

# Press Clippings Through May 28, 2025

## - Daily Herald -

### Photo Gallery: Elgin area School District U-46 high school graduations

By: Paul Valade

Date: May 25, 2025



U-46 Superintendent Suzanne Johnson visits with students at the Elgin High School graduation ceremony on Saturday, May 24, 2025 at the Now Arena in Hoffman Estates.

To view the full gallery please click [here](#).

## - Daily Herald -

### U-46 to host five commencement ceremonies on May 24

By: Tara Burghart, Elgin Area School District U-46

Date: May 21, 2025



Elgin High School senior Wilebalso Modesto Hernandez, who has been a part of U-46's Dual Language program since kindergarten, will major in chemistry at Aurora University. Also pictured are U-46 Superintendent Suzanne Johnson and U-46 Educational Foundation board president John Devereux, left.

More than 2,800 students will mark the end of their high school careers on Saturday, May 24, as Elgin Area School District U-46 conducts five high school graduation ceremonies at the NOW Arena in Hoffman Estates.

The U-46 Board of Education, Superintendent Dr. Suzanne Johnson, Deputy Superintendent of Instruction Lela Majstorovic, Assistant Superintendent of Schools Dr. Annette Acevedo, and many other district administrators and principals will join families and friends in recognizing the Class of 2025.

"We look forward to celebrating this milestone with the family, friends, and employees who have supported the students throughout their years in U-46," said Dr. Johnson. "These graduates leave high school well-equipped to create bright futures for themselves and contribute meaningfully to their communities and the world."

The graduation schedule for Saturday, May 24, is as follows:

- Elgin High School — 8 a.m.
- Bartlett High School — 11 a.m.
- Larkin High School — 2 p.m.
- Streamwood High School — 5 p.m.
- South Elgin High School — 8 p.m.

In order to continue to run five smooth and efficient high school graduation ceremonies, U-46 is requesting students and families ride together in the fewest possible number of vehicles to the NOW Arena, 5333 Prairie Stone Parkway in Hoffman Estates.

Graduates, families, and guests are also asked to arrive 45 minutes prior to their graduating ceremony. More details about the graduation ceremonies can be found at [u-46.org/classof2025](http://u-46.org/classof2025).



South Elgin High School's Ayush Patel has already earned two years of college credit as he heads to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to study computer engineering.

### **Dual Credit offered in partnership with ECC**

The district will continue its tradition of honoring seniors who enrolled in the full-time Dual Credit program, during which they take all their classes on the campus of Elgin Community College.

These students must demonstrate certain college readiness benchmark scores for acceptance and take all of their courses at ECC. They earn both high school and college credits for each class in the program.

A group of 46 Dual Credit students will graduate with the equivalent of an associate degree in addition to their high school diploma. Another 15 will graduate from high school with at least a year's worth of college credits. For graduation, they will wear special stoles.

South Elgin High School's Ayush Patel will take two years of college credit with him when he heads to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to study computer engineering. He said his main motivation for joining the Dual Credit program was that it would allow him to finish college earlier and "therefore significantly decrease the cost.

"The best part about the Dual Credit program was that once I got accustomed to the college life and system, I ended up having a lot more free time than I would have expected," he said. "At the same time, however, it did take a while for me to get acquainted with the system, and that was definitely the hardest part."

Danielle Sotto, of Streamwood High School, is also graduating Saturday with about two years' worth of college credits. Danielle, who plans to study civil engineering at UIUC, said she was drawn to Dual Credit because she was looking for an academic challenge.

"I liked the overall environment where I had more independence and freedom compared to in high school," said Danielle, adding she also learned to advocate for herself.



Larkin High School's Lucy Akemann plans to pursue a pre-medical track at the University of California San Diego.

### **Students learn to communicate globally**

U-46 also will issue a special honor to 247 graduates who have earned the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy, showing that they have demonstrated proficiency in one or more languages besides English.

Another 199 students earned the Commendation, given to students who have demonstrated significant progress toward achieving a high level of proficiency.

Languages for which U-46 students earned the Seal include Spanish, Polish, Japanese, Tagalog, Urdu, Lithuanian, Chinese, Punjabi, Russian, French, Hindi, Hungarian, Ukrainian, Punjabi, Bosnian, Turkish and Gujarati.

Students who earn the Seal can qualify for two years of foreign language credit at any Illinois public university; which translates to a combined total of \$487,770.66 in tuition savings for this year's Seal recipients, using the credit hour cost at ECC for calculation purposes.

Larkin High School's Lucy Akemann said earning the Seal in Spanish is one of her proudest accomplishments in high school, along with being an Illinois State Scholar.

"These achievements represent, to me, the years of dedication, hard work, and a commitment to academic perseverance," said Lucy, who plans to pursue a pre-medical track at the University of California San Diego. "The most important thing I learned in high school is that



resilience is paramount — the ability to persevere through challenges, to dust yourself off after setbacks, and to keep striving even when things get incredibly difficult.”

Also wearing special stoles will be more than 750 students who participated in the district’s award-winning Dual Language program; many of whom have been a part of Dual Language since kindergarten, including Wilebaldo Modesto Hernandez, who is graduating from Elgin High School and will major in chemistry at Aurora University.

“The Dual Language program has offered me so many different opportunities: field trips, AP credits, earning the Seal of Biliteracy, and giving back to my community, which I love doing,” he said. “It’s contributed to my education by letting me continue to speak my first language, Spanish, but I’ve used both English and Spanish in all of my courses.”

