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## Local woman honored for decade of work with Townsend students

**By Staff reports**

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Townsend, Del. — Dolores Sebastian of Middletown can often be found in a classroom at Townsend Elementary School showing students how to weave or just talking to them about their day.

After retiring from a 25-year career at DuPont in 2001, Sebastian knew she couldn't stay idle for long, so she decided it was time to put her love for children to use. Three months later, she became a mentor at TES, where she works one on one with students who may need a little extra friendship or care.

"I'm kind of like a grandmother figure," she said. "It's about being a friend that they can trust to always show up."

Twice a week, Sebastian spends time reading, playing games, coloring or just talking with a child.

"We talk about whatever they want," she said. "That seems to be what these kids need. It's a confidence builder. They can just be themselves."

Sebastian was recently honored for her hard work and dedication as a mentor. She received the Exemplary Mentor Award March 13 by Connecting Generations, a non-profit organization that offers mentoring programs to Delaware schools.

Rachel Markowitz, creative mentoring program director for Connecting Generations, said the award is meant to honor a volunteer who has mentored for more than seven years, has worked with more than 10 students, and who has gone above and beyond their duties.

"Dolores is at the school more than just an hour a week," Markowitz said. "She gives her support in the classroom and helps recruit others. She is a great advocate for our program."

Ann Lehman, mentoring program coordinator at TES who nominated Sebastian for the award, said Sebastian has played a major role at the school.

"She has a really neat way of recognizing that a student may need a little extra support," she said. "She very quietly and unassumingly becomes that student's friend and encourager, and she continues to do that year after year."

Lehman said when Sebastian is not working with one student, she is in fourth-grade teacher Claudia Scibek's classroom helping with projects and talking with the students, or she is in the library stocking shelves.

"The students really feel like she's part of the classroom family," Lehman said. "They love her. It's been like that every single year."

She said Sebastian not only provides encouragement to the students, she supports the staff, too.

"She was really instrumental in helping push me in getting more mentors back in the building last year and this year," Lehman said. "She's always there to encourage me."

Sebastian said although it's sometimes a challenge getting certain children to open up, working with each student is a rewarding experience for her.

"You feel like you really accomplish something by the end of the year," she said. "There's just something that happens. The kids admire you and want you there. Who could resist that?"

Sebastian said she plans to mentor as long as possible and encourages others to do it as well.

"It's part of my week," she said. "During the summer, when the kids aren't in school, I really miss it. I go through withdraw. The love of the kids is really what I keep going back for."

Lehman said the school has been honored to have Sebastian as a mentor and they have no plans of giving her up.

"She really is a very special person with a kind, caring heart," she said.

# Photos

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Dolores Sebastian was honored by Connecting Generations March 13 for her exemplary mentor work at Townsend Elementary School. She is pictured here with U.S. Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.).