

October 21, 2005

Section: Local

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Celebrations highlight need for after-school programs

Groups offer safe homework sites, activities, meals

EDWARD L. KENNEY

NJ

By EDWARD L. KENNEY The News Journal

Like many parents, Tina and Gerald Holmes both work. He runs a car-detailing business, and she works at MBNA. That makes them big fans of the **4-H Afterschool** Program at East Side Charter School in Wilmington.

"My children look forward to coming; I have to chase them out of here," Tina Holmes said of their 8-year-old twins, Giana and Gerald. "They make so many friends in the after-school program, and it's just a safe environment."

"It's a lot of help with the kids. We don't have to worry about them, about where they are," Gerald Holmes said.

The Holmes were among dozens of students, parents, teachers and others who celebrated after-school programs during a "Lights on **Afterschool!**" rally in the school's auditorium. It was one of thousands of such events nationwide held Thursday to help bring attention to the programs.

At East Side Charter School, the outline of a giant light bulb with white flashing lights beamed on stage as a procession of students with glow sticks filed past, symbolizing school lights burning during after-school activities.

Another rally-type event was held at Ursuline Academy in Wilmington, where members of Young Rembrandts of New Castle County, an after-school art education program, drew pictures of light bulbs to highlight the need for affordable programs that keep the lights on after school.

"For working families especially, they're absolutely necessary," said Melissa Dykins, a New Castle County spokeswoman for the national Rembrandt franchises. "You need to have your children somewhere safe and not just sitting around doing nothing."

"Lights on **Afterschool!**" is a project of the National **Afterschool** Alliance, which estimates that more than 28 million children have parents who both work outside the home - and at least half that number have no place to go after school.

"We have a lot of children who are latchkey kids, who go home to empty houses and sometimes unsafe houses," East Side Charter Principal Will Robinson said. "The kids need a safe haven. Just about 100 percent of our kids are either from a single-parent home or both parents are working. There's a great need for it."

Seventy students in the 243-student school take part in the **4-H Afterschool** Program, which emphasizes homework and gives them a hot meal, but also includes learning experiences that run the gamut from sewing to rocketry, said Carol Scott, project director for **4-H** after-school programs in New Castle County.

The program, which runs from 3 to 6 p.m., costs parents \$8 a day.

April DuPree is another satisfied parent. Her child, Lakesha, 8, a third-grader at the school, is a member of the **4-H Afterschool** Program. The program is operated by the University of Delaware's New Castle County Cooperative Extension Office.

"I work right up the street at Nixon Uniforms" on Gov. Printz Boulevard, DuPree said. "And I love it, because by the time I pick her up, she's already done her homework and has had a meal."

Dykins pointed out that after-school programs also are important for children who do have a parent at home. In an era where some schools are cutting out activities such as art and music, after-school programs may be the only place students can participate in those activities.

Jan Seitz, associate dean for extension and outreach at UD, told the audience during East Side Charter's celebration that 8 out of 10 students who participate in after-school programs earn A's and B's on their report cards. They also are less likely to get involved with drugs or to become pregnant as teenagers.

"What this program is really all about is the nurturing of one of this country's most precious resources, our children," she said.

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September 19, 2007

Section: Local

Edition: Final

Page: B1

Staying, learning after the bell

ALISON KEPNER

Staff

By ALISON KEPNER

The News Journal

WILMINGTON -- East Side Charter School kindergartner Lauren Davis carefully penned capital C's on a wide-ruled worksheet Tuesday afternoon, while classmate Neredia Lopez squealed with laughter over a picture book.

Down the hall in the school cafeteria, older elementary students were learning to count in Spanish as middle-school students received help on their homework across the room. School may have been over, but the learning wasn't for the 90 children enrolled in a **4-H** Club after-school program.

A \$22,500 **grant** from the National **4-H** Council and the JCPenney After-school Fund is helping more Delaware students benefit from such programs.

The **grant** will pay the \$100 monthly tuition for 45 students who participate in after-school programs at East Side Charter, Knollwood in Claymont and the Hickory Tree site of the Delaware State Housing Authority in Selbyville. The **grants** pay for children who don't qualify for state assistance but whose families cannot afford to send them on their own.

The **4-H** Club, a youth development organization, serves more than 6.5 million youth nationwide. In Delaware, the program is operated by University of Delaware's Cooperative Extension and provides research-based, hands-on learning to 600 to 700 children. The program has sites across the state and includes activities and skill development in areas such as healthy lifestyles, engineering and technology, and science. The Delaware **grant** is part of a \$1 million national commitment by the JCPenney After-school Fund. Children receiving the mini-**grants** also will be given \$50 gift cards for JCPenney stores to purchase clothing and other back-to-school items.

