

RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY

BY WILL B.

On Wednesday, January 28th, Synapse House commemorated its 3-year anniversary in our current building and was inducted into the Downers Grove Chamber of Commerce with an official ribbon cutting ceremony.

We hosted an open house for anyone interested in meeting some of the members as well as seeing some of the work and activities that we participate in during a traditional scheduled workday.

It was a major goal of Deborah, the Executive Director of Synapse House, to have Synapse House join The Downers Grove Chamber of Commerce so that it could get increased exposure and engagement within the immediate community. The open house was helpful for engaging everyone that wanted to be introduced to our staff here to see how we coordinate a normal workday.

All the members present that day were lucky enough to share a meal at lunch and have conversations with our guests during lunchtime. Everyone we met and spoke with was very friendly and interested in what Synapse House offers to brain injury survivors, like us. Especially how it is therapeutic and the other benefits involved, such as socialization with others like us, community engagement and employment services.

All of these are benefits for us attending Synapse House each week, and we're all grateful for special events like this one that help increase publicity and recognition for special organizations.



Downers Grove
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Impact our future & be a part of our growth

We Engage, Empower and Employ individuals affected by brain injury

INTERESTED?

Visit: www.synapsehouse.org
Events & Volunteers



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Join our Board of Directors or a volunteer committee.

Governance Committee · Gala Committee · Golf Committee

Synapse House continues to grow. Expanded program and service offerings are now available to members.

Interested? Please contact Deborah@synapsehouse.org



Save the Date for our 2026 Golf Fundraiser Outing



If you can't join us in person, consider becoming a sponsor for our Golf Outing or making a donation directly through our website



Scan QR code to purchase tickets or donate



Looking Ahead...

Join us for our
Falling "Fore" Synapse
House fundraiser

When: September 25, 2026

Time: 7:00 PM-10:30 PM

Where: Top Golf Naperville
(3211 Odyssey Ct, Naperville, IL 60563)



GOLF OUTING SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The Preserve at Oak Meadows
Monday, June 15, 2026

PREMIER SPONSORS: \$10,000

Sponsors will receive 8 tickets to the golf outing, including lunch, plus 24 raffle tickets. Headline naming opportunity, premier company listing on all event promotional materials, press releases, announcements & newsletters. Direct link on website to company website.

MAJOR SPONSORS: \$5000

Sponsors will receive 4 tickets to the golf outing, including lunch, plus 8 raffle tickets. Premier recognition on promotional materials mailed to households and businesses as well as in press releases, announcements and newsletters. Direct link on website to company website.

COCKTAIL PARTY SPONSOR: \$2500

Sponsor will receive 2 tickets to the golf outing, plus 4 raffle tickets. Company Logo on beverage napkins available during the cocktail hour. Direct link on website to company website.

BEVERAGE CART SPONSORSHIP: \$1500

Sponsor will receive 1 ticket to the golf outing, including lunch, plus 2 raffle tickets. Company logo on water bottles distributed in swag bags to golfers.

SUPPORTING SPONSORS: \$1000

Supporting sponsors will receive 1 ticket to the golf outing, plus 2 raffle tickets.

GOLFER SPONSORSHIP: \$500

Sponsor a Clubhouse Member and a friend for the golf outing, so our event will be accessible to all, especially those most affected by brain injury and stroke.

HOLE SPONSORS: \$250

Hole Sponsors are offered the opportunity to man a table at the hole they sponsor where they can hand out swag, plus signage at the hole.

LUNCH SPONSORSHIP: \$150

Sponsor a Clubhouse Member and a friend for lunch, so all can attend.

**ALL SPONSORS WILL BE RECOGNIZED AT THE EVENT, ON OUR WEBSITE
AND ON SOCIAL MEDIA, AND IN PRINT & EMAIL NEWSLETTERS**

We thank you in advance for your support

Contact Vera Kramer for more information on Sponsorship at vera@synapsehouse.org

If you know someone in need of services or would like to share information about Synapse House with your healthcare provider, please contact

deborah@synapsehouse.org

The Cranium Chronicles is published by Synapse House

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www.synapsehouse.org

Our Support Team

Deborah Giesler, Ex. Director, MS, CCC/SLP

Vera Kramer, Development Director
James Farrell, Business Office

Clubhouse Work Unit Coordinators

Megan McClain MS, OTR/L
Erika Panatera MS, OTR/L
Angel Lucena-Johnson COTA
Megan Gassel

