

Kenbrook students build special friendships

By Casey Hans
staff writer

PRECIOUS friendships are forming at Kenbrook Elementary.

An informal "buddy" program — designed to bring fourth graders and special education students together — has been so successful that special ed teacher Karen Wichert has a stream of student helpers visit her room, and Mary

Sletton's fourth graders eagerly await their turn to visit the special education room.

"This is the problem, they want to be here all the time," said a smiling Wichert, obviously pleased with the relationships developed in the program which began last year. "It's really a blending together to meet our kids — the magic works from there."

FIFTH GRADERS involved in the program last year have continued to

volunteer their time, even though they no longer have Sletton as a teacher. One of those students is Julie Bean, who makes her visits to Wichert's class each Friday, and said the program has had a big impact in her life.

"I never thought I would be doing this," she said. "I used to be afraid, I really didn't know them. Now I love them, I love them all."

Julie visited with one of her new friends during the summer months, sharing fireworks on the Fourth of July and swimming at his house. She is considering a career as a special education teacher, and her mom has promised to bring her back during after school hours after she leaves Kenbrook for middle school.

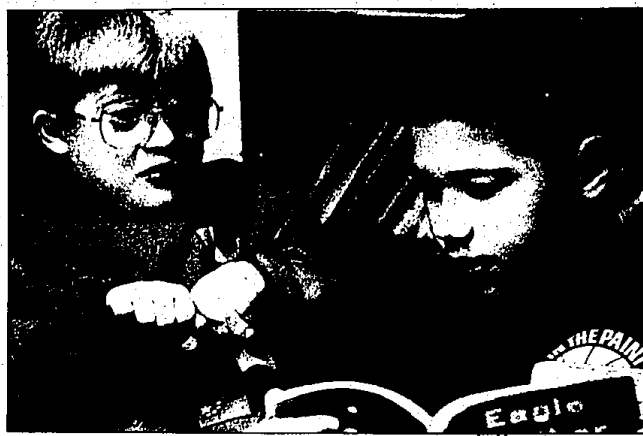
SPECIAL EDUCATION students in the Kenbrook program are classified as "irretrievably mentally impaired" and there are about eight students in the class this year. That gives them a lot of attention from about 28 of Sletton's fourth graders.

The program offers students day-to-day interaction, but also special programs, like the recent one in which the fourth graders helped their special friends write letters to Santa Claus.

Working with catalogs, they helped the younger students pick out pictures of toys and other things for the list, then helped them do the list.

"It's really amazing these kids pick up on this so quickly," she said. "If it wasn't for them, it wouldn't fly. It's their work."

Sletton, a former special education teacher at Farmington Training Center, said she got the idea for the program last year, when she saw her



photos by SHARON LEMIEUX/staff photographer

Taking a few minutes away from the group, Kenbrook fourth grader Brad Hollandsworth (right) reads a story to his "buddy," Chris

Giachino. Both fourth and fifth graders at Kenbrook have developed relationships with their special friends.

fourth graders at Kenbrook react to special education students on the playground. "They were afraid," she said. "I said 'this couldn't continue.'"

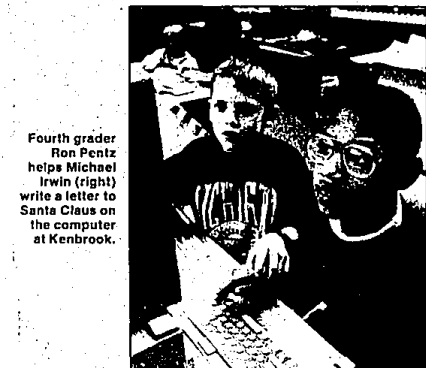
"She started the program about a year ago. 'We decided it would be a nice experience,' she said. 'It focuses on changing the attitudes. We feel it's important if we can affect

one life."

The needs of students with disabilities is a topic especially close to Sletton, who grew up with a younger brother with Downs Syndrome.



Teacher Mary Sletton says goodbyes to Addy Brown, who heads back to her room after working on a list to Santa Claus with Sletton's fourth graders.