### **Scholarships for first-generation college-bound students**

The Class of 2025 graduates include 30 recipients of the Superintendent’s Scholarship, which honors first-generation college-bound students.

They will receive \$2,000 from the U-46 Educational Foundation to put toward college costs. Those students are highlighted in this video, also posted on the district’s YouTube channel.



**[To watch the video on the district’s YouTube channel click here.](#)**

“Receiving the scholarship was the world’s way of letting me know that I have learned, that I’m capable, that I need to keep going,” said Elgin High School’s Gael Flores, who plans to pursue a nursing degree at Aurora University. “I’m beyond grateful for being awarded the scholarship, I’m so happy knowing that my struggle and efforts were real, and that it’s not something only I can see anymore.”



Elgin High School's Gael Flores plans to pursue a nursing degree at Aurora University. Also pictured are U-46 Superintendent Suzanne Johnson and U-46 Educational Foundation board president John Devereux, left.

### **Academic achievement top of mind for Top 2 Percent**

Forty-seven graduates rank among the top two percent of their graduating class within the five high schools. These students will attend top universities, including Northwestern University, University of Chicago, University of Michigan, Purdue University, DePaul University, and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

The top two percent graduates appear in a section on the district's Class of 2025 section at [u-46.org/2025top2percent](http://u-46.org/2025top2percent).

One of them is Bartlett High School's Jack Conner, who said his passion for his own personal growth will serve him well as he majors in finance at UIUC.

"The most important thing I learned in high school is that being smart isn't the ability to know the answer off the top of my head. Being smart is having the ability to find the answer when I do not know it off the top of my head," he said.

**- Chicago Tribune/ The Courier News -  
Elgin News Digest: South Elgin offering spring and  
summer pickleball leagues; U-46 high school  
graduations set for Saturday at NOW Arena**

**By: Mike Danahey**

**Date: May 22, 2025**



Graduation ceremonies for School District U-46 high schools will be held Saturday at the NOW Arena in Hoffman Estates.

### **U-46 high school graduations set for Saturday at NOW Arena**

School District U-46 high school graduation ceremonies will be held Saturday, May 24, at the NOW Arena in Hoffman Estates.

Elgin High School will start off the day of ceremonies at 8 a.m. followed by Bartlett at 11 a.m., Larkin at 2 p.m., Streamwood at 5 p.m. and South Elgin at 8 p.m.

New this year, all guests ages 2 and older will be required to have a ticket to enter a ceremony, according to the U-46 website. Each graduating student will receive 10 tickets.

Graduates, families and guests should arrive 45 minutes prior to the ceremony start time. To reduce parking and traffic problems, students and families are asked to ride together so there are fewer vehicles.

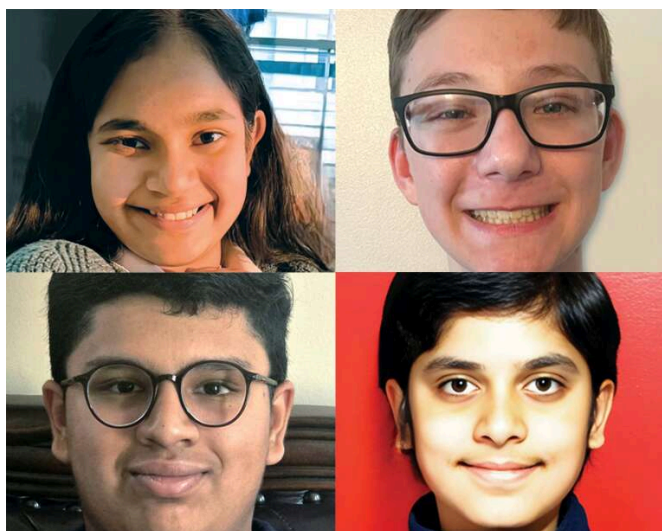
For more information, go to [www.u-46.org/Page/20657](http://www.u-46.org/Page/20657).

*To read the full article, please click [here](#).*

## **- Daily Herald - 4 suburban spellers among 13 Illinois finalists competing in Scripps National Spelling Bee**

**By: Madhu Krishnamurthy**

**Date: May 24, 2025**



Four suburban spellers are among the contestants in the 2025 Scripps National Spelling Bee, which takes place May 27-29. They are, clockwise from upper left, Shruti Ayyagari of Aurora, Tyler Kochanski of Fox River Grove, Visharad Sathish of Grayslake and Yahya Mohammed of Hoffman Estates.

Focus on the words given instead of the pressure of being in the spotlight.

That's the advice Visharad Sathish got from older brother Sahasrad as a strategy for being a contestant on the biggest stage there is for spellers.

Three-time Scripps National Spelling Bee finalist, Sahasrad Sathish was eliminated just minutes into the eighth round of the 2022 contest after he couldn't spell "cypsela" correctly. But he tied for ninth place out of 234 spellers that year.

Now following in Sahasrad's footsteps, Visharad Sathish of Grayslake is among four suburban spellers competing next week in the 2025 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

"I'm pretty excited and nervous," said the 12-year-old seventh-grader at Lake Forest Country Day School. "It is nerve-wracking to compete on stage in front of everyone."

The three other suburban contestants are: Tyler Kochanski of Fox River Grove, Yahya Mohammed of Hoffman Estates, and Shruthi Ayyagari of Aurora.