Employment Services

Ashley Gieschen
Achkei "HK" Wilson

Transportation

LaShelle Morrow
LaTonya Davis

Veteran's Program

Tony Chairez
Darla Kucera

2026 Board of Directors

Marilyn Dingsen, Board Chair
Nancy D'Andrea, Secretary
Treasurer—**Actively seeking**

Irene Abrons
William Booth
Joe Bretz
Melissa Johnson
Lynn Klassman
John Leone
Kelly Snow
Brian White



Pictured Below: In preparation for our first 2026 visit to volunteer at **Operation Support our Troops (OSOT)**, our Occupational Therapy Capstone student, Aynsley, had Members practice their organizational skills in the Clubhouse by putting together care packages for **ReVive Center for Housing and Healing**. This activity simulated the tasks necessary to perform at OSOT and yielded a product that we can deliver to other community members who are in need. Win, Win!



To learn more about ReVive and Operation Support our Troops please visit:

www.revivecenter.org www.osotamerica.org

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March 26, 2026

Downers Grove, IL

2:30 PM - 6:30 PM

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www.synapsehouse.org



MARCH IS BRAIN INJURY AWARENESS MONTH

BY WILL B.

It's that time of the year again! March is Brain Injury Awareness Month and is a very important month for Synapse House, as we're a nonprofit organization dedicated to working with, supporting and rehabilitating brain injury survivors. During this time, we do a big push for fundraising to support our program so that we can continue to grow and support more individuals that attend our program and rely on us for their continued recovery.

What characterizes brain injury? This can either be an acquired brain injury (ABI), which is primarily caused by a traumatic force, such as hitting one's head with extreme force on something else, or suffering a stroke, or sudden lack of oxygen to the brain for a sustained period. Most of our members have suffered and survived a form of ABI, and that's why we do our best to support, encourage and aid these individuals in bonding with each other, and return to a semblance of the lives they once knew.

So, how can you best support brain injury survivors in March this year? We think that it's most helpful to donate your time and money to organizations like ours, whether that's through volunteering or a generous donation. It also helps to spread brain injury awareness through discussion with others, whether that's about Synapse House, brain injuries in general, or about someone you know that may have suffered a brain injury. The work that we do with survivors at Synapse House includes exercise, following a traditional workday schedule and workload, employment and support for military veterans.

It's also important to point out that during March, we **wear green** to recognize and support brain injured individuals. The main symbol for this month is a green ribbon.

In honor of Brain Injury Awareness Month, we have highlighted some of our Members' stories to share awareness of the devastation that brain injury can cause and how Synapse House is a beacon of light and hope during the journey to recovery.



My name is Andy, and I had an automobile accident when I was 17 years old and recently a stroke. I am currently 56 years old. I have lost a lot of my memory, and the left side of my body is not working as well as my right side. I enjoy attending Synapse House because it gives me the opportunity to meet others with disabilities, build a routine, and stay engaged through daily chores and tasks. It helps me socialize with like-minded individuals, stay active with group exercises, and maintain both structure and wellness in my day.

If you know someone in need of services or would like to share information about Synapse House with your healthcare provider, please contact

deborah@synapsehouse.org



My name is Maddie and I had an AVM rupture when I was a senior in high school in 2018. I went to the hospital with a horrible headache and was discharged after receiving medication for a migraine. The headache persisted and I went back to the hospital six hours later. When I went back to the emergency room, they took me back immediately and ordered a CT scan. They found blood in my brain and about fifteen minutes later an entire neuro team came into my room. They rushed me into an angiogram but there was too much blood for them to see anything clearly. I was then admitted to the PICU so that I could be put on pain medications and be under observation while the blood started to absorb back into the brain. I was there for a week before I was put on a regular floor for another week and a half. After that the blood had absorbed enough into the brain for them to embolize the AVM with onyx. Six months later I went for a follow-up angiogram, and the AVM was back and bigger than the first time. We decided to go the route of radiation this time around. Within a year, the AVM was obliterated. Five years later I went for another angiogram, and the AVM was back for a third time. I decided to have a craniotomy this time to get rid of it for good and it finally worked. I am now AVM free and just coping with the side effects from it.

The brain damage was in the right frontal lobe and a small portion of the left as well. It blew out my center of emotions, leaving me with severe anxiety and depression. The damage has also affected my working memory and executive functioning. I have to wear glasses with prism lenses to help with the damage it did to my vision. My right leg gets weak and buckles at times. I was getting focal seizures, but they have been controlled for the last two years with medication.

