

Mitch-N-Friends Donates \$1,230 To Edwardsville YMCA, Money To Be Used For Monthly Clinics At Meyer Center

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EDWARDSVILLE - The partnership between the Edwardsville YMCA and Mitch-N-Friends, who puts on the annual clinic for special needs players held during the Edwardsville Futures tennis tournament, presented by the EGHM Foundation, was solidified on Thursday when Mitch-N-Friends presented a check for \$1,230 to the Edwardsville YMCA during a ceremony held at the end of the annual clinic.

The money, which was raised by donations to Mitch-N-Friends, will help with costs of the program, in which the Meyer Center began hosting monthly clinics last year, on the second Thursday of each month from September through May.

How the organization and the partnership between the Edwardsville Y and Mitch-N-Friends started was in a very simple and heartfelt way.

"So, 10 years ago, when my father died, Mitch-N-Friends was about two or three years into our organization," said Kevin McGinnis, the main force behind the organization named for his son Mitch, a longtime staple of the Edwardsville High School tennis program, "and we were not a non-for-profit at that time. So, I think it was my sister, Cindy, who said 'dad loved your Mitch-N-Friends organization. What about in lieu of flowers, we send donations to go to Mitch-N-Friends?' And so, my dad had a lot of friends, a lot of associates. He was an elementary school principal in Champaign. And, so then, all of a sudden, the organization had two or three thousand dollars.

"So, as we progressed through the years," McGinnis continued, "events like this, we were able to pay for. The community in Edwardsville, along the way, other people donated money. We didn't have a lot of fund raisers, there were donations made over the years. So, a year ago, as you know, we made the decision dissolve the non-for-profit Mitch-N-Friends and become a partner with the YMCA, who are very excited to have the Edwardsville YMCA take over branding and run the program. So, it's Paul (Abert) and I's pleasure - Paul has been the treasurer of Mitch-N-Friends all this time. It's our pleasure to present a check to the Edwardsville YMCA for \$1,230. Hopefully, it can continue to run with this program and I hope it helps."

"This is a big help," said Edwardsville YMCA president and Chief Executive Officer Brandon Bell. "This is all going to go to the Mitch-N-Friends program. The T-shirt today couldn't be a more better representation of what our hope is. Mitch-N-Friends on the front, the Y on the back and Tennis Everyone (the longtime Mitch-N-Friends slogan) and it's absolutely amazing. We're honored to take this program, we really are."

McGinnis also thanked both Bell and Abert for their help in the organization and also said the transition to the partnership with the YMCA was Abert's idea, an idea that has worked out very well indeed for the benefit of all.

"The transition was Paul's idea," McGinnis said, "and we ran with it.

"It's the coming together of two amazing organizations," Abert said. "A group that really understands why tennis for everyone makes sense. And the Y, can take the program to a whole other level. And as Brandon said, it's a monthly program. That's something our own little group couldn't do. We're excited now that this is a year-round existence and I'm really pumped for that."

Bell said the program will be held on the five tennis courts at the Meyer Center every month, with this year's program starting in September. He feels it's a great honor for the Y to keep the Mitch-N-Friends program going all year long.

"It's a great honor for the donation," Bell said, "but even more so, it's a huge honor for us to carry on the tradition of Mitch-N-Friends and to be able to do this as a program moving forward for years to come. Our hope is to just serve as many people as we can. It's a monthly program, September through May, the second Thursday of every month at six o'clock, free and we dedicate all five of our tennis courts for this program."

It all lives up to the slogan of Tennis Everyone.

"Tennis Everyone," Bell said, "and we're so excited and so blessed we're able to do this for the community. Just completely grateful for the opportunity to carry on this program."