The competition is in Maryland and starts Tuesday and running through Thursday. The semifinals will air live at 7 p.m. Wednesday on ION. The finals will air starting at the same time Thursday.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the iconic American competition, first held in 1925 with just nine participants, according to its website. This year's 243 national qualifiers, ranging in age from 8 to 14 years old, advanced through local and regional bees that took place through the end of March.

Most contestants have been preparing for this moment from an early age.

Visharad began competing in spelling contents starting in fifth grade. He made it to the Lake County regional spelling bee finals in fifth and sixth grades, but won it only this year in March qualifying him for nationals, said his father, Sathish Sathyamurthy.

“We are doing the same thing as what we did for our elder son ... as parents we have been through the exercise before,” said Sathyamurthy of supporting Visharad at nationals. “We are proud of what he has accomplished in qualifying for the National Spelling Bee.”

He and wife Vidhya Ramachandran and son Sahasrad — now a rising senior at Lake Forest Academy — will be cheering from the sidelines at the competition.

While competing on the national stage will be a new experience for Visharad, “because he knew what his elder brother did, there is going to be some familiarity,” Sathyamurthy said.

Visharad said he has managed to maintain his composure and confidence in his abilities so far.

“That was my strategy for winning the regionals,” he said. “I’m trying to follow my brother’s advice and strategies when he was competing in the nationals to gain confidence in myself.”

Like most young spellers, Visharad spends any free time he has after schoolwork and extracurricular activities training for the Bee.

His other interests include listening to music and playing the flute and the mridangam, a double-headed, barrel-shaped drum used in Carnatic music from South India. He also loves to solve challenging math problems, reads extensively to help build vocabulary and plays chess “because it’s like a good workout for my brain.”

His fellow suburban competitors similarly have varied interests.

Tyler Kochanski, 14, an eighth-grader at Saints Peter & Paul School in Cary, competes in a variety of sports, including cross country, basketball, volleyball and track. He likes playing video games and trying new things, especially in food and places.

“I’m excited but I also feel nervous since ... this is going to be my first and my last year competing at nationals,” Tyler said. “I’m just nervous because I wanna win. I’m feeling pretty confident. I’ve studied just around 50 hours already.”

Tyler now is focusing on learning the roots of words and studying the unabridged Merriam-Webster, the official dictionary for the contest.

“There’s over 476,000 words in that book,” he said.



His mother, Becky Kochanski, a 911 dispatcher, has been impressed with Tyler's dedication in preparing for nationals.

"He gave up friends and video games to make sure that he had time enough to study so he could make it to nationals," she said. "I'm happy for him and I'm nervous for him."

Yahya Mohammed, 13, a seventh-grader at Larsen Middle School in Elgin, has previous National Spelling Bee experience having tied for 60th place in the 2024 contest. He enjoys watching sports and is a big fan of the Chicago teams — Bears, Cubs and Bulls. He also likes playing video games, trying different foods, watching game shows, traveling, social studies and learning about other countries.

This is Shruthi Ayyagari's first time participating in the National Spelling Bee — a dream she never really thought would come true.

"It's very exciting but I'm also a little bit nervous," said the 13-year-old seventh-grader at Francis Granger Middle School in Aurora, who pursues classical music, dance and visual arts, likes painting and drawing and plays the cello. "And now that I am here, it's a lot to think about."

Shruthi has been prepping for the contest by studying the methods of past winners and running through Bee word lists each night with mother Madhuri Ayyagari, who works in data analytics for a health care company.

"We are very proud of her getting this far and we think that this is a big achievement already," Madhuri Ayyagari said. "We just want her to go there and have fun without any pressure, and whatever happens is just secondary."

To follow how these spellers are doing in the contest, visit [spellingbee.com](https://spellingbee.com).

## **- Daily Herald -**

### **Kane County releases youth-led report on mental health priorities and recommendations**

**By: Kane County Health Department**

**Date: May 20, 2025**



The sixth annual Youth Voices Forum on Mental health at Elgin Community College brought together students from 10 area high schools.

Kane County recently released the 2025 Youth Voices Forum on Mental Health Report, highlighting student-driven priorities and actionable recommendations.

The Kane County Health Department and the Regional Office of Education hosted the sixth annual Youth Voices Forum on Mental Health Feb. 7 at Elgin Community College, bringing together 86 students from 10 area high schools to tackle one of the most urgent issues facing today's youth: mental health.

The forum's mission was to:

- Provide an inclusive platform for youth, educators, and mental health professionals to collaborate
- Amplify youth voices and recognize students as experts of their own experiences
- Facilitate open conversations to break down stigma around mental health
- Promote holistic support systems that are trauma-informed, culturally sensitive, and gender-affirming
- Build connections and resilience among peers, school staff, and community providers
- Develop actionable outcomes to guide local policy and programming

The day featured a panel moderated by the Regional Office of Education's Josh Axelson, with representatives from the health department and Dundee-Crown High School, and concluded with an inspiring keynote from motivational speaker Brandon McCall, who shared his journey of resilience following family trauma and incarceration.

Students then participated in small group discussions led by trained youth facilitators, developed in partnership with Dr. Piper Stratton of Dundee-Crown.

