Circle celebrates commitment of grandparents

* Nearly 60 volunteered in Worthington schools to work with students on a character education.

By PAMELA WILLIS
Published: Sunday, June 6, 2010

A number of Worthington grandparents have been reading, sharing and listening to children in 76 classrooms this past school year as they promote the Partners for Citizenship and Character's words of the month.

A circle of six grandparents has grown to nearly 60 in nine years. The Circle of Grandparents celebrated the end of the year banquet on Thursday, May 29, at the Griswold Center.

Coordinator Debra Stephen said songwriter and educator Eric Gnezda sang an original song, *True Heroes*, at the banquet. Gnezda's mother, Mary Winter, is one of the grandparent volunteers.

"I've never know a better group of people than these grandparents," Stephen said.

"Some children don't have grandparents, so they can get the grandparent experience in the classroom."
Two Worthington sixth-grade students were honored at the banquet as "Persons of exCeptional Character" -- Jamie Eubanks, Evening Street and Joshua Stoner, from Brookside Elementary.

Nominated by their principals, the students "exemplify the character traits we teach," Stephen said.

Mary Rykowski, Evening Street principal, said "Jamie volunteers in primary classrooms."

"She takes her job very seriously," Rykowski said. "Often she will see one of the younger students in line and go over to give them a compliment or a kind word to help them get through the day.

"In November, she was instrumental in gathering a group of volunteers to put packets of toiletries together for the troops in Afghanistan ... She was a member of the Penny Harvest Committee and helped decide that the funds would be given to the United Methodist Children's Home and Pets Without Parents."

Brookside Principal Fritz Monroe nominated Joshua, who is Brookside's student body vice president.

"Joshua is an outstanding kid with the most polite and well-mannered behavior. He led the school in our Pennies for Haiti drive, which raised over $1,100," said teacher Libbi Jackson said.

"He also helped pack and deliver canned food to the food pantry for our food drive ... You will always see Joshua smiling and saying hello to others ... The younger students look up to Josh."

Stephen said grandparents can volunteer for as little as 30 minutes per month.

"During our orientation, we give grandparents a handbook that describes the character traits and gives classroom suggestions," she said.

"I find out whether they want to follow an actual grandchild in classrooms, or what grade level they'd like to work with."

Kathy Shaffer, one of the original six grandparents, said "It seemed like a wonderful idea, because I love being around kids."

A former teacher for Hilliard City Schools and a former home instructor for Columbus Public Schools, Shaffer raised four children of her own.

She visits a fourth-grade classroom once a month.
"I love fourth-graders," she said. "They are very curious and they give you back a lot with their ideas and their experiences."

Shaffer brings a plate of cookies with her, which the teacher is free to pass out at the end of the session.

"I tell them I love to bake cookies but I can't eat many, so I ask them if they can help me out by eating some cookies," she said.

If Shaffer can't find a good picture book to read that promotes the character word of the month, she writes her own story.

"I tell them they have to make the pictures in their head as I read, which is what I had to do when my father used to read me stories," she said.

"We talk about words like trustworthiness. I ask them 'how do you know who you can tell a secret to?' We talk about how trustworthiness is necessary for your whole life."

She also talks to students about their responsibility to vote when they are old enough and about recycling.

"We never talk about religion or politics, but morality is a big part of the program," she said.

"We also talk about smoking and drugs. I tell them about two of my friends, who couldn't stop smoking and carried oxygen tanks around until the day they died. My friend had one third of one lung left, and the kids understand that. I tell them if they never start smoking, they won't have to try to stop."

Shaffer said she'd encourage seniors to volunteer for the program.

"If they're not sure about it, they can come to observe one of the grandparents in a classroom," she said.

"You get back so much more from the kids than you give."

Seniors interested in the program, can visit the website circleofgrandparents, email Stephen at drstephen@columbus.rr.com, or call 614-436-4799.

LINK:
http://www.columbuslocalnews.com/articles/2010/06/06/multiple_papers/news/allwogrand__20100602_1048am_3.txt