

Heroine Fulfills Mission By Reaching Out To Others



"When you help others, something comes back to you — just when you need it!" proclaims Ruth Jackson, advocate for youth.

Mary Laeger-Hagemeister
Dauphin Co. Correspondent
HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.)
— The plaque reads, "Unsung Heroine, 1991, Ruth Jackson, Children and Youth Advocate in Central Pennsylvania. In appreciation of the contributions you have made to improve the quality of our community, and in recognition of your respect for each individual, the International Women's Day Coalition of Harrisburg offers you the Unsung Heroine Award with our deepest gratitude."

Ruth Jackson, home economics teacher at John Harris High School, Harrisburg, has been an advocate for children both on the job and in the community. The honor of unsung heroine, recently bestowed on her is a token of appreciation by her peers through NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) peers who nominated Ruth for this prestigious award.

In 1979, Ruth began a program titled "Deb-etts" which is open to girls from ages three to 16 years of age. "The purpose is to prepare young ladies for adulthood." At

age 16 they make their debut as young ladies. Between those years, the emphasis is placed on building positive self-esteem and leadership skills. Leadership is built with the older girls helping with the leadership role.

Being concerned with the image of African-Americans' skills lying in athletics only and not scholastics, Ruth joined forces with NAACP to begin a "mind Olympics." ACTLSO (Academic, Culture, Technical, Logical, Science, Olympics) philosophy is to go for the goal with your mind — use brain power. Students compete in brain Olympics at the local level with the winners advancing to Texas for the national competition as part of the Conference on Black Basic Education. Winners receive medals just like athletes do in their Olympic competition.

Newly organized is Ayudamos, which is Spanish for "we help." It is comprised of members from all class levels, providing they have good grades, interests that fit the mission and their behavior is upstanding.

Ruth's desire to help teen parents is also a vital part of her award. She has built a program at John Harris High School to give teen moms life skills, including parenting, decision-making, and

resource management. She has enlisted the volunteer help of a young male at Penn State Harrisburg who works with the often forgotten teen fathers. "We need to help all of them understand resources. I want kids to learn the value of earning their own money—real independent living," Ruth said.

She carries that desire beyond the school setting as well. Ruth is a Mentor Mother volunteer with the Penn State Cooperative Extension 4-H/Family Living program in Dauphin County. This program matches volunteer moms in the community with teen mothers as a support and mentoring to aid the teens with their parenting skills. Ruth was matched with a homeless teen this year. "Working with a homeless teen mother is a big challenge, but I know she needs my help," Ruth said.

When asked why she expends so much energy on youth, her eyes light up and a smile spreads across her face. "It's my little mission. I've never experienced failure when I'm working to help young people. The kids keep me young — they energize me!"

Her energies seem endless as she gives to youth on the job and in the community.

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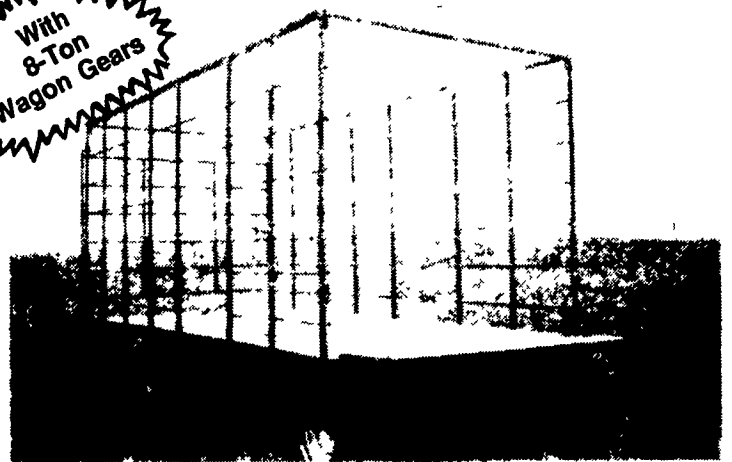
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Adam Newcomer Age 9

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