Key issues identified by youth included:

- Discrimination — especially among LGBTQIA+ students and those from diverse backgrounds — contributing to anxiety, depression, and isolation
- Cyberbullying and harmful social media trends, which students described as widespread, damaging, and often ignored
- Teacher bias and its impact on student well-being, with students calling for culturally responsive teaching and equitable school discipline
- Lack of structure, physical activity, and emotional regulation skills, which many youth said exacerbate mental health challenges

The report outlines targeted strategies for all stakeholders:

- Schools & Leadership: Implement restorative justice, expand school-based mental health staffing, integrate social-emotional learning, and form Student Advisory Committees
- Parents & Caregivers: Model empathetic listening, establish online safety practices, and engage in community support networks
- Students: Strengthen healthy habits (sleep, nutrition, hygiene, exercise), advocate for peer support groups, limit social media influence, and participate in school resource referrals

“Students face unique challenges growing up today, and we can learn a lot by taking the time to listen to their important perspectives,” said Michael Isaacson, executive director of the Kane County Health Department. “We have the ability to create a better environment for our young people and can act on what they’ve told us to build a future where mental health is prioritized and support is accessible to all.”

The 2025 forum was held as part of the Kane County System of Care, funded by the Illinois Children’s Healthcare Foundation, and reflects Kane County’s long-term commitment to youth-led, equity-driven mental health solutions.

For a full copy of the 2025 Youth Voices Forum on Mental Health Report in English and Spanish, visit [kanehealth.com/Pages/YVF.aspx](https://kanehealth.com/Pages/YVF.aspx).

# **- Chicago Tribune/ The Courier News - Elgin News Digest: Lords Park Zoo in Elgin opens May 31 for the 2025 season; pop-up book sale at Elgin library to be held May 30-June 1**

**By: Mike Danahey**

**Date: May 23, 2025**



Lords Park Farm Zoo in Elgin opens for the season on March 31. A series of special programs offered by the Elgin Public Museum and the Friends of the Lords Park Zoo will be held Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

## **Elgin Police Department offering Kids United summer program**

Registrations are being accepted for the Elgin Police Department's Kids United summer program.

Kids United activities include arts and crafts, culinary arts and sports, according to a social media post. Friday field trips are scheduled, and food will be provided.

The program runs weekdays from Monday, June 9, to Monday, Aug. 4, and is free for students who live in Elgin Township or attend District U-46 schools.

Sessions for students entering 4th through 6th grades will run from 3 to 5:30 p.m. Students starting 7th-graders through age 17 will attend sessions scheduled for 6:30 to 9 p.m. The program is held at Abbott Middle School, 949 Van St., Elgin

The deadline to register at [kidsunited.jumbula.com](https://kidsunited.jumbula.com) is June 5

For more information, email [KidsUnited@cityofelgin.org](mailto:KidsUnited@cityofelgin.org).

***To read the full article, please click [here](#).***

# **- Daily Herald -**

## **Elgin to honor its fallen with Memorial Day ceremonies across the city**

**By: Elgin Patriotic Memorial Association**

**Date: May 22, 2025**



The Elgin Patriotic Memorial Association, in cooperation with the city of Elgin, invites the community to the Memorial Day ceremonies to be held on Monday, May 26.

The first ceremony begins at 8:30 a.m. at Mount Hope Cemetery, 1001 Villa St., featuring a combined color guard, rifle salute, and the playing of taps.

A service to honor those buried at Lakewood Memorial Park will be held at 9 a.m. at the cemetery's Garden of Honor, 30W730 Route 20. It will include a combined color guard, rifle salute and the playing of taps.

The Elgin Navy Club and the Elgin Marine Corps League will conduct a program honoring veterans interred at sea at 9:40 a.m. at Elgin Veterans Memorial Park, 274 N. Grove Ave. It also will feature the Elgin Master Chorale. Following a presentation by Elgin Navy Club members, the ceremony will conclude with the strewing of flowers into the Fox River, rifle salute, and the playing of taps.

The ceremonies will conclude at 11 a.m. at Bluff City Cemetery, 945 Bluff City Blvd., Elgin. The program will pay tribute to the 75th anniversary of the start of the Korean War and all those who gave their lives, including Army Cpl. Eriverto Ortiz, a soldier classified as MIA for more than 50 years before being identified through DNA analysis. He was repatriated from Hawaii and interred in the Bluff City Veteran's Section in the fall of 2024.



As attendees walk or ride up to the ceremony site, they will witness more than 600 flags honoring local veterans lining the streets as part of the award-winning “Avenue of Flags.”

Local students will continue the long-held tradition of reading Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address” and “General John Logan’s Orders,” which established Memorial Day. The most solemn moment of the morning will be the laying of organizational wreaths at the Grand Army of the Republic memorial — an observance akin to the laying of wreaths at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Washington, D.C.

This program also will feature the Larkin High School Band and the Elgin Master Chorale.

Activities will conclude with a roll call of deceased local veterans, a rifle salute, and the playing of taps.

Additional notes for the Bluff City Cemetery event:

Shuttle service: A free shuttle bus will pick up riders at the main gate and east gate before and after the service for transportation to and from the ceremony area.

Seating: Because of limited seating, attendees are encouraged to bring a lawn chair.

Hydration: Please bring a water bottle to stay hydrated.

Live broadcast: This 11 a.m. program also will be broadcast live on WRMN Radio 1410 AM.

Donations: Voluntary cash donations will be collected at the ceremony to fund the setting and installation of Korean War veteran Corporal Envierto Ortiz’s government-provided veteran headstone at Bluff City Cemetery. Any donations collected above and beyond those expenses will remain with the nonprofit Elgin Patriotic Memorial Association, the community organization responsible for the city’s Memorial Day observance.

Adopt-a-Cemetery: Visitors to Bluff City will also see more than 2,800 smaller flags flying over veterans’ graves placed by local volunteers as part of the “Adopt a Cemetery” program.

