

## Capitol Federal employees volunteer as mentors in schools

*By Bobbi Mlynar*

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If it's true that a good leader leads by example, then Deloris Heins is a fine example of a good leader.

Heins, who has been a mentor to youths for about eight years, has joined the YouthFriends program in the Emporia school district. Previously, she had been a mentor in the HOST and Masters programs in the intermediate buildings.

"YouthFriends sounded like something that I wanted to get involved in," Heins said. "The kids are so important and so good. I really enjoy it."

Her passion for helping children piqued the interest of others at Capitol Federal Savings, with the result that four Cap Fed employees decided to become YouthFriends mentors, too.

"I just talked about how fun it is," she said, without mentioning names or divulging personal information.

All five — Brandie Booth, Kurt Jeffery, Kevin Moore, Sara Proctor, and Heins — recently completed the required two hours of training for YouthFriends and are waiting for background checks to be turned in before they will be allowed to meet with the children. All are eager to begin.

Commitment to the program is only one hour per week, and it is one that Capitol Federal management encourages.

The company is particularly interested in programs that help children, said Heins, the branch manager here and a vice president.

"They encourage employees and management to get involved in the community with the youth," she said. "It's a vital part of Capitol Federal's commitment to community service."

Employees can decide whether they want to mentor during their lunch hours, or during work hours without losing pay.

"A lot of times, it's not for a full hour," said Heather Wagner, prevention specialist for Safe and Drug-Free Schools. Elementary schools have 20

minutes for lunch and 20 minutes for recess before going back to classes. “So it’s really only 40 minutes.”

“When you make a commitment like this, you have to carry through,” Heins said. “The kids get attached. They look forward to seeing you on their special day and time. ... “The commitment is so little time for the reward you get.”

YouthFriends program extends from kindergarten through fourth grade at three elementary schools — Riverside, Logan Avenue, and William Allen White — and fifth through 12th grades.

A mentor may choose the day of the week they will participate, as well as the school or grade level of the child he or she prefers. Activities options are varied, and may be as simple as listening.

“Listening is important to them. They just want to talk,” Heins said of many of the youngsters.

An avid reader herself, Heins enjoys getting children hooked on books, a habit she’s already developed in her four-year-old granddaughter, Maya, who lives in Springfield, Mo.

“I read to my 4-year-old granddaughter over the phone,” Heins said. “She’ll call me on the phone and say, ‘Grandma, will you read to me?’”

In addition to reading, mentors also may become lunch buddies, help with studying, play games, shoot basketballs or simply listen, among other options. All mentoring time is spent on school grounds, but mentors can eat with their YouthFriends in the cafeteria or bring in lunches to share, she said.

The Cap Fed team brings an assortment of interests and experience to the program.

Brandie Booth will have the option of using mentoring time for athletics, if her YouthFriend is interested, Heins said as an example. Booth played soccer at Emporia High School and Emporia State University, and helps with coaching summer teams. Jeffery, with a background in golf, may be able to help his student with that game.

Proctor too wants to help instill the joy of reading in her YouthFriend, and Moore, who has three children with Village principal Wendy Moore, has plenty of experience keeping company with children of all interests.

Many more volunteers are needed for YouthFriends. The number of children who have been referred for the program is “huge,” Wagner said, and growing every day simply because of its success.

“A teacher might not be too sure of the program, then it works for one student and she’ll give me 10 more,” Wagner said. Once it proves itself, it just spreads like wildfire. ... Honestly, I would love to have one for every student in the district.”