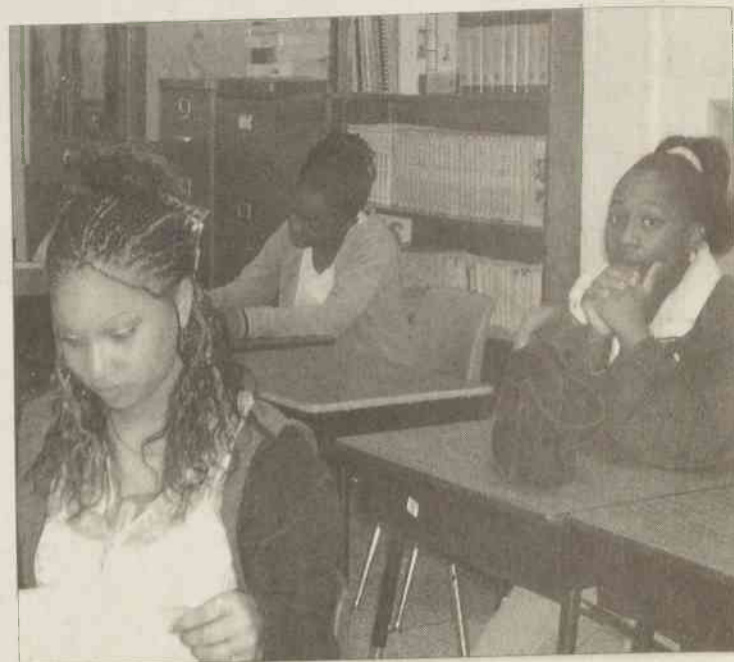


"They need positive influences outside of school figures to try to steer them in the right direction."

-- Latoya Deschamps, Women's Bowling Team

Role Models

Student-athletes team up with local high-school youth



Photos by Janell J. Lewis
Farren Whitehead (front) and Latrice Jowers (back right) sit in math class. Both are members of the Ram Buddies/Ladies in the House program. The Lady Rams will assist 19 other female students with various subjects.

By Janell J. Lewis
ARGUS NEWS EDITOR

A faculty member guided by the principle that each one should teach one has initiated a mentoring program that matches women athletes at the university with at-risk teenage girls at a local high school.

Tonia Walker, the associate director of athletics and senior women's administrator, launched the Ram Buddies/Ladies in the House program last month with 21 WSSU women athletes who have pledged to spend at least one hour per week with assigned ninth and tenth graders at Parkland High School.

"It's a mentoring program that allows for us to have some community service efforts from our student athletes and it also gives us an opportunity to give back to some of the young females now," said Walker, who is the former volleyball coach.

She added, "It's a way for us to befriend some of the girls at Parkland and let them know that they have someone they can confide in and who they can trust."

The women athletes participating in the program have been recommended by their coaches and members of the administrative staff. "We looked for those young ladies with high-quality leadership skills and mentoring skills," Walker said. The high school students mentored by the Ram Buddies are considered at-risk. More specifically, Walker said the students have been identified as having academic, behavioral and social challenges.

Already, there is a request from Parkland for 20 additional volunteers, Walker said. The Ram Buddies eat lunch with their Parkland "sisters," accompany them to class and engage in other activities that establish trust. The goal is to show the teenagers how to stay focused, and help them develop strong, positive attitudes.

Another goal of the mentoring program, Walker explained, is to introduce the high school students to the college atmosphere.

This is the second year of the Ram Buddies program. Last year the program operated at Wiley Middle School. Karen Morning-Cain, a former teacher at Wiley, collaborated with Walker in developing the mentoring project. However, Morning-Cain transferred to Parkland this year, so Walker decided to move the program.



Photos by Janell J. Lewis
Dara Bess, a WSSU volleyball player, tutors "little sister" Janae Shavers. Dara volunteers weekly at Parkland High School as a Ram Buddy in hopes of keeping her buddy on the right track in school.

Among the Lady Ram student-athletes are April Allison, Dara Bess, Jamila Dalton, Shannon Davis, Ebony Douglas, Janine Martin, Tiffany Tonkins, and Toya Vaughn. They are players on the volleyball, basketball, softball, and bowling teams.

Janae Shavers, a 9th grader at Parkland, said "it's good because my sister is gone. I look forward to going places with her [Ram Buddy] and her helping me with my work."

Latoya Deschamps, a physical education major and member of the women's bowling team, is also one of the mentors. She said the program definitely fills a void in the lives of the teenage girls that they mentor. Said Deschamps:

"They need positive influences outside of school figures to try to steer them in the right direction."



Photos by Janell J. Lewis
Benita Wicker (right) sits and reads a magazine with her "buddy" Asha Gray for the school-wide Stop, Drop and Read program.