

# The Matthias Memo

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## The Matthias Pulse

Liz Pumala

While the start of 2026 presented challenges, Matthias Academy remains focused on growth and progress.

The Academy 83 Campus expansion is officially moving forward, overcoming a cold-related delay. The groundwork is finished and the foundation is poured, which will create space for up to 50 new students. Additionally, the new 83 garage is getting siding, and we are finalizing plans for an expanded parking lot.

Our residential program, Matthias Living, continues its goal to open three new houses this year, with DHS approval secured for one. Although the new Forward Health Portal (connecting DHS to IRIS) is extending the wait for adult move-ins, we are celebrating a positive milestone: the Matthias Living residential program is now 28 months strong, having launched years ahead of its initial 2029 target.

We are excited to expand our internship program by enhancing ties with local colleges to welcome new talent year-round. This year, we've welcomed interns from Carthage College (Social Work) and Rush University (Occupational Therapy). Our partnership with Carthage is strengthening, and in 2026, their Special Education majors will join our campuses to lead lessons and activities for our students.

The staff's dedication gives us the confidence that 2026 will be our best year yet!



Foundation of 83 Campus expansion



New garage at 83 Campus

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## Visionary Investors

Canice Neary

Originally founded in 2009 as Mac IT Pros, Monge IT Consulting grew from Dan Monge's deep experience with Apple technology and his desire to help businesses navigate the complexities of Macs, iPhones and iPads. Today, Dan leads the company, with Jeffrey Matthews as the primary support professional, whose decade of customer-focused experience strengthens the firm's hands-on, responsive approach. Together, they've worked to make the technology at Matthias run as smoothly as technology can. The following is an interview with Dan Monge regarding his Matthias journey.

### Was there a moment that made this personal for you?

I began working with Matthias at its inception. At first, I didn't fully grasp the impact it would have. However, once they opened their doors and began serving students and families, I saw it firsthand during our weekly visits. Watching the way staff and students interacted, it became clear: Matthias Academy fills a critical need for adults and families who rely on it to thrive.



Dan Monge

### When you stepped in with your IT expertise, what problem were you trying to ease?

From the start, my goal was simple: make the technology seamless and remove that burden from the staff. Their mission isn't technology; it's serving adults with special needs. If I could take IT off their plate, they could stay focused on what truly matters.

### What moment has stayed with you the most?

During one visit at the Route 83 campus, I was working in the office while "Crocodile Rock" by Elton John played in the gym. I could hear laughter and pure joy from students and staff. That sound stuck with me. It captured how unique and wonderful this place truly is.



Jeffrey Matthews

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## **Visionary Investors (continued)**

### **What did this experience teach you about dignity or independence?**

It made me realize how much I take independence for granted. As a father, I want my adult children to thrive on their own. I hadn't considered that raising children to independence can look very different for families of adults with special needs. Matthias helped me understand how essential places like this are - spaces that support not just the adults, but their parents and caregivers, enabling lives filled with dignity and love.

### **What does the best possible future for Matthias look like?**

A future where Matthias has every resource it needs - funding, staff, space - to serve as many adults as possible. Supporting the adults also supports the families who care for them.

### **What misconception did this challenge for you?**

I once associated adult disabilities mainly with physical injuries. Now I see a broader, often unseen community that needs support and connection from all of us.

## **If more firms stepped up, what would change?**

Even small actions—donations, event space, volunteers, or sharing their story—could collectively become a catalyst to serve more adults and families in meaningful ways.



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## **The Giving Light**

Patrick Johnson

Volunteers are the driving force creating a vital, welcoming environment at Matthias, directly enriching the lives of our students and residents! This shared, passionate effort allows students to learn and grow outdoors.

The Matthias 83 Garden is an inspiring outdoor classroom, bursting with lessons in patience and teamwork. This incredible initiative was co-started by Matthias parent volunteers Susie Jeppsen and Julie Peters. Their dedication blossomed into the Garden Subcommittee, which pioneered lessons, extending the garden's benefits into every classroom! With new staff

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## The Giving Light

Patrick Johnson

member Jennifer Mullen now driving horticulture lessons, this valuable educational work will expand even further. Volunteer Jeppsen captures the deep reward perfectly, recalling a student "very happy and proud" to watch their planted cucumber seed grow.



Students planting with Garden Subcommittee

The commitment of volunteers is absolutely crucial for keeping our expanding properties beautiful and welcoming, ensuring students and residents have peaceful, fun outdoor spaces. Facilities Manager Rob Stueber affirms this incredible impact: "Given the number of properties we have, landscaping is always needed and volunteering helps keep many of our costs down while keeping our properties beautiful! The garden requires



Matthias 83 Campus patio and Butterfly Garden

continuous work, and without volunteers we would not be able to maintain it." All outdoor work delivers amazing health benefits—exercise, fresh air, and sunlight—for students, residents and staff, ensuring the Matthias properties continue to benefit the entire community day in and day out!

If you have questions or want to learn more about volunteering, please contact Outreach@MatthiasAcademy.org.

**Volunteer Here**  
**Matthias**



[HTTPS://SIGNUP.COM/GO/YAKGHMR](https://signup.com/go/YAKGHMR)

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## Positive Effect

Christene Kamberis

Matthias Academy launched Project Victor-Y in response to a tragic loss within the community that resulted from a misunderstanding with law enforcement. As Matthias welcomes individuals with complex needs into our classrooms and residences, we recognize a responsibility that extends beyond our campus. Project Victor-Y reflects our commitment to safety, dignity and understanding in every environment our students encounter.

Project Victor-Y equips the community and first responders with tools and information to better support individuals with disabilities during everyday and emergency situations.

