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## Basketball: Basketball players pass the basket for troops

BY TODD SHIELDS tshields@pioneerlocal.com June 5, 2012 5:46PM

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Six years ago, Mitch Salzstein was snowed-in at O'Hare, waiting out a four-hour blizzard. All flights were cancelled, but one man insisted he must get home.

"He was really irate and yelling at the gate attendant, throwing a hissy fit and pounding on the counter," Salzstein recalled.

"During this, I was watching a CNN-TV report on how U.S. soldiers in Iraq couldn't return home to families up to another 18 months. Here was this guy enraged over a four-hour delay, while our troops in defending our freedoms faced many more months. It was my 'ah-ha' moment."

A year later, Salzstein put his fledgling notion to work.

He founded The Charity Stripe, a fundraising program that encourages basketball players and students to shoot free throws in exchange for pledged donations to benefit soldiers and cancer victims.

Most of the funds raised have benefitted American soldiers and their families and cancer patients, Salzstein said.

"We want student-athletes to make a difference with their sports talent by helping people in need. To me, there is no greater gift than to instill strong values and educational life lessons in young athletes to help benefit those less fortunate," said Salzstein, a Northbrook resident for 18 years.

More than 100 suburban Chicago schools have participated in Charity Stripe; locally, Glenbrook South, Glenbrook North and Highland Park have joined the effort.

The nickname for the free-throw line serves a dual purpose, Saltzman said.

"It's a reminder to always step up to the line, focus on the goal and take a shot to make a difference (for) fellow Americans in need."

Dave Weber, varsity basketball coach for Glenbrook North, said he's all in favor of the program.

"I think it is worthwhile because it allows players to shoot free throws and know that they are helping other people at the same time. It is a great lesson in life for our players and some of them have really done a nice job promoting this program. Mitch Salzstein has done an outstanding job of running this program and working with the high schools."

Since 2009, the charity has raised more than \$250,000, thanks to participants and the Illinois High School Association, Illinois Basketball Coaches Association, Illinois Athletic Directors Association and Illinois Coaches Association, said Salzstein, who owns a marketing and advertising company.

Charity Stripe has paid for the final wish of a World War II veteran who landed on Omaha Beach on D-Day to visit the Navy Seal Museum in Fort Pierce, Fla., where he was presented a key to the city.

The charity also has bought rehabilitation equipment and gym memberships for disabled veterans and picked up travel expenses for troops to see their newborn babies for the first time and reunite with families.

Other projects have provided job training, gift cards for holiday shopping and mortgage and utility assistance for people facing eviction or discontinuation of services.

“The Charity Stripe is the realization of a lifelong dream that combines my passion for helping people in need and my love of sports,” he said. “When students apply for colleges these days, admission staffers often look beyond GPA and ACT scores to their ‘sport service projects’ in the community.”

The Charity Stripe’s latest event was scheduled for Wednesday at the Barrington Park District to honor fallen military soldiers. Several World War II veterans and families who have lost loved ones in the war on terror were to attend.

Barrington resident Joe Cantafio, executive director of National Veterans Museum planned for Hoffman Estates, hoped to raise \$15,000 by shooting free throws.

#### TAG CLOUD

BASKETBALL CHARITY FREE MITCH PLAYERS PROGRAM SALZSTEIN SOLDIERS STRIPE THROWS

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