Synapse house helps me by getting me up and out of the house multiple days a week. It gives me a schedule to follow. I also receive speech therapy here which helps me with my memory and executive functioning. I enjoy getting to know others who have been through similar experiences as me because they can better understand me. The atmosphere here is very inviting and all the staff is very kind.

My name is Duryea. My mother asked me about the Stroke which was noted on my information sheet. This question caught me very off guard because I had absolutely no memory of any Stroke symptoms or the general nature of that supposed event. Asking questions and providing answers are both significantly harder. The brain obviously knows what it wants to say, but thinking of the proper words to speak or write down is like attempting to put together a jigsaw puzzle with a few of the pieces missing. Synapse House provides activities which keep me entertained and socially engaged. One of the main problems with having even a Mild Brain Injury is that having even a small conversation is like an untrained person trying to run a Marathon. Even a 10K or 5K can feel like way more effort than the Individuals Body and Brain are prepared for.



Visit our website to learn more about our programs, volunteering and donating.

www.synapsehouse.org

GIVING TUESDAY

We were humbled by your generosity during our December 2025 Giving Tuesday campaign.

Not only did we meet our \$5,000 goal, we exceeded it!

Every gift makes a difference, and we are so grateful for your support. Thank you for helping us continue our mission! With the funds raised, we will put it toward our Employment Program to help Members who are actively seeking employment and support those on site at their jobs.

In 2025 we had Six members get hired into jobs. These Members, while engaging in productive, meaningful days, can feel proud of themselves for their accomplishments as well as their contribution to their companies and their communities.

Thank you to the companies that have hired our Members and know that everyone is valuable.



ACCESSIBLE DOOR OPENERS—HOORAY!!

By Kasia C.

In July 2025, Synapse House received a grant from Northwestern Medicine for automatic door openers. This was an extreme improvement for the Clubhouse as we've been asking for these to be installed for quite some time. At the end of January 2026, these doors were finally completed and operational. Synapse House now has four fully functioning and operational automatic door openers: one in the women's bathroom, one in the men's bathroom, one in the front interior, as well as one in the front exterior. The doors are especially helpful in the bathroom since those doors were always extremely heavy and hard to open. These automatic doors are a wonderful addition to the Clubhouse as they enhance a sense of independence as they eliminate the constant need for added assistance. They are not simply a convenience but a necessity.

The inclusion of automatic door openers shows a commitment to inclusivity. Synapse House believes that everyone deserves equal access, and the addition of these door openers proves that. Thank you to Northwestern Medicine for their continued support of our program efforts.



If you know someone in need of services or would like to share information about Synapse House with your healthcare provider, please contact

deborah@synapsehouse.org



Donations made in honor of our Members and Staff

A donation was made in honor of James H King Sr by the William & Colleen Burke Charitable Fund

A donation was made in memory of Kevin Bretz by Matthew Bretz, brother.
"Thank you to Synapse House for all the work that you do to support the club members!"

A donation was made in honor of Maddy Grillo by Cathy Grillo.
"We are so glad to have found your program! Thank you for all the hard work you do for your members!"

A donation was made by Barbara Booth in honor of the staff at Synapse House.
"Thank you for all you do!"

A donation was made by Dan Inlay.
"A worthy cause!"

A donation was made by Daniel & Donna Tomasetti.
"Thank you Synapse House for all you do!"

A donation was made by Dr. J. T. Olsen.
"What incredible work! Thank you Synapse!"

A donation was made in honor of Will Booth by Nancy Leiser

A donation was made by Jim & Kris Kelly.
"Great work!"

A donation was made by Joe & Barb Bretz in memory of Kevin Bretz.
"Thankful for a program of this caliber and the staff that makes it happen

A donation was made by Chris & Pattie Zinski.
"So proud of our amazing Members and staff. Keep up the good healing work! God bless!"

A donation was made by Ashley Gieschen in honor of all the employers that have hired individuals with brain injury and stroke!

A donation was made by Kay McClain in honor of Ruth Pusich.
"So proud of this organization! Love you friend!"



Visit our website to learn more about our programs, volunteering and donating.

www.synapsehouse.org

CLUBHOUSE PROGRAM UPDATE

Downers Grove Nonprofit Helps Brain Injury and Stroke Survivors Move Forward

BY JANET HOSEY

A stroke or brain injury can change a life in an instant.

Recovery is not an easy process, as a brain injury or stroke changes more than someone's physical condition, it can change relationships, affect the ability to work and maintain financial stability, to be independent, and to do things like drive and raise children.

