

Ward employee takes company plan seriously

By Jacqueline Thomas

Each week during the school year 160 Near-North Side children leave their homes in Cabrini-Green for the corporate headquarters of Montgomery Ward & Co.

They're participants in a volunteer-run program for children from the public housing project that includes individual tutoring, field trips, parties and other special activities.

It's not unusual for another 50 children to be on the waiting list for the program, now in its 17th year.

At the helm of the Cabrini-Green Tutoring Program for the last seven years has been Dan Bassill, a retail advertising employee at Ward's.

"Through Dan's personal leadership, and many hours of personal time spent each week, this volunteer program is now one of the largest corporate [tutoring] programs in the country," said Bassill's boss, Ron Mategna.

It is for that reason that Bassill, 35, was named one of 10 Chicago winners of 1982 Jefferson Awards for outstanding community service.

THE NAMES OF BASSILL and other Chicago winners will be submitted to a national Jefferson Award competition. Each of the five winners of the national award will receive \$1,000.

Bassill calls his a "people program" that enriches the lives of both the children from Cabrini, ages 7 to 12, and the adult participants.

About 50 of the tutors are employees of Montgomery Ward & Co. They range from a vice president to a janitor and include buyers, secretaries and computer specialists, said Bassill.



JEFFERSON AWARD winner Dan Bassill, a Montgomery Ward & Co. employee, teaches 7-year-old Latoya Collins, a Cabrini-Green resident, how to play checkers at Ward's headquarters, 619 W. Chicago. (Sun-Times Photo by Jack Lenahan)

Many of the other tutors are affiliated with the Moody Bible Institute and the Quaker Oats Co.

The emphasis is on reading during the once-a-week sessions in Ward's headquarters cafeteria. Using donations, the program has been able to assemble its own library of books aimed at young readers.

The sessions last 75 minutes, but Bassill says that most tutors go beyond that, taking students on weekend trips to museums or other outings.

It may also extend beyond the time a child is involved in the program, said Bassill, who is still in touch with a young man he once tutored and who now is a senior at Lane Tech.

The kind of results the program seeks aren't necessarily measurable on tests but may be seen on "the kids' faces," Bassill said.

"We're not teachers; we're motivators. . . . The schools can teach them if they want to learn," he said, adding, "The bond [that develops] between the kid and the tutor is the most important thing."



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