For more information on these events, visit [elginmemorialday.org](http://elginmemorialday.org).

**- Chicago Tribune/ The Courier News -  
Elgin News Digest: School District U-46 honors top  
graduates in class of 2025; Elgin police launch new  
initiative to help autistic drivers**

**By: Mike Danahey**

**Date: May 19, 2025**



These are eight of the 13 students from Larkin High School in Elgin recognized for being the top academically in their school by District U-46 and its school board.

### **School District U-46 honors top graduates in class of 2025**

The District U-46 School Board honored the academic accomplishments of the top 47 graduating seniors from the district's five high schools in a program held May 12 at South Elgin High School.

Those recognized were:

**Bartlett High School:** Kaitlyn Jenison, Krish Patel, Jingyuan Wen, Whalan Eid, Ryan Chien, Benjamin Emro, Audrey Martin, Zara Yasooob and Jack Conner.

**Elgin High School:** Sebastian Siwec, Jason Allen, Rishi Shah, Joshua Nato, Aaditya Sanghavi, Eric Nazario, Evangeline Comings, Brody Grosenbach, Liza Aygul and Jai Patel.

**Larkin High School:** Lucy Akemann, Lara Amaro, Erany Fahmy, Addison Kuttner, Jenna Mack, Lydia Soto, Caitlin Sweeney and Samantha Winer.

**South Elgin High School:** Carter Beucler, Anthony Cavallo, Anna Christopherson, Donald Doan, Ava Franch, Emmett Hanson, Mackenzie Klinger, Ethan Messer, Nishar Parekh, Ayush Patel, Dia Patel, Kamila Sangabriel and Kalia Verdino.

**Streamwood High School:** Sophia Lortie, Danielle Althea Sotto, Sophie Saflarski, Salman Amir, Ream Basraoui, Leonor Nevarez and Claire Dresser.

*To read the full article, please click [here](#).*

# **- Daily Herald -**

## **Elgin teacher named Marklund's 2024 Volunteer of the Year**

**By: Dawn Lassiter-Brueske, Marklund**

**Date: May 19, 2025**



Elgin resident Alison Smith, with her therapy dog, Dolen, were recently named Marklund's 2024 Volunteer of the Year. In speaking about her volunteering with Marklund residents she said, "Once they touch your heart, there's no going back."

When Elgin resident Alison Smith was a teenager at Larkin High School, she took a class to learn more about students with special needs. One student in particular, who was a resident of the Little Angels Center for Exceptional Care facility in Elgin — now known as the Marklund Wasmond Center. Alison got to know Matt really well and it turned into a special friendship.

Fast forward more than a decade, and Alison, now an elementary special education teacher herself, was named Marklund's 2024 Volunteer of the Year. In fact, her old chum Matt helped present the award using a specialized communication device at Marklund's recent volunteer Appreciation Brunch.

"When considering this honor, we look for individuals who do more than just volunteer at Marklund," said Melanie Toth, Marklund's volunteer engagement specialist. "Previous winners of this volunteer of the year award actively recruit others to join in the 'Marklund Magic.' This year's winner does that and more. She always answers the call to our needs at Marklund not just at our Elgin location but also at Bloomingdale and Geneva.

"She not only provides twice monthly pet therapy with her beautiful dog, Dolan, she volunteers for activities, holiday decorating, baseball games, and has made volunteering a family

gathering, incorporating her church and even fourth- and fifth-graders from her school's Service Club, which she co-leads," Toth said. "This spring, she invited Marklund residents from Geneva and Elgin to participate in an 'Egg-tra-ordinary Easter Egg Hunt' organized by herself and her church for individuals with disabilities. I could go on and on about this selfless volunteer and what she means to Marklund."

"I am so honored to accept this today, especially with Matt being here," Alison said. "He was the one who first introduced me to Marklund, and the 'Marklund Magic' we all experience when we're there."

In accepting her award, Alison noticed that her dog Dolan received a special "Volunteer of the Year" bandanna. "I truly appreciate all the staff does and being able to share the love and joy I have for him with my friends at Marklund."

Marklund is a nonprofit organization with locations in Elgin, Geneva and Bloomingdale that serves children and adults with severe and profound disabilities. To learn more about volunteering, visit [www.marklund.org/volunteer](http://www.marklund.org/volunteer).

#### 2024 Special Honors

- Event Volunteers — Ana Armbruster and Abbie Winfrey
- Resident's Choice — Barb Harper
- Volunteer Group of the Year — Glenbard West High School boys wrestling team

#### Top Volunteer Hours Served:

- Ami Dalwadi — 96 hours at Marklund Wasmond Center, Elgin
- Tom Hahn — 130 hours at Marklund Philip Center, Bloomingdale
- Reese Peck — 155 hours at Marklund Hyde Center, Geneva

#### Most Hours Served by a Volunteer in 2024

- Evan Clark — 577 hours at Marklund Hyde Center's Community Day Services Program, Geneva

## **- Chicago Tribune/ The Courier News - District U-46 construction may push back start of 2026-27 school year**

**By: Mike Danahey**

**Date: May 22, 2025**



In this photo from Aug. 15, 2023, Leah Wagner, 7, poses for a photo with Amanda Zyrek, her second-grade teacher at Huff Elementary School in Elgin, on the first day of the 2023-24 school year. District U-46 may push the first day of classes back by about two weeks next year because of school construction, officials said.

District U-46 could be starting the 2026-27 school year more than two weeks later than normal due to the school construction being planned for that summer.

