Charity basketball tourney run by and for kids

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OAKVILLE — The street was lined with cars. Someone splashed in the pool. Every now and then a basketball sailed into the street. Noise echoed a block away.

Something was definitely up at the Noblitt home.

Behind a high wooden fence, more than a hundred high schoolers lounged around. Just about everyone held one of those ubiquitous red cups. A teen stood on the deck taking cash from folks as they arrived.

But this was no wild summer keg party. It was actually a charity event. A two-on-two basketball tournament. For children in Africa.

Come again?

Let's back up. Wednesday's Second Annual Noblitt Classic was the brainchild of 17-year-old Matt Noblitt and his older sister, Katie. It began when Katie Noblitt, 22, who just finished her senior year at the University of Missouri-Columbia, watched the documentary "Invisible Children," about child soldiers in Uganda's decades-old conflict.

Last year, Katie Noblitt brought a copy home. The movie was screened for Oak Bridge Community Church, where her dad is the pastor. Matt got caught up in his sister's passion. He and some buddies decided a charity basketball tournament sounded fun.

"I figured we'd just try it and see what happened," said Matt, who will be a senior at Oakville High in the fall. "We play basketball all the time. Why not do it for a good cause?"

They spread the word at church, at school and on Facebook, the Internet social network. Two-on-two, 20 bucks a team, bring your A-game.

Last year's event drew about 40 teams. This year, 64 signed up.

The proceeds go to the charity Invisible Children, which grew from the documentary's success. Katie and Matt Noblitt expected this year's haul to be close to $1,500.

"It's cool to see all these people wanting to play and raise money at the same time," said Peter Eggers, 18, who just graduated from Lutheran High School South.

Added Jordon Winheim, 17: "It's summer. I might just be waking up now. Instead, I'm actually doing something."

The teenagers huddled around a short basketball court, pavement sunk in the yard where grass once was. The hoops were lowered to 8 1/2 feet, so plenty of kids could dunk. Balls flew as shots were blocked.

Some of the teens will play college ball. Some had never played before.

"Most of the kids may not know about Invisible Children or Uganda, maybe they..."
don't even care," Katie Noblitt said. "But that doesn't matter to me. They're still helping."

Standing at the grill, Tom Noblitt beamed with pride at what his children had pulled off. To him, the tournament stands as an example of what a socially and politically motivated generation can do, especially with technology such as Facebook.

"They may not be saving the world, but they can save a few people," Tom Noblitt said. "That's pretty cool."