

The Matthias Memo

	Issue No. 1 January 2, 2026	
--	-------------------------------	--

The Matthias Pulse

Liz Pumala

I want to share a reflection on what has been a pivotal year—a year of pause and preparation for the promise of 2026.

The past year was intentionally not focused on rapid growth. After four years of swift expansion, we took a necessary and deliberate pause to create a solid, enduring foundation. This preparation is crucial, ensuring that we are ready to adapt to any changes that come our way, whether they be shifts in Medicaid, IRIS, DHS, or HCBS guidelines. This period has honed our organization's incredible skill of adaptation.

Our 2025 focus areas included:

- Strengthening compliance and refining our policies and procedures.
- Defining leadership roles and strengthening the Matthias Living leadership team.
- Conducting a payroll audit and refiguring the organization as a whole.
- Strategically planning for the future, including the launch of the first "Kappa Squad" in November to begin transitioning our "Frat Houses" into the "Squad" model for more choices and opportunities.



Taking A Look Back

Featured articles

The Matthias Pulse (Continued)

Looking Ahead: The 2026 Promise

The foundational work of 2025 has cleared the way for the exponential growth of 2026. Our promise for the new year includes:

- A new garage for vehicle maintenance on our fleet of 22.
- Squads rolling out across both campuses to provide more connections and opportunities.
- The addition of over 8,000 square feet to the Student Center and 30,000 square feet of new parking.
- The opening of three new Adult Family Homes: Oaks House, Birch House and Redwood House, serving 12 deserving adults.
- The start of the road to the back 70 acres for supportive housing.
- Our goal to welcome 40-50 new students into the Day Program, all while continuing to maintain a staff turnover rate under 3%.

This dramatic expansion will fill the significant gap that exists between day programs, nursing homes and institutional settings. We are ready with the staff, vehicles and the unwavering desire to give these individuals a safe place to belong.



Pi Nu Looking Ahead

Featured articles

Visionary Investors

Canice Neary

thE WERTHy Foundation, officially a 501(c)3 since May 2014, began with a mission to assist facilities and families affected by epilepsy. While Matthias is now their primary beneficiary, the foundation has also supported other organizations like Little Angel Service Dogs, Special Olympics in Illinois, and Epilepsy Families Southeast Wisconsin. Their primary approach to acquiring donations is through family and friends, but they continue to expand their reach.

thE WERTHy Foundation has donated over \$250,000 since 2013, with donations primarily being cash for specific equipment or programs. The foundation hosts two annual golf outings, a larger one in May and a smaller one in November, which are key to their fundraising efforts. Unlike larger foundations, thE WERTHy Foundation does not have paid staff.



thE WERTHy Foundation Trike Donation

We talked to Lyle and Kelli Werth, whose daughter, Erin, is a Matthias Pioneer.

What types of donations have you made?

We started with equipment. Things like bikes, educational and therapeutic equipment. For Matthias, we have done a playground match gift, but cash donations are used to supplement whatever areas are needed. This past year we surpassed \$250,000 in total donations since we began over a decade ago.

What are your most memorable moments with Matthias Academy?

At the initial meeting for Matthias, Liz's determination to open the program, especially amidst the pandemic, was truly inspirational. Sitting in that room with all those parents and realizing that you're not alone and how great the need is. And here's this woman standing up there saying, "I want to do this. I can't do it by myself. Are you with me?" And everyone in the room cheered, "Yes, absolutely!" We were overwhelmed with the sense of community and the realization that us parents were not alone in their challenges.

Featured articles

Visionary Investors (continued)

Also, fundraising events like the annual Golf Outing and the Gala always amaze us as to the number of people who participate and the amount of funds and resources that people are willing to donate. This shows how the acceptance and appreciation of Matthias goes way beyond the parents and families of the students, which is crucial for the program to thrive.



thE WERTHY Foundation Laramont Donation

What has Matthias meant to you both and Erin?

It was clear we'd never have been able to find any place in Illinois for Erin, let alone something at Matthias' level. When Liz said she was going to open a place and hearing who was coming with

her, we thought, "this is where Erin can go and thrive and can continue to have a life outside of just being home with mom and dad." The fact that they are out mingling in the community to retail stores, the fair, a ballgame and go play bingo ... she truly is living a fulfilled life.

What do you hope to see in Matthias' future?

Our greatest hope is that Matthias can continue to provide services to more adults because obviously the need is there. You know, as you grow, obviously things change, cultures change. Keeping that culture the way that it is right now is why Matthias is so amazing. There's so much love there. Everybody knows everybody. Erin is at the Abbey Campus, but when they go over to 83 Campus, they all know Erin. We think that's just very special. And we just hope that they can keep that kind of small feel to it.



thE WERTHY Foundation Wickert Donation

Featured articles

The Giving Light

Patrick Johnson

Matthias Living residential homes are magical not just because of the incredible residents and staff, but also because of the hands of its dedicated house-cleaning volunteers. This small but mighty group, provides a profound service, transforming residences into true places of comfort, dignity and care for the young adults who live there.

The work, as volunteer Donna Sumner puts it, is an act of love. "Our homes should be our safe and comfort place," she says. "Volunteering around them changes what you think is important in life."