The district school board was briefed this week on the proposed schedule change, which would have classes beginning closer to the start of September than they have for the last decade or more.

“That is because of the planned construction district-wide,” Mark Moore, assistant superintendent of human resources Mark Moore, told the board Monday night. “Our informal thinking is we would get back to our typical calendar over two or three years.”

However, with construction and other variables to consider, it is impossible to say for certain what the calendar would look like beyond 2026-27, Moore said.

The district has undertaken an ambitious building project schedule over the next few years in which new schools will be built, some schools will be expanded and others will undergo renovations and improvements.

Plans call for work to be done at Kimball and Kenyon Woods middle schools and Century Oaks and Glenbrook elementary schools as the district moves sixth-grade classes into middle schools and adds early learning centers at elementary schools, among other changes.

If the proposed calendar outlined by Moore is adopted, the 2026-27 school year would start Thursday, Aug. 27, 2026, and end Friday, June 4, 2027, if no snow days are used.

By contrast, the current school year began on Aug. 11, 2024, and will end May 20.

Moore said high school graduation will likely remain on the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, which is how it is currently scheduled for this year and next.



“We will be negotiating a new contract with NOW Arena for graduation dates,” Superintendent Suzanne Johnson told the board. “So, as an aside, that’s something the Board of Education can expect to see come forward (in the future).”

U-46 has been holding its high school graduation ceremonies at the Hoffman Estates venue for about 20 years.

As for the shift in the calendars, Johnson said, “When we take a deep breath, everyone realizes that the calendar is being readjusted to be responsive to the construction that is occurring across the system to update learning spaces for our students. ”

While appreciating the “why” behind the proposed change, board member Dawn Martin said she was concerned about its impact, particularly on how high school schedules for testing and advanced placement courses align with other districts.

“If my kids were little, I would have no issue. Having bigger kids, it scares the heck of me,” Martin said.

The school board is tentatively expected to vote on the 2026-27 calendar at its June 2 meeting.

## **- Kane County Connects - Elgin Planetarium to Host May 21 Events on Historic Watch Company**

**By: Paul Johnson**

**Date: May 19, 2025**

Free public presentations on the Elgin National Watch Co. and the observatory will be held at 4:30 and 6:30 p.m. on May 21 at the [U-46 Planetarium](#). Tours begin at 4 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. Seating is first-come, and donations are welcome. (photo from google maps)

## **- Daily Herald - Boys tennis: Streamwood’s Veltkamp wins St. Charles North sectional; North Stars claim third straight team title**

**By: Dave Hess**

**Date: May 24, 2025**



It's scary how good of a high school tennis player Streamwood sophomore Mathieu Veltkamp could be in the future.

Veltkamp (28-1), a Class 2A state qualifier a year ago as a freshman, cruised to the St. Charles North Sectional singles title Saturday.

The talented sophomore defeated Alex Sternowski of St. Charles East in the championship match, 6-0, 6-0.

Veltkamp advanced to the title match with a 6-2, 6-0 semifinal victory over St. Charles East's Teige Donehoo.

"I just wanted to stay calm," said Veltkamp. "Last year's experience helped me. My serve and forehand and everything was solid.

"I lost in the first round last year (at state) and want to at least win one match last year."

Host St. Charles North won its third straight sectional team title with 18 points. Batavia was a point behind with 17 points. St. Charles East was third with 15 points followed by Geneva (14), Bartlett (12), Streamwood (10) and Elgin (10).

The North Stars were led by the doubles team of seniors Cole Weddle-Ben Goddard who won 5-0, retired over Geneva's Tyler and Aaron Masoncup in the final.

Aaron Masoncup, who was injured in a semifinal win over Batavia's Eric Otten and Caleb Sharda (7-6, 6-1), was unable to continue in the championship match.

"It was unfortunate but we had to stay focused and not get comfortable," said Weddle.

"It was trending toward us winning," said Goddard. "We peaked at the right time. It was an unfortunate situation. It was great to win the conference last week and sectionals this week that give us momentum going into the state finals next week."

Sean Masoncup, the father of Aaron and Tyler, praised his doubles team of Weddle and Goddard, and his team's sectional title streak.

"They are legit," said Sean Masoncup. "They have a different style and they are great athletes and they force their opponents to make shots. To win the conference and sectionals is quite an accomplishment. They are great communicators. I am hoping they are a force next week. To win the sectional again is great. There are great coaches in this sectional. St. Charles East (Rob Livermore), Geneva (Ryan Barabasz) and Batavia (Brad Nelson) have great coaches."

Barabasz is hoping Aaron Masoncup will be healthy enough to compete with his brother Tyler in the doubles state finals next week.

Batavia, a close second, was led by the doubles teams of Eric Otten-Caleb Sharda who defeated teammates Jack Nelson-Matt Vrba 6-0, 6-2 for third place.

"We played very well," said Nelson. "Our No. 1 doubles team played very well and are peaking. We had some big quality wins."

The third place Saints were paced by Sternowski who was second in singles play and Donehoo who was third.

Bartlett was led by Oskar Tredota who was fourth in singles.

## **- Daily Herald -**

### **Baseball notes: Kating, South Elgin's only coach, headed into home stretch**

**By: Craig Brueske**

**Date: May 20, 2025**



South Elgin's baseball program has had one varsity coach since the school's first season — without seniors — in 2007.

Jim Kating, who has guided the Storm to seven 20-win seasons, 6 regional titles and a pair of sectional championships, highlighted by the team's third-place Class 4A state finish in 2014 — the school's first state trophy, announced his plans to retire following the 2025 campaign.

