

The Matthias Memo

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The Matthias Pulse

Liz Pumala

After two years of growth, Matthias Living is proactively evolving our approach to care. Expanding from our very first adult family home to five homes has given us the strength and scale to transition to a collaborative team model—a move designed to eliminate caregiver exhaustion and elevate our standard of care.

Originally, each home relied on a single house manager. The 24/7 demands of compliance, staffing, medications and constant communication proved intensely demanding for a single person who also has a life and responsibilities outside of Matthias.

Our new multi-home network allows us to work smarter. Instead of managing every task individually, house managers now specialize in specific operational areas across all locations. Dedicated leads proactively handle network-wide duties like activity planning, meal planning, compliance and staff training.

By centralizing these duties, we replaced 24/7 individual phone availability with a shared communication line. Managers can now truly disconnect and recharge, backed by our vital House Leads and direct care staff.

We are incredibly grateful to the parents, guardians and staff who helped us build this scalable, supportive model for the future!



Matthias Living Staff and Guardians

Featured articles

Visionary Investors

Canice Neary

NorthBridge Church is an Antioch community built around “One Family. One Story. One Mission.” The church welcomes people wherever they are in their spiritual journey and invites them into hope in Christ. Its relationship with Matthias extends that welcome into shared spaces, mutual learning and a deeper commitment to inclusion. Pastor Mark Albrecht was kind enough to share some of the stories about the relationship NorthBridge has with Matthias Academy.

Tell us about the history of Matthias and NorthBridge.

Shortly after moving into our building in 2017, church members approached me about starting a ministry for families of children with special needs. I was fairly unaware of the need at the time. Then we began "Fantastic Fridays," and I started seeing what I had not seen before. My heart, and the heart of our church, grew with compassion. As a pastor, I was heartbroken to learn how isolated many of these families become and how often they feel unwelcome in churches. We did not know everything about building a special needs ministry—we just knew we had to do it.

What originally inspired NorthBridge Church to partner with Matthias, and what was your first impression of the mission?

Our parishioner, Molly Klowas, joined the staff at Matthias and brought the mission to our attention. Around the same time, God gave us a vision for Treehouse Community Playground, a fully accessible playground. I asked Liz for advice because of her fundraising experience, and she invited our team for a tour. We were blown away by the quality of care; you could feel the love from every member of the staff. That visit gave me a deep respect for Matthias and a desire to build a partnership. Later, Matthias donated money for our playground's "rocker boat," and our congregation was overjoyed to give our Christmas offering toward a van they needed. That really solidified the partnership and mutual respect.



Featured articles

Visionary Investors (continued)

How do you see the mission of NorthBridge and Matthias overlapping and supporting one another?

As a church, we feel called to love our community by helping solve problems and meet needs, especially for people who are often overlooked. Jesus said that what we do for “the least of these,” we do for him. Matthias is a beautiful example of that kind of love, particularly for adults who have aged out of school programs. We often say we want to be a hospitable home with arms wide open. We have learned that if we truly mean everyone, we have to be intentional about welcoming the special needs community too.

Can you share a story or a specific moment from a Matthias event at NorthBridge that highlighted the impact of the partnership?

Every time our church family sees Matthias using our building, it brings pride and joy; it reminds our people what this place is for. This partnership has also created an awareness that is changing us. This summer will be the third straight year we send volunteers, about half of them teenagers, to Camp Barnabas (a special needs camp in Missouri). That is a direct result of what we have learned through Matthias.

As Matthias grows, so does the need for inclusive spaces. What is your vision for the future of the partnership?

We hope to serve Matthias, but we also know NorthBridge has been enriched by them. Matthias helps us learn how to be more welcoming and intentional with our spaces. Our new hydroponics greenhouse was built to be fully accessible. Furthermore, in 2027, we plan to open a new addition that includes a Sensory Room and storage for adaptive bikes. We look forward to continuing to learn from Matthias as we create more inclusive spaces.