Fourth grader Ron Pentz helps Michael Irwin (right) write a letter to Santa Claus on the computer at Kenbrook.



Sarah Schwartz (right) hands Jason Alto something as other students help him prepare his list for Santa Claus. At left is Karen Meloché and standing is Greg Seaman. Kenbrook Elementary fourth graders were helping students from the school's special education program with their holiday wish lists.

Victim a no-show in court, so judge dismisses charges

By Susan Buck
staff writer

Felony charges were dismissed Dec. 21 against three people charged with kidnapping and extortion in Farmington Hills when the woman who made the charges failed to appear for the preliminary examination.

This exam was rescheduled from a week prior when the woman also failed to appear.

Judge Frederick Harris of the 47th District Court dismissed the case against Detroiters O.C. Cruder Jr., 21, and Russell Eric Glenn, 25, as well as Melissa Yvonne Ebinger, 22, of Farmington Hills.

The 29-year-old woman had reported to police that she was held against her will, threatened and sexually assaulted on Nov. 7.

It is believed the incident involved a \$200 drug debt.

"It's very frustrating when a victim won't cooperate," said Hills Detective Chuck Hubbard.

District Judge Margaret Schaeffer

The victim's father appeared in court Dec. 14, but could not tell attorneys why his daughter did not appear.

had approved a material witness warrant against the woman to force her to appear.

"She knew the charges," Hubbard said. "I advised her personally Dec. 12. She had come into the station and was questioned."

LATER, HE said police were unable to find her, Hubbard said. He added that the woman's actions showed a "lack of interest in prosecution."

At the Dec. 14 exam, only Cruder was represented by an attorney. Schaeffer ordered the proper paperwork be handled to get the other two people court-appointed attorneys.

At that time, Schaeffer continued cash bonds of \$100,000 for each defendant. All were held in the Oakland County Jail.

The kidnapping charge carries a term of up to life in prison and the extortion charge up to 20 years upon conviction.

The woman's father told police he received a call from his daughter asking to borrow \$200. When he refused, a man came onto the telephone and said: "If I don't get my money, I'll kill her and drop her in pieces on your front lawn," the police report said.

The woman appeared in court Dec. 14, but could not tell attorneys why his daughter did not appear.

The woman told Farmington Hills police she had gone to a crack house in Detroit where she was abducted, put into a van, forced to have sex with three men, then moved to another vehicle and eventually brought to her house in Farmington Hills. Police arrested the three defendants there.

Videotape available to explain what zoning appeals board does

It could be the season's sleeper.

But a video tape — filmed at Farmington Hills City Hall — could alleviate some confusion over what the city's zoning board of appeals does, and what it can not do.

"The problem we've run into is that people expect deed restrictions, for example, to be enforced by the ZBA," said zoning supervisor Lee Blizman.

Occasionally neighbors get upset with the ZBA because they look to the city to prohibit a resident from parking their motor home in their backyard, for example. But it's in the rear yard and complies with the required setbacks, the ZBA must allow it.

"We must permit what the ordinance permits," Blizman said.

The 15-minute tape, featuring Blizman and former city attorney Paul Bibeau, is designed to acquaint homeowners with the ZBA's role and function.

THE TAPE PROVIDES a description of how ZBA

meetings are conducted and the types of variances the board can grant. Bibeau discusses the laws that must be followed in ZBA decisions.

The idea stemmed from a request by councilman Larry Lichtman for the city's zoning division to prepare educational materials about the ZBA for the public. "This is a first in trying to do something like this," Blizman said. "I hope we manage to do some teaching. This we hope will end the confusion about the ZBA and that people won't feel abandoned by the city."

The city's homeowners associations were informed by letter of the tape in November. Since then the tape — there are four copies — have been borrowed several times. Use of the tape is not restricted to homeowners organizations. Residents are also encouraged to borrow the tapes.

"We could also arrange for someone (from zoning) to be at their meetings if they'd like," Blizman said.

To borrow a copy of the tape, call the zoning division at 473-9325.

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