For Wilmington father Anthony Jefferson, the **grant** is allowing his 6-year-old son, Auntonio, to have a safe place to go after school where he not only can play but learn, too.

"It's a peace of mind. We don't have to rush around" to try to get off work in time to pick him up after school, he said.

This is the second year Auntonio has participated. He has received help on his addition, subtraction and spelling.

"It's just getting better and better every day," Jefferson said.

East Side Charter's program runs from 3:30 to 6 p.m. every day school is in session. The children start the afternoon working on their homework, then move on to the day's activities, which usually are based on a weekly theme. They have time to play outside and to eat dinner, too.

"I'm excited we can get more students in the program," site coordinator Caroline Romeo said, noting they benefit from the homework help and the enrichment activities. "Some of

these kids don't get a meal when they go home, and we can offer that, too."

For 5-year-old Lauren, the highlights are reading and "when we say ABCs."

She likes the activities, too. On Monday, she learned how to make a kite. Taking it outside was fun: "It fly up in the air!"

For Neredia, also 5, the question of why she would enjoy staying at school later seemed like a no-brainer.

"It's like fun and stuff," she said.

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ABOUT THE GRANT

The money will be used to pay the \$100 monthly tuition for 45 students who participate in after-school programs at East Side Charter, Knollwood in Claymont and the Hickory Tree site of the Delaware State Housing Authority in Selbyville. The money helps children who don't qualify for state assistance but whose families cannot afford the tuition.

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November 4, 2001

Section: Focus

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Delaware to discuss future of 4-H programs

Molly Murray

Staff

Centennial brings opportunity for new ideas

By MOLLY MURRAY Sussex Bureau reporter

For nearly 100 years, **4-H** has taught youngsters how to care for everything from pets to livestock, offering programs on public speaking, citizenship and life skills along the way. As the **national** organization approaches its centennial, chapters throughout the country are re-examining **4-H** to see how it can capture the best new ideas for programs that build youth skills, generate civic involvement and create better communities.

Nearly 7 million youths are involved in **4-H** in rural to urban communities, said Alma C. Hobbs, deputy administrator for families, **4-H** and nutrition at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In Delaware, the first of four scheduled discussions on the future of **4-H** programs runs today from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. in Georgetown. Other meetings will be held throughout the state.

The discussions are open to those with an interest in youth development. People involved in **4-H** and other youth organizations also have been invited to attend.

The local meetings will lead to a statewide conference and a **national** conference in Washington in February.

Susan DeFord, the **4-H** coordinator in Sussex County, said the conversations are a new idea and she isn't sure what to expect.

"We're leaving it very broad," she said. "We're questioning what's working and what's needed."

Organizers said they hope to have about 40 people at each of the meetings.

Amy Estey, a **4-H** coordinator in New Castle County, said people should come with ideas.

"They all have their own ideas of what we can do to help youths reach their potential in the next three to five years," she said. "We're not looking for any right answers here."

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IF YOU GO

4-H has scheduled four meetings to discuss the organization's future.

?Today, 2 to 6 p.m. Comfort Inn, Georgetown.

?Monday, 7 to 9 p.m., Townsend Hall Commons, University of Delaware, Newark.

?Nov. 11, 6 to 8 p.m., Delaware Center for Contemporary Arts, Wilmington.

?Nov. 13, 7 to 9 p.m., the new Middletown Fire Hall, Middletown.

?Nov. 14, 7 to 9 p.m., Delaware State University, Washington Cooperative Extension Building, Dover.

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November 8, 2006

Section: CROSSROADS

Edition: Kent & Sussex

Page: K1

A valuable resource on nature

KIM HOEY

Freelance OK

By KIM HOEY

Special to The News Journal

DOVER -- Cathy Martin didn't know much about **4-H** when she attended a meeting with her oldest daughter because her daughter's friend wanted to join.

Now more than 20 years later, Martin has donated thousands of hours to helping children learn through the **4-H**. She said she just started with her daughters, and her involvement grew from there.

"My husband could probably tell you how many hours," said Martin, an organizational leader with the Kent County **4-H** club program. "I love teaching kids about natural resources. With **4-H**, they learn by doing."