Kating, who earned his 300th career victory in 2023, has watched this year's squad bounce back from a slow start.

Once 2-8, the Storm improved to 19-9 overall following Monday's 1-0 victory over Bartlett.

Junior pitcher Zacharia Barkho tossed a 2-hit complete game with a pair of walks and 7 strikeouts, outdueling the Hawks' Josh Colaizzi (7 IP, 5 H, 12 Ks), while Justin Pold drove in the game's lone run with an RBI single in the fifth, as South Elgin extended its winning streak to 9.

South Elgin (14-1) owns a 1-game lead over West Aurora (13-2) in the Upstate Eight Conference with 3 games remaining.

"It's a lot of fun," senior Ryan Mirante said of playing for Kating. "Some crazy, different emotions come out in any moment of time, so you never know what you're going to get but he's a great guy. I love playing for him.

"He is always telling us you could be learning something. It's good to have a coach that is always teaching you something when you're out there."

Kating enjoys the teaching aspect.

"Isn't that what a coach is called?," he asked. "I take pleasure in that — in trying to teach, and the kids are very receptive to learn.

"You always see new things in this game, so learn from it, add it to your repertoire, build upon that, and see what happens."

Kating, a multisport high school standout (football, baseball) in the 1980s at Fremd, earned NJCAA All-American honors as a sophomore at Triton Junior College (.400, 25 home runs) before being a first-round pick by the Los Angeles Dodgers in the MLB Draft-January Secondary Phase in 1986.

Kating, who hit .263 with 13 home runs and 63 RBI as a 21-year old playing at Class A Bakersfield (Dodgers), spent 5 years in the minors, including the last two in 1989-1990 at Double-AA Huntsville (Oakland Athletics) before turning his attention to coaching.

Thirty-five years later, Kating heads into the home stretch of his coaching career.

“I’m sad because this is a good group of kids to be with,” he said. “Throughout the years, I have had real good kids and great experiences.

“The mind is still there but the body is telling me it’s time for me to give it up and give it to somebody else and see what happens.”

His shoes will be tough to fill.

“It was a unique situation — starting the program from the ground up,” said Kating. “I’ve had some good coaches along the way who have helped me out. That will be the part I’ll miss most — the interaction with the kids and the coaches.”

Ben Erickson has served as Kating’s assistant at South Elgin since 2007.

“The most important thing I have learned from Jim is that no matter what is happening during a season, winning more games than losing or vice versa, at the end of the day we are still teachers,” said Erickson. “We have been fortunate to have won more than we have lost and even while winning, he’s still teaching the game.”

Throughout the years, Erickson’s fondest memories involve around Kating’s humility.

“As strange as it sounds, the thing that sticks out to me most are the things that Jim never talks about — his professional playing career,” Erickson said. “The only time he ever talks about those days is when you ask him and even then, he downplays everything. He’s a very, very humble person.”

South Elgin’s entire varsity baseball staff, which includes Bob Slania, Dan Koss, Zach Wendt, and Erickson, is also retiring.

“Everyone was here to coach with him (Kating),” said Erickson.

Scouting DuPage County and Fox Valley postseason

While Class 2A and 1A schools, including Westmont, IC Catholic Prep, Lisle, Aurora Central Catholic, Harvest Christian, Aurora Christian, St. Edward, and Westminster Christian, look to advance to Saturday’s regional championship games, the 3A and 4A teams are preparing for next week’s regional openers.

All share one common goal — bringing home a state championship.



Willowbrook, McHenry and Lockport will host 4A sectional tournaments, while 3A sectionals featuring area teams are at Kaneland and Grayslake Central.

At Willowbrook, the field includes the top-ranked Warriors (22-8), No. 2 York (20-9), No. 3 Geneva (23-10), No. 4 South Elgin (19-9), and No. 5 St. Charles North (18-12).

Glenbard East, Lake Park, Bartlett, Wheaton Warrenville South, St. Charles East, Wheaton North, Batavia, Glenbard West, Glenbard North, Addison Trail, and West Chicago are also participating.

“We’re happy with the 3 seed,” said Geneva coach Brad Wendell. “It’s a reflection of a strong regular season. That said, we know the postseason is a reset — everyone’s 0-0 now. We open against a solid Glenbard West team — I think they’re a tough first-round draw.

“But when you think about it, everyone is. Everyone has a good arm that you must beat to keep playing. There isn’t a team in this sectional you can overlook. It’s wide open in the best way possible.”

What will it take to win?

“Quality pitching, clean defense, and timely hitting,” said Wendell. “Those are the three things that win baseball games.”

The Lockport sectional field includes top-seeded Downers Grove North (24-7), No. 3 West Aurora (25-5), and Naperville Central (18-11).

DuPage Valley Conference co-champions Waubonsie Valley and Naperville North are seeded 10th and 12th, respectively, while Downers Grove South, Hinsdale Central, Neuqua Valley, and Metea Valley are also at Lockport.

First-round matchups include Naperville Central vs. Waubonsie Valley, and West Aurora vs. Neuqua Valley.

“We might see them in the conference tournament and again next week, too,” said Waubonsie coach Bryan Acevedo. “We want to be playing our best baseball at the end of the year.”

Fox Valley Conference champion McHenry heads its own sectional field that includes Hampshire (26-7), Huntley, Jacobs, Dundee-Crown, Streamwood, Elgin, and Larkin.