NorthBridge

How can the Matthias community best support NorthBridge Church in return?

We want to keep doing what we are doing. We would also benefit from training from the Matthias team, or even a facility audit to help us see where we can become more welcoming and accessible.



Featured articles

The Giving Light

Patrick Johnson

Over the past three months, Matthias Academy welcomed 58 first-time volunteers from four large local companies: Uline, Zebra, NyproMold and Keller Williams. As a non-profit serving adults with disabilities, these partnerships are vital for keeping overhead costs down while rapidly improving our campus locations and adult family homes.



Volunteers from Zebra Technologies

Matthias completely customizes every event to match the group's size and schedule. We easily accommodate large teams of 20 or more for intensive weekend deep cleanings or weekday outdoor projects, as well as small groups of two to five volunteers for lawn care, painting, organizing, cleaning and more.

Whether driven by corporate give-back days, individual volunteer hours or a desire to team-build, every group arrives with a huge heart and a willingness to help.



Volunteers from Keller Williams

Following a Keller Williams RED Day event in May, volunteer Bekah Garcia shared, "Helping with exterior projects was meaningful, but the bigger impact was the way this place touched our hearts. We walked away receiving far more than we gave."

As Director of Committees, Joy Wojtak loves seeing volunteers team up with Matthias on various projects. "Volunteering offers a unique, firsthand perspective of our campus and mission. By lending your time, you will leave with a deeper connection, greater insight and the satisfaction of making a real impact. It is truly a win-win-win experience". If you are interested in setting up a volunteer group event, contact Outreach@MatthiasAcademy.org.



Featured articles

Positive Effect

Christene Kamberis

What began as a connection through NorthBridge Church has blossomed into a meaningful partnership between Matthias Academy and Growing Healthy People (GHP). In 2024, as NorthBridge Church was developing its hydroponic greenhouse ministry, Matthias Academy students were invited to learn hydroponic growing techniques through the Growing Healthy People's greenhouse program at the Tech Campus in Grayslake. What started as an educational opportunity quickly evolved into something much more.



Cheryl working with Matthias Students

Over the next two years, Matthias students became an important part of the hydroponic operation. They learned to sow seeds, care for plants, harvest produce, package products and clean equipment. Their work helped supply fresh produce to organizations including Gonzalez Supermercado, Roberti Community House, Open Arms Mission and the Tech Campus culinary department.

According to Cheryl Besenjak, Executive Director of Growing Healthy People, the students became a true workforce and an integral part of the team.

"There was always a sense of teamwork and pride in the work," Besenjak shared. "The students cheered each other on and worked efficiently to accomplish their tasks. Their contribution was real and recognized."



Nova Squad members learning at GHP



Featured articles

Positive Effect (continued)

The partnership also fostered strong relationships between GHP staff and Matthias Academy students and staff members. Besenjak described the experience as both rewarding and joyful, noting that the collaboration has been positively received by community organizations and funding partners alike.

Although program changes have altered the original vision of preparing students to work in NorthBridge's future greenhouse, Growing Healthy People remains committed to providing educational opportunities through its hydroponic growing programs and the John Lewis Middle School Teaching Farm.

Reflecting on the partnership, Besenjak's lasting impression is simple: "Just loved getting to know the students and watching them grow in their abilities. It was a joy."

The feeling is certainly mutual.



Viggo and Student at GHP



Cheryl helping Matthias students at GHP



Brynn with Calypso Squad

Squad Spotlight

Kathy Przekwas

Building on our last edition of the Matthias Memo, we are highlighting the Calypso Squad—a dynamic community combining the Xi Pi and Alpha Omega homerooms. As a newer, larger structure at Matthias Academy, squads expand student opportunities by offering more friends, more staff and a wider variety of activities.