Martin laughs at how she got involved with the program to teach children leadership, citizenship and life skills. It really did begin because her daughter's friend didn't want to go to a meeting alone. Once they arrived, Martin was drawn into the projects and skills taught through the program. Even though her daughter's friend dropped out, Martin stayed. Even when her own daughters outgrew the program, she stayed. And now, she can't really imagine what life would be like without it.

In working with the **4-H**, Martin developed and secured volunteers for projects in wildlife and conservation, foods, woodworking and photography. Being a fisheries biologist with the Aquatic Resources Education Center of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, Martin emphasizes natural resources in the work she does with the 4-Hers.

Some programs she started with the children are ongoing, such as taking a group to work at the annual beach grass planting project, adopting a wetland, building birdhouses, banding barn owls and seining fish ponds to sample fish populations.

"She's an excellent educator," said Doug Crouse, director of Kent County Cooperative Extension and the **4-H** youth development educator for Kent County.

"She provides experience and opportunity the students wouldn't have otherwise. She just has the ability to share information on a kid's level."

While she keeps her standing projects with **4-H** going, Martin added to her duties by starting and coaching the Kent County Envirothon Team. The Delaware Envirothon is a competition where teenagers in the ninth through 12th grades apply their knowledge of natural resources in the areas of soils, forestry, aquatics, wildlife and a special topic each year. Many school districts provide an Envirothon class so interested students can work on their knowledge and skills on a regular basis. The Dover area did not have such a program in schools, so Martin started one with her club.

Her students give up afternoons and weekends to learn more about the different areas for the contest. Martin works with them on their knowledge base as well as in practicing for the oral presentation part of the competition. Her teams have improved consistently

during the last eight years. Last year her team came in second in the state -- a moment Martin called "pretty exciting."

In her spare time, Martin donates more hours to many committees, boards, workshops and organizations. She is a member of the Delaware Invasive Species Council and the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the American Fisheries Society, a program leader for the Becoming an Outdoors Woman, a founding member of the Delaware Council of Wildlife Rehabilitators and Educators and an organizer of educational programs at Bombay Hook **National** Wildlife Refuge.

"She is just phenomenal," said Dawn Failing, a community outreach specialist with the Aquatic Resources Education Center and a longtime friend of Martin. Both had daughters come up through the **4-H** program. Both say their children benefited so much from the life skills they learned in the program that they want to make sure more have the opportunity.

"We probably wouldn't be where we are without the life skills we learned early in our lives," said Failing. "Look at kids today. They don't climb trees. They sit in front of a computer screen. They're not interacting with nature."

Martin said she participates in all these programs in hopes of helping children develop an appreciation for the outdoors so when they get older they will be good stewards of their environment.

She sees the knowledge of the children she works with growing, much in the way her involvement with **4-H** began.

"You start small, and it keeps building," she said. "It's not like one person is doing all the work. It's really a kind of community group."

PROFILE

Cathy Martin

AGE: 60

RESIDENCE: Dover

FAMILY: Husband Steven and two grown daughters

TITLE: **4-H** organizational leader

OCCUPATION: Fisheries biologist with the Aquatic Resources Education Center

EDUCATION: University of Delaware, bachelor of science, biology

HOBBIES AND ORGANIZATIONS: Dancing, stamp collecting; coach/adviser Kent County Envirothon team; member of the Delaware Invasive Species Council and the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the American Fisheries Society; program leader for the Becoming an Outdoors Woman; founding member of the Delaware Council of Wildlife Rehabilitators and Educators; organizer of educational programs at the Bombay Hook **National** Wildlife Refuge

THE JEFFERSON AWARDS

The Jefferson Awards are given annually to volunteers in the United States who provide extraordinary public service. Nominated by friends and co-workers, one of Delaware's five recipients will compete nationally.

Award criteria include two simple issues:

- **OUTSTANDING PERSONAL ACTS.** The individual stands out for taking extra steps. The individual acts were outstanding, unique or heroic.
- **COMMUNITY IMPACT.** Besides heroic acts, the individual has positively impacted the community and helped others.

Do you know an unsung hero?

Send nominations to www.delawareonline.com/jeffersonawards

Or mail to William Osborne c/o Jefferson Awards 100 W. 10th St. Suite 215,
Wilmington, DE 19801

For more information call William Osborne at 622-9101 or e-mail him at b.osborne@jeffersonawards.org

To get involved/find volunteer opportunities, go to www.jeffersonawards.org

The awards, named for Thomas Jefferson, were started in 1972 by the American Institute for Public Service to encourage volunteerism. The News Journal is a local sponsor.

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