

Tuesday, October 16, 2012

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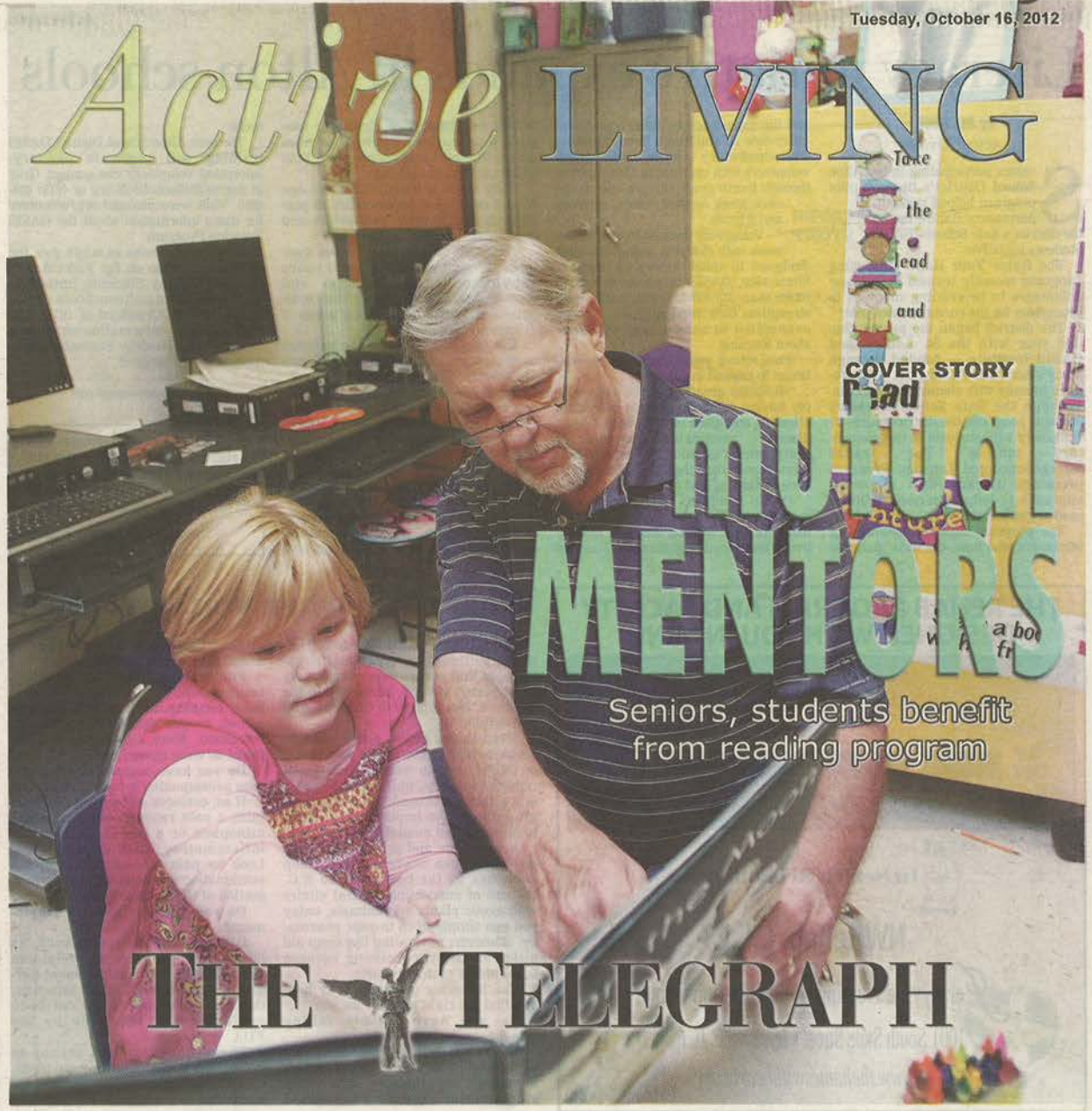
COVER STORY

Read

mutual MENTORS

Seniors, students benefit
from reading program

THE  TELEGRAPH



Literacy initiative expands in Alton schools

By JILL MOON

Active Living

Seniors participating in the Alton School District's literacy pilot program helped make it a permanent fixture through the district's Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative.

The Raise Your Hand Mentoring Program recently trained new senior volunteers to be reading mentors to youngsters for the current school year.

The district began the partnership last year with the St. Louis-based OASIS Institute — funded through Macy's and BJC Healthcare — to promote literacy with elementary students. Through the Safe Schools/Healthy Students program, the district paired 21 volunteers with students at two elementary schools. The OASIS Intergenerational Tutoring Program promotes literacy with a proven approach to help high-need children read at grade level.

The program taps the potential of volunteers who have the time, patience

and life experience to make a profound difference in children's lives. Working with elementary schools, OASIS pairs volunteers with children in kindergarten through fourth grade to work one-on-one each week as their tutors, mentors and friends.

Volunteers commit to one hour a week with students, doing activities designed to spark a love of reading. Since 1989, OASIS tutors have helped more than 330,000 children nationwide strengthen their reading skills, positive connection to school, and attitudes about learning.

This school year, the program continues to expand in Alton.

"Students greatly benefit from simply having someone provide individual attention and listen to them read," Alton district mentoring coordinator Marybeth Gras said. "In turn, volunteers report that they find the experience rewarding and fun."

OASIS Institute's mission is to promote successful aging through a three-fold approach: lifelong learning, healthy living and social engagement. Founded

in 1982 and based in St. Louis, the non-profit organization is active in 40 cities across 24 states and serves more than 56,000 individuals each year.

Their vision is to see that adults age 50 and older have opportunities to pursue vibrant, healthy, productive and meaningful lives.

They seek to positively impact their lives through partnerships to share knowledge, offer evidence- and research-based programs, conduct evaluations and adapt to meet the needs of diverse audiences.

The OASIS Institute is the national headquarters and manages staff who provide OASIS programs in the St. Louis metro area. The institute develops national programs and provides training and support for OASIS education centers and partners. OASIS education centers are located in community sites.

Its network of more than 700 partners includes health providers, corporations, senior centers, community organizations, libraries, universities and colleges, senior living organizations and

more.

The next Alton School District OASIS training will begin in January. Interested volunteers can contact Gras at mgras@altonschools.org or (618) 433-4910. Visit www.oasisnet.org/volunteer for more information about the OASIS Tutoring Program.

Visit <http://sshs.samhsa.gov> for more information on the Federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative. Visit scrawford@altonschools.org or contact Sandy Crawford at (618) 433-4907 for more information on Alton's Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant, programs and services.

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ON THE COVER: Volunteer Billy Hammon of Alton reads "On the Moon" to Alyssa Westbrook, 8, of Alton Tuesday at the Literacy Center at East Elementary School in Alton.

The Telegraph/MARGIE M. BARNES