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Education

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Mentors prove the power of one

Volunteers honored Saturday during month of national recognition

BY EDWARD L. KENNEY • THE NEWS JOURNAL • JANUARY 20, 2008

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When Stacey Altemus was a little girl, she failed the second grade because she could not concentrate in school.

ADVERTISEMENT "I could've used some support," she said.

Altemus, 42, of Newark, is making amends with a new generation. She now volunteers to help students with similar problems, and she was one of more than a dozen mentors who were recognized Saturday for their work with children, including Sen. Tom Carper and Appoquinimink School District Superintendent Tony Marchio.

The timing was right to shine the spotlight: January is National Mentoring Month.

Like others who volunteer, Altemus believes she is getting more out of it than the children she mentors at both Kirk Middle School and Jennie Smith Elementary School.

"I would say, when I go to meet with the students, it helps put life in perspective, it helps put my job in perspective," said Altemus, who works for the Nationwide [Financial](#) Network and coordinates its mentoring program. "It helps keep me in touch with what really matters. I just feel proud of myself when I do something like this."

Mentoring has been evolving since she first started doing it in the mid-1990s, she said. It has moved away from the academics and more toward building a relationship and helping with self-esteem issues.

"It always seemed to me that their lives were more important than the math or history," she said.

Rachel Markowitz, manager of training and recruitment for Creative Mentoring, confirms that there has been a change in direction. Mentors, she said, are asked to be advocates, cheerleaders, listeners and nurturers, rather than disciplinarians, judges, parents or saviors.

Creative Mentoring has a three-part application process: a criminal background check, personal references and 3 1/2 hours of training, which should be repeated every two to three years, Markowitz said. The mentors are teamed with students who usually have been recommended by a teacher or parent.

What makes a good mentor?



The News Journal/ROBERT CRAIG

Stacey Altemus mentors Kirk Middle Schooler Samantha Taylor on Friday. Altemus started mentoring through a program at her work, Nationwide Financial Network. [\(Buy photo\)](#)



The News Journal/CARLA VARISCO-WILLIAMS

Cynthia Osborne mentors 8-year-old twins Willeek (left) and Keyana Thomas, Mount Pleasant Elementary students. [\(Buy photo\)](#)

MENTORS CELEBRATED

Along with Sen. Tom Carper, the following mentors were honored by Creative Mentoring Saturday at the DuPont Country Club: Lyndon Yearick of Magnolia, Vaughn Hopkins of New Castle, Karen Beare of Wilmington, Cynthia Osborne of Wilmington, Tony Marchio of Middletown, Carol White of Wilmington, Michael Bove of Boothwyn, Pa., Nicole Kalinosky of Joppa, Md., Stacey Altemus of Newark, Richard Schauer of Townsend, Stephanie Bryant-Crowe of Dover, Judy Melman of Wilmington and Tom

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"I would say a good listener, because kids a lot of times don't get an opportunity to talk to an adult or somebody who would listen to them. I think it makes a big difference," Altemus said.

Fellow Creative Mentoring honoree Cyndy Osborne, who has been helping students at Mount Pleasant Elementary School for eight years, said the quality that a mentor needs most is commitment.

"My advice would be: Do not become a mentor if you're not going to be totally committed to these kids," she said.

"I've tried to induce my friends to mentor," she added, "and the first thing they say is 'I don't have a college degree. I can't teach them math and science.' But to me, being a mentor is being a role model, someone who says I care and I care where your life is going."

Osborne, who has had to deal with her own problems lately with her mom passing away a couple of months ago, also confesses that the mentoring gives her almost as big of a boost as it does for the children.

"There are times when it's difficult to come in here," she said at the school. "But every time I came in here and worked with these kids, it changed something for me. I think it made me a better person."

Jennifer DeHoff, the mentoring coordinator at Mount Pleasant Elementary, praises Osborne's extra efforts.

"Cyndy is just the ultimate kind of mentor you want at a school," she said. "She is not just a role model for the kids but a role model for their classmates. Every teacher at this school who has come in contact with Cyndy is thrilled with her energy."

The extra effort she gives also is a big help for the children, DeHoff said.

"They thrive on the attention they're getting, I think, and it's something they need," she said. "Whether it's some loss in their life or some turmoil in their life, they just thrive on that attention."

Art Madric, who coordinates the mentors at Kirk Middle School, also has seen the benefits Altemus and other mentors at Kirk Middle have achieved.

"It's another adult outside of the parents who come in," he said. "And sometimes they're saying the same thing, but the student is hearing it differently. It helps them grow more toward their potential."

Altemus has two of her own children, and she said she appreciates it when anyone says positive things to them or gives them guidance, which gets to the heart of what mentoring is all about.

"That means a lot to me," she said. "I hope somebody will reach out to my kids in the same way as they're growing up."

Contact Edward L. Kenney at 324-2891 or ekenney@delawareonline.com.

In your voice

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Stevenson of Wilmington. The mentors were nominated by their employers or schools for longevity of service or mentoring in a distinguished manner. For information about mentoring, visit the Creative Mentoring Web site at www.creativementoring.org or call toll-free at (877) 202-9050.

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