

## Marklund relies on baseball buddies to aid residents games

### 'Baseball is a great way to engage a group'

By KANE COUNTY CHRONICLE - editorial@kcchronicle.com  
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*Photo provided by Russell Karlins*  
Caption

BLACKBERRY TOWNSHIP – Marklund’s campus in the Mill Creek subdivision hosted a baseball buddies program this summer, where more than 250 volunteers came Tuesday and Thursday nights to help its residents play baseball in a unique way, the agency stated in a news release.

Marklund, a non-profit that works with people with profound disabilities, hosted 15 games from June to August.

“Baseball is a great way to engage a group,” Cathy Nikrandt, manager of Volunteer Engagement at Marklund stated in the release. “There’s so much action that goes with it.”

The games are played on the Marklund Miracle League field, which is a baseball diamond with rubberized turf instead of grass so wheelchairs can move smoothly and safely.

Every game requires 24 volunteers, each one is paired with a resident who does hand-over-hand assistance. This refers to a method where one person places their hands over another’s and moves through the action with them.

“With baseball you can help them hold onto the bat,” Nikrandt stated in the release. “It’s a great way to actually do hand-over-hand assistance.”

During a typical Marklund-style baseball game, volunteers push the residents up to home plate and provide hand-over-hand assistance so that the resident can hit the ball off of a tee.

Together, they head for first base as the resident and volunteer pairs in the field make the play.

The volunteers field the ball and give it to the resident before they throw the ball where it needs to go.

“It’s a great way to spread the word on what we do here,” Nikrandt stated in the release. “If someone has a good experience when they’re volunteering, they’re going to go out there and they’re going to tell people how they felt. Word of mouth is a powerful tool.”

The baseball games have new volunteers every year, in addition to regular volunteers who come year after year.

This regular Tuesday and Thursday night season has come to a close, but volunteer groups like companies, churches, and schools are still able to schedule individual baseball games as long as the weather cooperates and they provide enough volunteers, the release stated.

The activity will expand to three nights a week next year due to its popularity.

The 25-acre Marklund Hyde Center campus is located in the Mill Creek subdivision in Blackberry Township near Geneva. Adult residents there live in six 16-bed homes, and is one of three residential locations for the nonprofit. The other two are in Bloomingdale and Elgin.