

Volunteers share a Christmas Eve tradition with Marklund residents

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GENEVA – For the last 11 years, Colleen McCauley has spent the morning of Christmas Eve at Marklund in Geneva, helping residents open gifts donated by area churches, individuals and businesses.

It was a tradition that started shortly after McCauley's daughter died from brain cancer in 2001. She had donated a custom wheelchair and walker to Marklund, a center for disabled children and adults, and one resident there suggested that she choose a name from the facility's gift tree.

She took that resident's advice and now returns to Marklund year after year on Christmas Eve.

This year, she and about 20 coworkers from Screws Industries in Glendale Heights bought presents for 80 Marklund residents. They



Jeanette A. smiles with Santa Claus at Marklund at Mill Creek in Geneva. Clients of Marklund opened presents with family and volunteers on the morning of Christmas Eve. (Rena Naltsas – For the Kane County Chronicle)


"To us, it's Christmas," she said. "Seeing the kids appreciate it more than anything – that's the meaning of Christmas, just to give."

Marklund Celebrates Christmas

Cathy Nikrandt, volunteer coordinator at Marklund, said 215 volunteers were expected to help 96 residents open gifts this year. She said volunteers have been dedicating part of their Christmas Eve to assist residents with opening gifts since Marklund opened more than 50 years ago.

More than 200 volunteers helped residents at Marklund – a center in Geneva for adults and children with developmental disabilities – open gifts on Christmas Eve.

This year, Boy Scout Troop 43, the Rotary Club of Batavia and a Wheaton Warrenville South High

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School leadership group were among the organizations whose members helped out Monday.

Members of the Simmons family in Elburn said this was the first year they volunteered, adding they hoped to make it a Christmas Eve tradition. Robert and Jennifer Simmons brought along their children, Sam, 11, and Rob, 14. Jennifer Simmons said her family has been involved in volunteering at Marklund in the past, and she wanted her family to gain a new perspective.

"Christmas is kind of chaotic," she said. "We figured serving would put our minds back to where they ought to be."

Though it was the first time Rob Simmons has been involved in gift-opening at Marklund, he said he had an idea of how much it meant to the residents. He said he donated a book to a resident two years ago, and that resident still remembers him and the gift to this day.

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- I'm going out to celebrate
- I'm having friends and family over
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