Chicago Catholic League White champion St. Francis (23-6) and Burlington Central (16-15) highlight the 3A sectional field at Kaneland, which includes Marmion, Montini, Benet, Glenbard South, Wheaton Academy and the host Knights.

No. 3 Crystal Lake South (18-11) and No. 4 Cary-Grove (18-11) are in the 3A field at Grayslake Central.

Sectional championships will be held Saturday, June 7, with supersectionals on Monday, June 9.

State championship weekend is June 13-14 at Slammers Stadium in Joliet.

## **- Chicago Tribune - True, South Elgin's Zacharia Barkho outduels Bartlett's Josh Colaizzi. But they're still friends. 'We go way back.'**

**By: Paul Johnson**

**Date: May 19, 2025**



South Elgin's Zacharia Barkho (7) throws a pitch against Bartlett in the first inning of an Upstate Eight Conference game in Bartlett on Monday, May 19, 2025.

Even though Zacharia Barkho has emerged as South Elgin's ace in the second half of the season, there are still benchmarks for the developing pitcher to reach.

One of them is finding a way to get the win for the Storm without his best stuff. That was the junior right-hander's test Monday at rival Bartlett.

"Was this his best outing?" South Elgin coach Jim Kating said. "No, but he gutted it out. I was very proud of him."

Count it as another test passed for Barkho. He outdueled Bartlett's Josh Colaizzi as both threw complete games in a 1-0 Upstate Eight Conference victory that went to the visiting Storm.

It was the ninth straight win for South Elgin (19-9, 14-1), while Bartlett (16-14-1, 12-5) had its eight-game win streak was snapped.

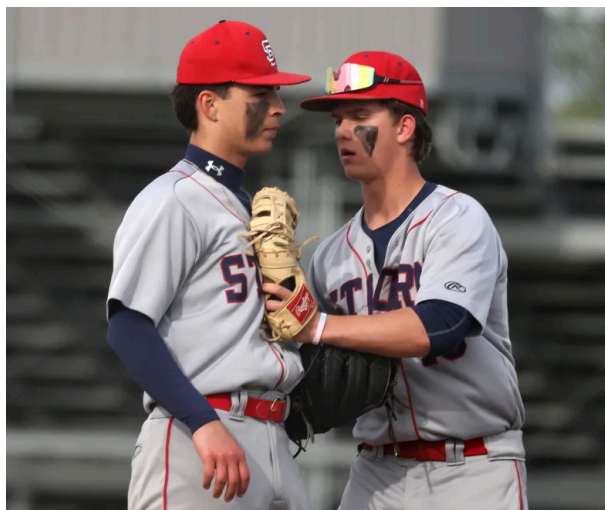
Barkho struck out seven while allowing two hits and a walk. He singled in the fifth and courtesy runner Aiden Bernau scored game's lone run on an error. Nathan Kmiec had the other hit.

Colaizzi was just as dominant for Bartlett. He struck out 12 and allowed an unearned run on two hits and a walk. Alex Bihun doubled and Brandon Pelz singled for the Hawks' only two hits.

Battling through a game without his best stuff, Barkho said he had to rely on his mental toughness to get through the outing.

"I think if I can just stay mature in my head and think strategically instead of getting angry at everything that's going on, I can find a couple of pitches that will work for me and I can continue to put the ball where I need it to be," Barkho said. "If my fastball is off, I can go with the two-seam. Curveball off, I can change it to a slider.

"I have to find my groove for the day, find my arm slot."



South Elgin's Zacharia Barkho, left, and Jacob Robertson (13) react to a strikeout against Bartlett in the fifth inning of an Upstate Eight Conference game in Bartlett on Monday, May 19, 2025.

If Barkho didn't have his best stuff, he could have fooled Bartlett coach Alex Coan, who came away impressed.

“He mixed it up well,” Coan said of Barkho. “He has a nice fastball-slider mid. He picks his spots really well. He really targets the zone. When he’s doing that and he’s on, he’s tough to beat.”

Coan had plenty of praise for his ace after Colaizzi’s performance as well.

“He’s been everything we’ve asked for and then some,” Coan said. “He’s a dog. That’s what it is.”

Barkho and Colaizzi have been friends since they were kids, so it gave the duel extra meaning.

“We go way back,” Barkho said. “It was fun. We both got to share an experience with each other that I’ll never forget.”



South Elgin’s Lucas Seifrid (10) slides safely into second base against Bartlett’s Brandon Pelz (3) in the sixth inning of an Upstate Eight Conference game in Bartlett on Monday, May 19, 2025.

In addition to bringing the Storm one win closer to an Upstate Eight title, the game also held special meaning to Kating.

The only head coach South Elgin has known since the school started playing varsity sports in the 2006-07 season is retiring at season’s end. He was honored with a plaque before the game.

Kating began his career coaching at Bartlett in 1997.

“I was not expecting that at all,” Kating said. This is the first place I coached when I came to U-46, so that was nice.

“(My brain) is firing on all cylinders. (My body) is telling me I’m done. I still have the burn, though.”



South Elgin's Zacharia Barkho (7) walks away after pitching a shutout against Bartlett during an Upstate Eight Conference game in Bartlett on Monday, May 19, 2025.

Kating's impending retirement is something Barkho and his teammates have discussed. They want to rack up as many wins and accolades as they can before it's all over.

"That's the goal — the conference title, get it for him," Barkho said. "He's put so much into this program. All we can do is try to get him wins. I think we're just bonding as a team a lot more.

"I feel like the closer we keep getting, the better we're playing."