Jamie Cullen, another dedicated volunteer, sees it as a vital connection to the Matthias mission, helping to ensure the Matthias can continue to support families like hers.

The impact of this quiet kindness is felt most deeply by the staff. Residential Manager Ellie Schueneman notes the volunteers are "everything," providing an "extra set of hands" that frees up house managers for other critical duties. House Manager Becky Hiemstra highlights the thorough, thoughtful deep-cleaning—mopping, dusting, and sanitizing—that staff often can't complete while residents are present. This crucial support is what ensures a safe, well-maintained environment, especially vital during cold and flu season.



Volunteer Donna S Cleaning



Apollo and Artemis Residents and Staff

Featured articles

The Giving Light (continued)

Across all their experiences, a shared message comes through: cleaning is not just a task — it's an act of dignity, of care, and of keeping each Matthias home feeling like home.



Athena Residents

Donna summed it up best: "Giving your time to these young adults changes your whole perspective on what is truly important in life...their hearts are so pure; we can all learn from them and be inspired to make our world a better place, showing love and kindness!"



<https://signup.com/go/YAKgHmr>



Intern Lauren D

Positive Effect

Christene Kamberis

Internships at Matthias Academy are a powerful force, not only strengthening the growing nonprofit but also shaping compassionate future leaders while bolstering the wider community. In the summer of 2025 alone, Matthias hosted over 22 interns, each leaving a profound mark.

The interns gain transformative personal and professional growth. College freshman Maya, a Psychology major, says her experience "reshaped her outlook on life," and she's now "proud to say my days are now guided in positivity." For high school senior

Featured articles

Positive Effect (continued)

Lauren, who has been connected to Matthias since 2020, the experience has been defining. She shares, "There really isn't anything like Matthias. I learn something new every day, and the connections I've built will stay with me forever," crediting the program with inspiring her path toward Occupational Therapy. Leah also gained invaluable empathy, sharing, "I've learned to recognize that everyone fights their own battles... I'm proud to have acquired an increased sense of empathy as an intern."

This impact reaches far beyond Matthias's own doors. The transformation noted in interns, as Professor Sydne observed, their initial reserve gave way to "initiative and drive"—is a common thread. Each intern carries lessons in patience, empathy, and confidence into their academic pursuits and future professional lives. By fostering these qualities in future leaders, Matthias Academy is helping to build a more understanding, connected and inclusive community.



Intern Maya G



Intern Riese M

Fraternity Spotlight

Kathy Przekwas

Brooke has been professor of the Sigma Fraternity at the Abbey Campus of Matthias Academy since March of 2023. Her vision for the frat is for students to be flexible, fun, reliable, friendly and accepting of change. She feels her students are well on their way to growing in these human milestones. She has seen these students grow

Featured articles

Fraternity Spotlight (continued)

by welcoming new activities, routines and experiences, into who they are today. She marvels at how the students have become outgoing, inquisitive and so willing to try new things. Some of those new activities include Media and Creativity and Conversation Corner. She and staff have been amazed at the level of participation and creativity the students have exhibited. They are very curious and ambitious people!

Sigma is made up of seven (7) students and four (4) staff, who Brooke attributes to making the frat a success. She says of the staff, their teamwork, collaboration and inclusion of everyone, no matter the ability level, makes it all work. Staff are given options in choosing tasks they want to do

with and to support students, but they all are accountable to each other to keep things mostly going smoothly. Some staff have worked as aides in SPED classrooms, transition teams and even in the military and theater. All of these backgrounds help support the students in different and exciting ways. Brooke says people would be surprised to know that her students love working on things that help the Matthias organization, such as doing laundry, grocery shopping and delivery to the residential homes. They also love to work in Scott's Bike Shop. Some favorite outings for them are Peanut Butter and Jam, lunch at the Kenosha Lakefront and going to the movie theater. One very special outing was going to the visit The Bean in Chicago!

Committee Corner

Joy Wojtak

The CONNECT Subcommittee operates under the Matthias Outreach Committee with the core purpose of



Sigma Frat at The Bean in Chicago

enhancing connections within the Matthias community (students, families, staff) and the wider community. It focuses on facilitating events for shared interests, rather than fundraising.

Featured articles

Committee Corner

Joy Wojtak

Since its formation in June 2024, CONNECT has been actively engaging the community. Key events put on include an Outdoor Summer Concert, Bunco Night, Siblings and Friends Bowling, Trivia Night and a Fall Fest and Concert featuring Lucas Matthew Music. The year 2026 is kicking off with a Winter Family Snow Ball, a semi-formal dance for students and families in January and Matthias Trivia Night in February open to everyone.

While fundraising is not the primary goal, donations have helped keep events free or inexpensive. To date, these community efforts have reached over 300 people and relied on volunteers from Matthias families, staff, and students from local schools, truly making it a community effort.



Portion of CONNECT at BUNCO 2025

Event Horizon

- **January 21st, 2026 from 6-8PM -
Matthias Open House and Service
Project**
 - At Matthias Gift and Garden Center,
12015 Antioch Road, Trevor WI
53179
 - Come to the gift shop to help make
blankets for Penny's Purpose!
- **February 20th, 2026 starting 6pm -
Matthias Trivia Night**
 - At Antioch VFW, 75 North Ave,
Antioch, IL 60002