Through clearly visible identifiers for homes and vehicles, wearable community lanyards and partnerships with local law enforcement and first responders, an individual's needs can easily be recognized. This proactive approach helps reduce risk, supports de-escalation and fosters a more informed and compassionate response.

Beyond individual safety, Project Victor-Y also strengthens the broader community by promoting awareness and shared responsibility. It empowers the community and public servants to engage more thoughtfully, helping create a culture where disability is not only visible, but better understood.



Officer visiting Matthias



Members of Kappa Squad visiting Officers

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## Positive Effect (continued)

After two successful pilot phases with Matthias residents and several students, we are excited to announce the official launch of Project Victor-Y at the end of May. Every Matthias family will receive further information and a kit by the end of May.

Each kit is designed for use throughout the community and includes:

- Identification stickers for vehicles and home entry points
- Wearable safety lanyards for community outings
- Reminder cards with helpful cues on communication

Replacement or additional items will be available through the Matthias Gift Shop.

Contact [projectvictory@matthiasacademy.org](mailto:projectvictory@matthiasacademy.org) for any questions about Project Victor-Y.



Matthias students checking out a fire truck



Members of the Kappa Squad at the Mitchell Park Domes

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## Squad Spotlight

Kathy Przekwas

Squads, a newly implemented concept that was part of Matthias Academy's original plan, are now replacing the smaller Greek frat system that was adopted when the Academy opened during Covid. According to Jennifer Burke (JB) Director

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## Squad Spotlight (continued)

of the Academy and Living Programs, Squads are larger groups designed to offer students more friends, more staff and increased variety choices in activities.

The first Squad, Kappa Squad, launched in November 2025. This new structure provides staff with variety in their week by allowing them to work with different students and environments. For students, Squads are valuable in allowing them to get acquainted with new staff and friends, which can lead to new interests and new skills. JB describes them as "organized chaos with endless opportunities for all students."

Jennifer Neideffer, the lead for Kappa Squad, which has 11 staff and 23 students, reports that a typical day begins by showing students three, sometimes four, different choices for how to spend their day. Staffing can adjust based on student choices, with other personnel like nurses or occupational therapists assisting when needed for a particular activity/outing.

Key benefits to Squads include students having more choices, more friends, gaining time with different staff at their own pace and ensuring they all receive weekly priority at being first to choose an activity. The goal is also that each student goes on at least one outing per week and has a movement experience. All Matthias Academy students are scheduled to transition into Squads by the end of April 2026.



Members of the Kappa Squad enjoying snacks and a show

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## Committee Corner

Joy Wojtak

The Outreach Committee was established in March 2024 as the second committee at Matthias. Its primary focus is identifying, evaluating and establishing overall plans and



Matthias Outreach Committee

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## Committee Corner (continued)

Joy Wojtak

strategies to expand Matthias Academy's reach by fostering an engaged, collaborative community of families, staff, volunteers and the public.

Highlights from the past year include:

- Volunteers: Managed, supported and recognized over 190 volunteers in 2025 who donated more than 3,200 hours. This includes staffing the Matthias Gift and Garden Center Monday through Friday!
- Thank You Notes: Completed over 3,000 recognitions for donors and volunteers.
- Community Events: Hosted events such as Trivia Night, Bunco Night, the free Fall Fest and Concert and the successful semi-formal Matthias Family Snow Ball.
- Publications: Launched the quarterly Matthias Memo publication, reaching up to 885 readers, and published the Matthias Cookbook, which is for sale now!
- Other Activities: Hosted Gift Shop Open Houses to build community, have fun and do service projects to aid those needing support in the community.

To learn more about volunteering or joining a committee or project team, please contact [Outreach@MatthiasAcademy.org](mailto:Outreach@MatthiasAcademy.org).



Meijer Volunteers



Matthias Family Snow Ball



Open House and Service Project



Thank You Note Writing



AbbVie Volunteers



First United Methodist Volunteers

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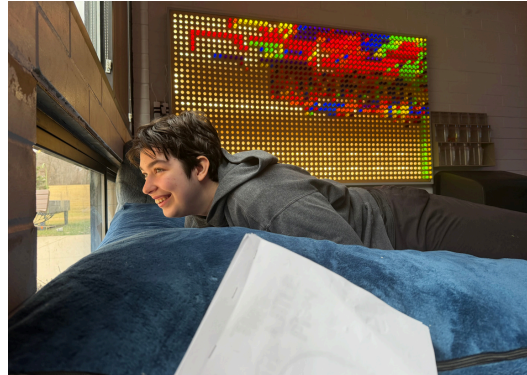
## Event Horizon

- **April 19th from 12-2PM - Matthias Family Bowling**

- At Guttormsen Recreation Center, 5411 Green Bay Rd, Kenosha, WI 53144
- Signup here: [https://onecau.se/\\_g3sdy1](https://onecau.se/_g3sdy1)

- **April 24th and 25th - Spring Sale**

- At Matthias Gift and Garden Center, 12015 Antioch Road, Trevor, WI 53179
- Open 10am-2pm on Saturday



Student watching for Spring

- **May 14th - Matthias Raffle Grand Prize Drawing**

- Enter for a chance to win the \$10,000 Grand Prize
- Ticket sales close on May 4th
- Funds raised support the 83 Campus Addition
- Purchase tickets from a Matthias family, staff or at the Matthias Gift and Garden Center
- Find more details here: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/17rUoGLmKP/>

- **July 13th - Matthias Golf Outing**

- At The Club at Strawberry Creek
- Save the date

- **July 18th from 2-4pm - Matthias BINGO**

- At Antioch VFW, 75 North Ave, Antioch, IL 60002
- Save the date

- **October 3rd - Matthias Fall Fest and Concert**

- Save the date!

- **November 7<sup>th</sup> - Annual Matthias Gala**

- Save the date!

