

Program Provides Seniors With Training, Job Contacts

BY SUSAN USHER

Mattie Griffin was a little nervous about returning to work last month—she turned 65 in October and it's been five years since she worked her last job.

Her duties in the office of Regina White, clerk to the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners, are both temporary and part-time. But it's a start—and that's what the Senior Aide Program in which she participates is all about.

A United Way agency, the program hires senior citizens to fill community service slots in Brunswick, New Hanover, Columbus and Pender

counties, according to program director Dewey L. Graham of Wilmington. Nine senior aides presently work in Brunswick County and there's an open slot in the Brunswick County Volunteer and Information Center office at Bolivia.

"We try to provide them with recent work experience so they can get unsubsidized jobs," said Graham. "There's no limit on how long they can stay in the program. We encourage them to look for other jobs when their self-confidence is built up and they have some skills."

Grace Bratt provides a good example of how the program is meant to work. She was first employed in the

Volunteer and Information Center as a senior aide and was hired full-time when a permanent position became available.

People are generally unaware of the program, Graham said, because the workers are placed in "host" agencies such as VIC. In Brunswick County, for instance, two senior aides operate the Home Missions Center in Bolivia, one works for the Town of Navassa, one for the Brunswick County Department of Social Services, one for Southeastern Mental Health, one for SENCLand Community Action, two in the Volunteer and Information Center.

A typical senior aide slot might last three or four months.

Mazie Sellers, director of the Employment Security Commission's Bolivia office, said workers age 55 and older make up only about one percent of those seeking jobs through the office. Most are female.

"We had had problems trying to fill the job slots" in the senior aide program, she said. Of those who meet

the minimum age requirement of 55, most don't qualify as economically disadvantaged, based on factors such as family size and earned income.

Graham said funding for 66 senior aide jobs in the four-county area is provided through a \$300,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Labor through the National Council of Senior Citizens. United Way pays administrative and overhead costs of the program, which began in 1977.

While working at their aide job, they're encouraged to look about for job opportunities. At the same time, he said, in exchange for getting a "free" employee, the host agency is expected to train the worker and consider him/her for any position that becomes available during their tenure with the agency.

"I'm already looking," Mrs. Griffin said from behind a desk in the lobby of the county administrative suite. While keeping alert to job possibilities, she also does light typing, files, takes inventory, answers the phone and meets the public,

"whatever I'm asked to do."

Last Thursday morning applicants interested in an animal control officer's job kept her busy distributing forms; those applying included her son, Keith, who with his wife recently moved to Brunswick County from Charlotte. They're expecting their first child—and Mrs. Griffin's first grandchild.

A Rocky Mount native, Mrs. Griffin had worked 23 years for Burlington Industries, moving her way upward from payroll to general ledger clerk. Later she worked four years as a teacher's aide in Nash County, also driving a bus two of those years. She also worked about six years either full- and part-time for Daughtridge Gas & Oil Co. in Rocky Mount.

She had had a second home in Brunswick County for seven or eight years, near her sister's place close to Holden Beach. "It was peaceful and quiet; I liked it," she said.

After retirement, widowed and with her son grown, she sold the

family home in Rocky Mount, bought a lot and mobile home and moved permanently to the Holden Beach area. "There's not too much to do," she said, "but I love it here."

She takes great pleasure in the outdoors, particularly walking and shelling at the beach, and enjoys gardening in the small space available. Mrs. Griffin said she and her sister freeze and can "everything we can get our hands on in the summer," though good produce was in short supply last summer.

"She's the inside cat and I'm the outside dog," she quipped. "She's content to stay indoors; I've got to be outdoors."

Once a frequent fisherman, she lacks both a fishing buddy and a rod and reel at present.

She likes to crochet and embroider, but even with these hobbies, Mattie Griffin had too much time on her hands.

Before starting back to work, she said, "I was bored staying at home all the time."



SENIOR AIDE MATTIE GRIFFIN looks over a job application submitted by her son, Keith, while on the job at the county administration office.

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