



HS cheerleaders lead first Miracle League cheer clinic

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Scarlett Mayfield leads a cheer with athletes participating in the Miracle League Northshore cheer clinic. PROVIDED PHOTO

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High school sophomore Scarlett Mayfield loves cheer.

She's cheered for her school, St. Scholastica Academy, and she's spent years doing it on recreation teams.

But Mayfield also loves something else — giving back.

However, not until she was involved with Miracle League Northshore was Mayfield able to combine those two passions. Miracle League Northshore is a nonprofit that provides children and adults with disabilities the opportunity and accommodations to play on sports teams, and it's based at Coquille Park in Covington.

Volunteers, or “buddies,” as the league calls them, assist with the program and are typically high school students — Mayfield included — who do not need accommodations to play their sport of choice.

But this year, Mayfield noted a gap in the league's programming — a gap she knew exactly how to fill. Sure, the league already offered baseball, soccer and kickball, but the League needed cheer.

“I've volunteered with Miracle League as a buddy off and on for years, and having my cheer team be buddies one day was fun, but I knew we could do more,” said Mayfield, 16. “I figured there's probably a bunch of ... kids (with disabilities) who might not be into baseball or soccer but maybe they'd love to cheer.”

And she was right.

She took the idea to Miracle League Northshore Manager Trevor Johnson, who immediately gave the thumbs up. Kids had been asking about it already, he said, so when Mayfield offered to design and run the program, it was a slam dunk for the organization.

Mayfield gathered up her cheer friends from high schools across the area, and the girls came up with a dance, cheers and games they would teach the athletes. Interest soared and culminated on May 15 when the group launched its first-ever cheer clinic. Nearly a dozen children participated with the cheerleaders, learning

cheers and a dance during an afternoon filled with fun and friendship. The next day, they performed in between Miracle League baseball games.

“They loved it all, and we didn’t know if they would really like it, and they honestly loved doing it,” said Kate Dupre, 16, also an SSA student who cheers for St. Paul’s Catholic School. “It’s just so refreshing seeing they love what I love doing. I felt a bond with them.”

Two more cheer clinics are planned for the fall and spring seasons, and the program is on course to become a staple at the Miracle League.

But the program meant so much more to some of the children, such as Lilly, who Johnson said is now graduated but was never able to be part of the cheer team in high school. She had asked Johnson where she could learn to cheer, and thanks to Mayfield and her friends, she found it at the Miracle League.

However, it also offers connection that all kids need, Mayfield said.

“It’s really special to all these little kids and ... gives them friends that are older (to help) them do the things they love to do it, and it creates a bond,” Mayfield said.

Mayfield said she is excited to continue the program; she learned how to do it from a pro.

Giving back has always been modeled in her home, she said. Her mom is a regular volunteer at the Children’s Museum of St. Tammany, her grandmother volunteers at the Northshore Food Bank, and her older brother actually started the tennis tournament that raises thousands of dollars each year for Miracle League Northshore. Mayfield has also helped with the tennis tournament and plans to continue that as well.

“I saw their love for the community,” Mayfield said. “ ... and I think it has benefited me as a person in the way I feel about others and being able to help them and make others happy.”

As for the Miracle League, volunteers are always needed, said Johnson, even if “just for one game.”

The league will host summer basketball, fall and spring baseball, and spring kickball. Dates for upcoming cheer clinics have not yet been determined, but will likely take place during fall baseball, which begins Sept 12. The cost to play is \$20 for baseball and \$10 for basketball, but there is tuition assistance for families who need it. Registration for athletes and volunteer information can be found at miracleleaguenorthshore.org.