Featured articles

Squad Spotlight (continued)

Staff lead Brynn Martin, collaborating with team members Beth and Kailyn, noted that adjusting to new personalities was initially a challenge. However, the students have shown immense growth, particularly in taking their time to make thoughtful decisions. The squad model has significantly boosted staff collaboration and flexibility. By working as a team, staff members share the planning load, problem-solve together and blend their unique skills in organization, problem-solving and empathy. To ensure ultimate safety and security, all staff remain updated on pertinent student details and strictly follow each student's individual plan.

The Calypso students themselves are highly intellectual, inquisitive and funny. They share a deep love for history and animals, exploring these passions through reading and special projects.

Looking ahead, Calypso is eager for a fun summer packed with water and outdoor activities, with a strong focus on regularly and safely integrating all students into the wider community.



Inga with Calypso Squad



Calypso Cafe Time



Calypso at the Park



Justin with Calypso Squad

Featured articles

Committee Corner

Joy Wojtak

Securing funding is a vital effort fueling the growth of Matthias. At the heart of this mission is our Grants Subcommittee. Since forming in early 2025, this dedicated volunteer team has raised over \$42,000 through corporate and foundation grants.

This success is entirely thanks to our incredible, visionary grantors. As some of the very first organizations to back our mission via grants, their generosity does far more than fund programs. Every single "YES" we receive gives our subcommittee confidence and the fuel to keep trying in a highly competitive landscape. These grants directly fund critical needs like inclusive classroom technology, sidewalks, roofs, generators, air conditioners, etc.

The application process can be intense. Volunteers like Nancy O, Ray M, Jennifer B, and Michelle Z along with Joy W invest hours researching foundations, vetting partnerships and translating the "daily magic" of Matthias into formal proposals. They leverage AI, professional databases and their own backgrounds in marketing, business and education to align our needs with grantor priorities.

The subcommittee's most vital message to the readers? Everyone has a connection that can help us grow. By looking into your own networks and sharing our mission, you become part of this funding cycle. If you are reading this and have any leads the team should consider, email Outreach@MatthiasAcademy.org.



WE Energies Foundation supported a technology for a classroom



Burlington Garden Club supported soil for the Matthias Hwy 83 Campus



WHEDA supported an A/C unit and generator at the Oak House

Featured articles

Event Horizon

- **July 13th - Matthias Golf Outing**
 - At The Club at Strawberry Creek, 14810 72nd St, Kenosha, WI
 - Secure a spot at the dinner or a student/family sign, here <https://onecau.se/ffqcu1>
 - Submit whiskey or silent auction items by July 3.
 - Questions? Email LMuhlenbeck@MatthiasAcademy.org
- **July 24th & 25th - Christmas in July Sale**
 - Open 10am-3pm on Saturday.
 - At Matthias Gift and Garden Center, 12015 Antioch Road, Trevor, WI
- **July 25th from 5-8pm - Thrivent® Parking Lot Party with Live Music!**
 - Thrivent®, 189 E. Chestnut Street, Burlington, WI
 - NOTE: The lot is on the 164th block of Washington Street.
 - This year's event proudly supports Matthias.
 - Watch the Matthias website [Calendar page](#) for information.
- **July 28th from 6-8pm - Retro Pizza Party Open House and School Supply Drive**
 - At Matthias Gift and Garden Center, 12015 Antioch Road, Trevor, WI
 - All collected items go directly to The Sharing Center
 - Enjoy pizza, games, shopping, and volunteer packing.
 - Sign-up here: <https://signup.com/go/kpTZUoO>
- **August 6th at 6:35pm - Matthias Night at the Kingfish Ballpark**
 - To learn more and purchase tickets, navigate to August 6th on <https://matthiascommunity.org/calendar/>
- **October 3rd from 1-4pm - Matthias Fall Fest and Concert**
 - Salem Community Park, 9410 256th Ave, Salem, WI
 - Free event featuring live music from the Judson Brown Duo
 - Come one, come all to enjoy music, games, and community!
- **November 7th - Annual Matthias Gala**
 - At The Club at Strawberry Creek, 14810 72nd St, Kenosha, WI
 - Judson Brown Duo will be performing



Volunteers from NyproMold