

## NEVER TOO OLD TO LEARN

# Adult New Readers Use Skill To Make Their Lives Better

BY DORI COSGROVE GURGANUS

"I live in the United States of America. It is a democracy. The United States has a democratic government," reads Kay Lawson.

"Good, Kay. Now, does anyone know what we mean when we say 'democracy'?" Barbara Rhodes. "If we all vote for president, does my vote count any more than yours?"

So goes the adult basic skills class at Brunswick Village, a nursing care facility in Shallotte. Twice a week the Brunswick Community College instructor teaches a group of residents the basics of reading, and keeping others up-to-date on world events.

Monday and Wednesday afternoons at Brunswick Village, Ms. Rhodes teaches what appears to be a literacy class.

"But it's so much more," she said, because students use their reading skills to improve other aspects of their lives.

"We read from magazines and newspapers," said Ron Mullis, one of the members of the class. "It's pretty fascinating. We've learned about world religions and everything."

Ms. Rhodes makes sure that the participants learn of the world around them from the materials they read, which are provided by BCC.

"We read sales circulars and advertisements. Then we try to figure out if something really is a bargain, or how many of the item you could buy with \$10," she said.

If the class reads a passage that mentions democracy, she asks them what they think it means. Around the time of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, the class learned about civil rights.

"My goal is for them to be better informed so they can take an active role in their lives," Ms. Rhodes says of the philosophy behind her work.

And it appears that her efforts are paying off. Kay Lawson, who is 50 years old, never imagined that she could learn to read at her age. "It surprised me, really," she recalled.

Many people feel that after a certain point there's no need to learn to read, or that they're too old to learn, said Ms. Rhodes.

Ms. Lawson agreed. "That's what I thought 'til



STAFF PHOTO BY DORI C. GURGANUS  
PRACTICING THEIR READING SKILLS are (from left) Brunswick Village residents Ruby Cheers, Ethel Watson, Mary Strickland, Kay Lawson and Ron Mullis.

"My goal is for them to be better informed so they can take an active role in their lives."

—Barbara Rhodes, ABE Instructor

Barbara encouraged me. I didn't think I could do it."

But she certainly can read now, and is considering trying for a high school equivalency certificate.

The BCC class is offered on a quarterly basis, utilizing instructional readers titled *My Country*. Residents sometimes attend for several years, or skip a few quarters and come back later in the year, Ms. Rhodes said.

Presently the residents taking the class in addition to Mullis and Ms. Lawson are Ethel Watson, Leon Walker, Mary Strickland, Ruby Cheers, Ryan Halecki, Annie

Clyde Bellamy, David Fuquay and Mary Holmes.

Similar courses are also offered through BCC at Shallotte Senior Center, the Southport Senior Nutrition Center, Ocean Trail Convalescent Center in Southport, and United Faith Church in Longwood.

At Brunswick Village, activities for residents such as this class become "as much a part of their treatment as diet and medication," said Ms. Rhodes.

Catherine Godley, BCC's basic skills program coordinator, said courses are designed to fit the needs of each

particular group.

"Life skills, is what you could call it," she said.

The four main goals of this continuing education program, also called Adult Basic Education, are reading, writing, math, and speaking skills. Persons with less than an eighth grade reading level qualify, Ms. Godley said.

At Brunswick Village, Ms. Rhodes can take pride in knowing that her students have even started using their reading skills to teach other residents.

"I'm so proud of them!" she beams. "They've just taken it upon themselves. That's really great because it gets people started and they can pass it on to someone else."

A chain reaction of sorts has developed, in what Ms. Rhodes calls the "Each One, Teach One," method, also known as the Laubach method.

Residents like Walker, Mullis and Ms. Lawson meet in the evening to share what they've learned with other residents. Walker takes attendance and gathers residents together for their sessions.

"They're really doing something great," says their instructor.

Also on Ms. Rhodes' agenda for Monday mornings is another reading class, but this one is geared toward older residents who desire stimulation from current events and an understanding of world news. They study a variety of newspapers and magazines provided by the facility.

Ms. Rhodes recalls being impressed by the perspective of older adults who can look back on all the different events in the Soviet Union, and weigh them against the present-day crumbling of that same government.

"We do a little bit of everything," she says, "and I even learn things from them!"

Brunswick Village administrator Tommy Miller speaks favorably of BCC's community service work. "I'm just really grateful to the college for offering the classes. I think we've got a real good program going here and they (the participants) do benefit from it."

For Ms. Rhodes, the goal is more than helping individuals gain the ability to read and write, or to make a purchase.

"We have to encourage them to think for themselves," she says. "It's the only way anyone can have any degree of control over their lives."

## SEASIDE CONDOS

# Project Is For The Birds

BY TERRY POPE

A new housing unit built in Seaside last week has 16 rooms, a large penthouse and decorative decks. Painted across the front are the words, "Home Tweet Home."

It's a cozy, simple condominium project near the beach—only it's for the birds.

Greg Bland and Josh Baker spent a weekend building the purple martin house, their first, in hopes of attracting the insect eaters to their backyard this spring. They are the sons of Cecil and Sandra Bland of Seaside.

"We wanted somewhere for the

martins to live," explained Bland, "because they eat the mosquitoes."

The eighth-graders at Shallotte Middle School erected the nesting house last week beside a swimming pool and a birdbath. Water attracts insects, which attract purple martins.

After reading columnist Bill Faver's article called "Getting Ready For Nesting Season" in the Jan. 30 issue of *The Brunswick Beacon*, the brothers spent much of the weekend hammering and sawing.

Faver wrote of the need to have nest boxes in place by mid-February in Brunswick County so birds taking advantage of warm spells of weather

can begin scouting for a nesting site.

Martins are distinguished by their bluish, black heads and back feathers. They are white underneath and along the tail. Within hours after placing the 16-room house atop an elevated pole in their backyard, Bland and Baker spotted four birds checking it out.

"They landed beside it and kind of looked at it," said Bland. "Then they flew away."

Hopefully to return later.

Martin houses need to be on a post or pipe at least 10 feet above the ground and need to be cleaned out after the nesting season. They

should be placed in an open area near water where insects gather. Birds will bypass houses that have not been cleaned out.

Faver also warned that martins may not come to a newly-erected house the first year, but those that migrate into Brunswick County by March will find it sooner or later.

Bland said he and Baker read a couple of books on how to build a birdhouse before designing their luxury model. The large room on the top floor, he said, is a "Presidential suite".

Reservations are now being accepted for the summer tourist season.



STAFF PHOTO BY TERRY POPE

ARCHITECTS AND BUILDERS Josh Baker (left) and Greg Bland designed this 16-room purple martin house, hoping it will attract birds for the spring nesting season.

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