

A fairy tale evening for a local nonprofit

By Jamie Baker • Photos by Chris Guillen and Sam Peyton

Marklund is so much more than a nonprofit dedicated to assisting those with significant special needs and developmental disabilities. It is a safe haven for some of the most incredible humans in the world. Every year, those individuals and the organization that serves them celebrate their special relationship at the magnificent Top Hat Ball.

"It's always so magical," says Chief Development Officer Heather Graves. "Being the 28th year, we always think about how we can top the year before, just with the theme and new and interesting things. Our goal is to create this whole unique experience and then back it with all these mission moments of what we do. We want to throw a great party, but we want to make sure we incorporate our mission throughout the night as well."

2024's Top Hat Ball theme was A Royal Affair, and Marklund delivered a spectacular, once-in-a-lifetime event for attendees. From paid actors and actresses down to the tiniest details for the night's menu, every plan was meticulously laid out and executed to create a fantastical atmosphere full of life and merriment. Event Chairs Sandy and Mike Herlihy spent hours pouring over each aspect of

the ball, ensuring its resounding success.

Marklund's ambassador at the Top Hat Ball, Heather, a longtime resident, served on the event committee and as a greeter at the ball. "People were coming into this royal affair with all the magic and all things royal from decor, and an actors and actresses playing the parts at a royal event," says Graves. "Then you have Heather greeting our guests as they come in, talking through her communication device, and she's all dressed up and excited as well as doing photo ops. It's why we're here."

This year, the Top Hat Ball netted about \$860,000 for Marklund, which Graves points out is around 18% of their total budget for the year. "I think beyond the dollars, the critical part of these huge events is just to bring people in to expose them to who we are," says Signature Events Director Jeannine Zupo. "Each year, we have a platform to be able to introduce people to Marklund who may not otherwise have known. It's all of our leadership at all of our table sponsors and sponsors, introducing Marklund to new people each year. That's how we really gain and keep momentum - growing our circle of influence each year to build our core constituents and people who support Marklund."



MARKLUND'S TOP HAT BALL

More about Marklund

- Marklund's mission is to "make everyday life possible for individuals with profound disabilities." They are celebrating their 70th anniversary this year!
- Marklund serves 178 residents at their sites in Geneva, Bloomingdale and Elgin.
- CBRE in downtown Chicago has partnered with Live Art International and commissioned our residents, students and community clients to put together an Art Exhibit. The exhibit opened Jan. 18 and will run through April. Visit one.bidpal.net/737artexhibitwelcome to view and bid on art.
- The Run, Walk & Roll-Bloomingdale 5K/1M will be held on Sunday, April 21, 2024. For registration and donation information, visit <https://p2p.onecause.com/rwb7>
- The 42nd Annual Golf Classic will be held on Thursday, June 6 at Cog Hill Golf & Country Club. Learn more at www.marklund.org/golfclassic.

