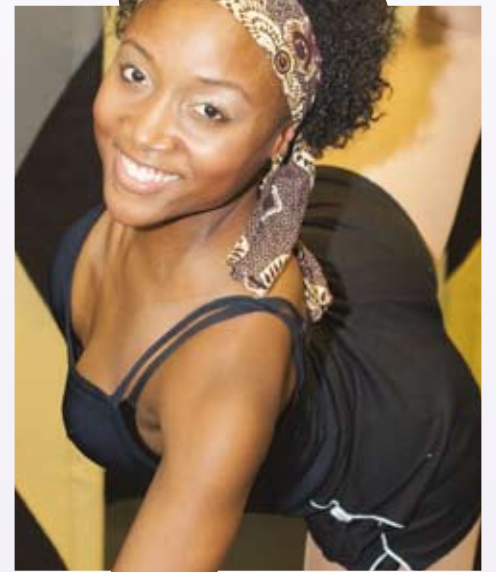
Tracey says she has to practice what she preaches in educational theatre, so she tries her best to live a healthy life, running to stay in shape and eating a balanced diet.

"I'm so glad Kaiser Permanente has this program," she adds. "I saw 'Professor Bodywise' when I was an elementary school student, and I still remember that show to this day."

### Shannon Dorsey

"When I was 3, I told anyone who would listen I was going to be an actress," states Shannon Dorsey. "I've been blessed to always know what I would be doing with my life. I was a very creative child; it just comes naturally to me."

Shannon, a performer with ETP since April, says she enjoys all types of



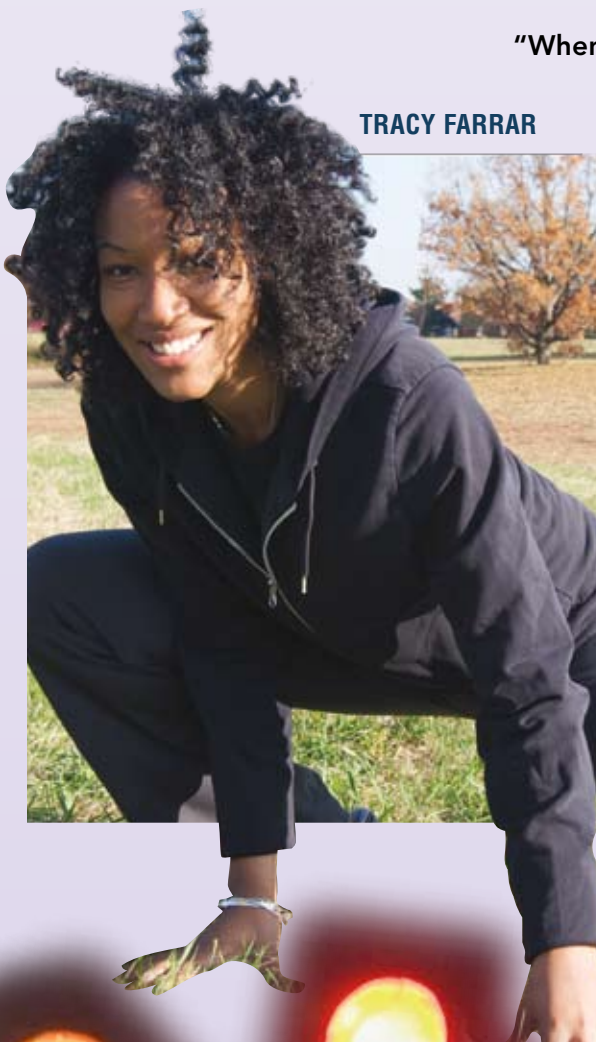
SHANNON DORSEY

performance—as a dancer, mime, puppeteer, and actor in both stage and film. She is currently preparing for her next performance in Tarell Alvin McCraney's "In the Red and Brown Water," with Studio Theatre in Washington, DC. The show opens in January. "Life is very busy for me," she says.

One of her career achievements is a Helen Hayes Award nomination for outstanding ensemble in a Synetic Theater production of "Carmen." She has been on many national tours and performed on stages such as The Kennedy Center and The Shakespeare Theatre Company's Harman Center for the Arts.

Like her fellow cast members, she enjoys her work with ETP and finds it rewarding. "I enjoy the reaction of the kids," she explains. "Our performance sends a message, and everything is so spectacular to them in their little world. That's big for me."

#### TRACY FARRAR



# Have a story idea for KPeople?

KPeople features employees and physicians for their excellent work and the unique ways they thrive—on and off the job. If you would like to nominate an individual or team to be featured in a future issue of KPeople, e-mail [beverlie.brinson@kp.org](mailto:beverlie.brinson@kp.org). Include the employee's name, title, contact information, reason for nomination, and supervisor's name. We'll take it from there.

KPeople is a publication for employees of Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Mid-Atlantic States, Inc., and the Mid-Atlantic Permanente Medical Group, PC.

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Kaiser Permanente of the Mid-Atlantic States, Inc.  
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**Dr. Anu Dahiya** makes it a point to relax and better manage the stress in her life.

# Finding your balance

**A demanding full-time career,** kids, a marriage, countless activities and tasks—how do you balance it all?

Anu Dahiya, MD, Mid-Atlantic Permanente Medical Group, finds her balance by practicing the Art of Living. "This has made a significant, positive difference in my ability to handle the stress of my life. It is a way for me to balance and find that even keel."

The internal medicine specialist has been with Kaiser Permanente for nearly five years, with most of that time at the Silver Spring Medical Center. As a student, her life was easy, she says. School was her only focus. Once she was working and married, however, and with two children, her stress level soared.

"I was constantly chasing this list of things to do in my head," she explains. "My sense of accomplishment was wrapped up in if I was successful in checking items off the list."

Relatives had told her about the Art of Living philosophy and she enrolled in a course two years ago. The program and lifestyle are based on the teachings of Sri Sri Ravi Shanker, a spiritual leader and social activist from India. "It is all about how to live a good, healthy, well-balanced life," Dr. Dahiya says.

The Art of Living teaches meditation and relaxation as a way to harness the stress in your life, putting you more at ease and with a sense of calm and well-being. Daily meditation, with a breathing-based technique called Sudarshan Kriya, is the key component along with a longer weekly Kriya, often done in a group setting.

"There are days I still struggle, but this has made a big difference in how I live my life," she says. "We all have ups and downs, and deal with the challenges of life, but with the Art of Living, it is smoother sailing for me. I've realized I don't have to do everything, or be perfect at everything. I'm just going to do my best."

That is a hard concept for many to grasp, especially physicians, she says. "There is a sense of pressure we feel to be perfect."

Dr. Dahiya believes that some people are more prone to be anxious and overwhelmed, and our society today really pressures women, in particular, to do it all. She recommends yoga and other meditation activities to some patients.

"This type of program is not for everyone, but it can be helpful to people who are searching for a way to tune in to themselves and regain focus," Dr. Dahiya says. "This is a tool, and you can never have enough tools in your toolbox."