"They lose friends and they gain new ones in a whole new type of community," said Deborah Giesler, MS, CCC/SLP, executive director of Synapse House. "Every aspect of life is impacted."

Synapse House is a Downers Grove-based nonprofit that provides continued services for people who have completed treatment programs at rehabilitation facilities and local hospitals.

Serving individuals from five counties, Synapse House fills the gap between treatment and real life, offering programs that help people rebuild skills, confidence and meaningful daily routines as they begin the next chapter of their lives.

The organization serves people from five counties and is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).

"When people arrive at our door, they have completed, for the most part, their medical journey and most of the rehabilitation journey," Giesler said. "It is at our facility that they begin to transform into what will become the next chapter of their lives. Who are they now? We like to say that we assist people in moving from being a patient to figuring out what this new life looks like and how they can live their best life given the circumstances."



The organization offers a Clubhouse Day Program, Supported Employment Services to return back to work, Community Support Services for veterans and our KNZ Neuro-Fitness Gym with adaptive exercise classes.

Synapse House is a member of the International Brain Injury Clubhouse Alliance (IBICA). The Clubhouse philosophy is that work is healing, Giesler said.

"We pair the goals of the clients with the actual work of the nonprofit. This is real life practice," she said. "Traditional therapy uses therapeutic interventions, primarily one on one with the client to address individual deficits. We hand them not a worksheet or an exercise to complete but an actual task to do and then they take what they have learned in the therapy room and put it to work."

There are several ways the public can help Synapse House accomplish its mission.

Volunteer. Assist clients with the day to day work or maybe lead a class, art, music, craft, help on community outings.

Help plan special events. Join a committee for the golf, bingo or fall fundraisers

Join the board of directors. Share your expertise and help us grow as a nonprofit and as a business.



Thank you to *Downers Grove Living Magazine* for highlighting Synapse House in an article for their January 2026 edition.

We are honored to be featured in local publications, sharing our mission and spreading the word about what our Clubhouse can offer to the community.

Our Members and staff are always ready to welcome new faces to our program.

Come and see how we can help you!

Employ someone looking for a job or allow them to shadow you on the job. We would love some help with practice interviews for those individuals that are going back to work, as well as help with applications or resumes.

Contribute to the wish list. We have a wish list of supplies that are always needed.

"We are motivated to continue to grow and be much more integrated into the community," Giesler said. "We have just started to put down roots, but we feel very positive about our future here."

* If you know someone in need of services or would like to share information about Synapse House with your healthcare provider, please contact:
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* deborah@synapsehouse.org
*

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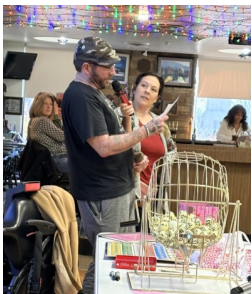
deborah@synapsehouse.org

BINGO FUNDRAISER RECAP



On Sunday, February 15th, Synapse House was excited to host its first ever bingo fundraiser. The event was a **great success**, and we're hoping to make it an annual tradition, based on positive feedback from attendees and overwhelming participation and donations.

We played eight rounds of bingo and the winner of each round was awarded a prize that was generously donated. We also offered raffle prizes to everyone, and the raffle tickets were included with every general admission ticket.



In between rounds, one of our Veterans, Tony, shared with the crowd his personal story. Together with his Life Skills Coach, Ashley, he drafted his story and read it aloud to over 120 engaged listeners in the bingo hall. Tony has been a Synapse House member for over 6 years and is appreciative of both his community integration (specifically art classes) and Clubhouse engagement that his Life Skills Coaches help him be a part of. Thank you Tony for sharing your story and inspiring so many people!

At our next bingo event, we hope to host more bingo players, accept more donations, and think of more creative ways to reward and involve everyone present.

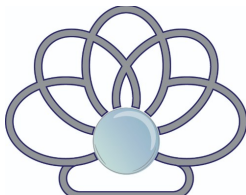
A very special thanks to our Sponsors for supporting Synapse House and our mission to Engage, Empower and Employ those affected by acquired brain injury

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Downers Grove
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**Joe
and
Barbara
Bretz**

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For a snapshot of our Clubhouse programming, Employment training and Members in the spotlight, please follow us on Social Media:

Facebook: Synapse House

Instagram: @synapsehouseclubhouse

YouTube: Synapse House



YouTube

For more information or to register for an event go to Synapsehouse.org