



Staff Photo by Diana McFarland

Shanija Perry-Harris worked on her multiplication with the help of Smithfield Women's Club volunteer Arleen Whalen at the tutoring program held at Jersey Park.

Tutoring program endures

By Diana McFarland
 News editor

The fourth graders in the Jersey Park tutoring program were concentrating on multiplication last week.

There was a case coming up, said Shanija Perry-Harris, a fourth grader at Westside Elementary.

To drill the students, volunteer Arleen Whalen held up a series of flash cards while Perry-Harris wrote the answer down on a dry erase board.

And most of the time, she got it right.

"I love coming here because they help me figure stuff out," Perry-Harris said.

Perry-Harris attends the tutoring program that began 10 years ago and is run by the Woman's Club of Smithfield.

Today the program has more than 30 children and 10-15 volunteers — mostly retired teachers — who meet each Wednesday after school to help with homework.

The students live in Jersey Park and attend other Westside Elementary grades four through six, or Carrollton Elementary, kindergarten through third grade.

The younger children this day had a variety of homework, from writing and illustrating a story to matching the correct color to U.S. currency on a coloring page. Some practiced writing letters and numbers on worksheets.

When the children arrive, they sign in, pick out their name tag and do their best that evening to earn a star on the chart that hangs on the wall in the Jersey Park community center.

Those that earn the most stars are eligible to be selected for a week at 4-H summer camp, courtesy of CHIPS, which is administered by the Smithfield Police Department. Isle of Wight Christian Outreach also provides liability insurance coverage for the program.

Volunteer Debra Thurston pointed out one of the younger boys, Nehemiah Hill, who was working on writing that evening.

Thurston said Nehemiah came to the tutoring session years ago as a very small boy knocked on the door and announced he wanted to learn his letters.



The "younger" group of students from Carrollton Elementary get tutoring help on a variety of projects from Smithfield Women's Club volunteers.



Photo courtesy of the Isle of Wight

Delivering Thanksgiving

The Isle of Wight County Sheriff's Office helped the Smithfield Assembly of God youth group load bags of Thanksgiving food Sunday that were distributed to needy families in Isle of Wight County. The group delivered more than 30 dinners with all the trimmings. The youth group, led by Pastor Darin Lindsay, raised money for the meals by participating in community projects and by donating personal funds. Pictured are Lt. James Pope, right, and Deputy Josh Beach. Also participating were Sheriff Mark Marshall and Lt. Bob Fox.

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He did, and now Nehemiah is an excellent reader, said Thurston, who was one of the program's founders.

Thurston told of another girl who said she couldn't do fractions, but once a tutor showed her how to figure them out, her face lit up.

"That's what's fun. Watching the light go on," she said.

Tutors either work one-on-one or in groups, depending on the need that evening.

"We don't force a struc-

ture and just respond to the ongoing situation," Thurston said.

"You never know how many kids are going to show up."

It got hectic when the younger children arrived — mostly because they were a larger group. The older children put their books away and helped the volunteers pass out snacks.

Smithfield Police Officer Adams stopped by and also helped a student with his homework.

Sometimes a high school student who once

attended the tutoring program peeks in to say hello.

In addition to homework, the Woman's Club volunteers also have a small party at Christmas and give each child a hat and scarf knitted or crocheted by Club members. In the spring, the volunteers color Easter eggs. The group has also accumulated a library of used books for the children to read when they have time.

But most weeks, the kids hit the books.

"We really try to focus on education," Thurston said.