

## Mill Creek mentor Karen Beare does more than set a good example

By Adam Zewe

Community News

Posted Feb 01, 2010 @ 04:49 PM

Mill Creek, Del. — Though Karen Beare's two children are grown, she still spends a lot of time helping with homework.

The Mill Creek resident is a mentor with Connecting Generations and devotes each Wednesday to four elementary school kids who need a helping hand.

Beare began mentoring in 1998 after hearing a talk by Sen. Tom Carper on volunteering. He mentioned that he was a mentor and she thought it'd be a good way to give back.

"You hope it makes a difference in a child's life," she said. "So many kids just need some one-on-one attention."

She began mentoring a first-grader at Highlands Elementary School named Maria. Beare became so invested in the girl's future she followed Maria to four different schools and is now the high school junior's Big Sister.

Like many of the students she has mentored, Maria lived with one parent and there was a void in her life from her missing mother, Beare said.

Others Beare has mentored have come from broken homes where one parent is dead or in prison, she said, leaving a shortage of positive role models in the child's life.

Most of the kids are very bright, she said, so the mentoring is not as much about improving schoolwork as it is about boosting confidence. Many of her mentees are Hispanic and struggle with English, she said, so they tend to be shy in class. It's important they have an adult to speak English with besides their teacher, she said.

Beare and the kids read books, play games, do puzzles and work on math during their hour-long sessions, she said, and there is nothing the kids love more than beating her at a game.

The kids really enjoy the encouragement she gives them, Beare said, and the best reward is their smiles.

Her most rewarding experience as a mentor came 10 years ago when she was beginning her second year mentoring Maria, she said.

Maria was called down to the office to meet her mentor for the year, not knowing who it was going to be, Beare said. She peeked into the office window and Maria's eyes lit up when she saw Beare.

"She threw her arms around me and said, 'You came back!'" Beare recalled.

Beare's goal is to see Maria through high school, she said, and though she is uncertain whether or not the girl will graduate, Maria has come a long way over the past 10 years.

But one thing hasn't changed over the past decade – Beare's dedication to mentoring. She was honored as Connecting Generations' Exemplary Mentor Award in 2008 and named Big Sister of the Year in 2007.

In that time, she's never had a mentee she didn't care for, she said, and while it's important to try not to get too attached to the children, it's impossible not to take an interest in their life and their future.

"Mentoring makes a difference in a child's life and it makes a difference in your life, too," she said. "You give a little and get a lot."

**Meet Karen**  
**Name:** Karen Beare  
**Lives in:** Mill Creek  
**Hails from:** Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
**Family:** Husband, Steven; Children, Kenneth and Anne  
**Profession:** retired antique saleswoman  
**Hobbies:** travelling  
**Best place she's travelled:** Greece

**Connecting Generations Mentoring Works Summit**  
Held from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on Jan. 26 at the Sheraton Hotel in Dover

Breakout sessions for mentors, educators, service providers, business leaders, faith leaders and student leaders

Tickets cost \$15 and include breakfast and lunch

Register at [connecting-generations.org/events-mentor-summit.html](http://connecting-generations.org/events-mentor-summit.html)