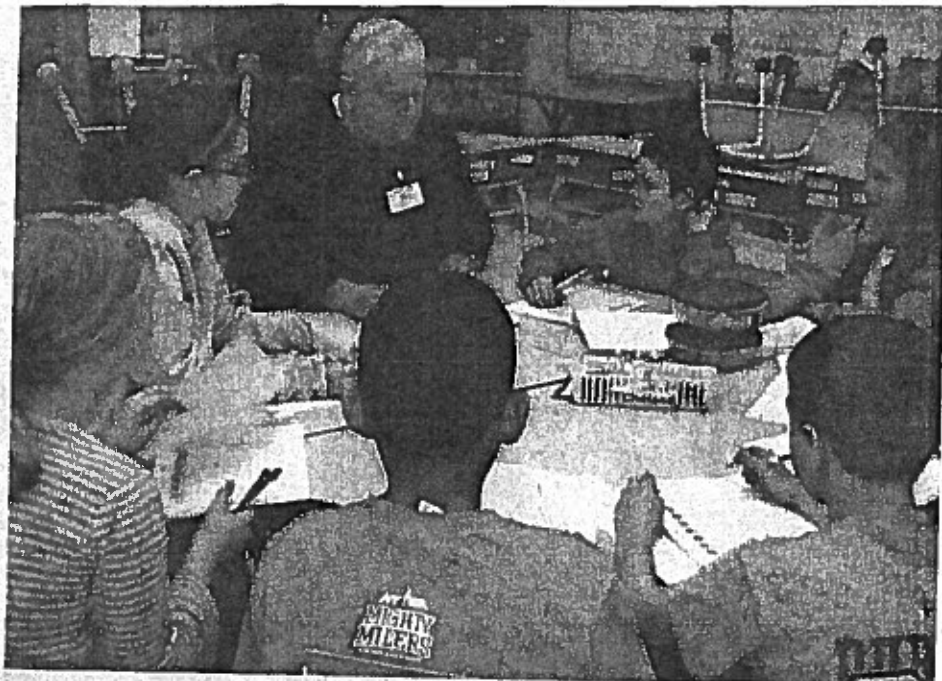


SCHOOL



Cory Willey

Fourth graders at Lee Elementary School and the seniors of the town's Council on Aging during a recent Bridges Together session.

Bridges Together program unites Lee Elementary fourth graders, local seniors

By Cory Willey

LEE — Difference can often divide people, especially those separated by a full generation. The fourth graders at Lee Elementary and the seniors of the town's Council on Aging, however, are proving that this generational gap can be bridged and in the process, a very special bond can be formed.

Since early January, a group of eight seniors have been meeting with the fourth grade class for an hour a week as part of a program called Bridges Together. Working in conjunction with Council on Aging Director Patricia DiGrigoli, Lee Elementary fourth grade teachers Ruth LeCompte, Trysta DeSantis and Leslie Hickey, have worked to bring the program to life for its first year.

The program itself is based on a workshop held by the organization of the same name, headed up by Andrea J. Fonte Weaver. The three fourth grade teachers attended training sessions through the Bridges Together organization, and through that came to form the program at the elementary school.

In the elementary school's iteration of the Bridges Together program, the fourth graders were split into groups

between the same eight seniors each week, working with them to foster a positive relationship between the young students and the local seniors.

"The same six to eight children were with the same adults for the 6 week period," explained LeCompte in an interview with the Record. "The kids developed a great rapport with the seniors."

LeCompte said that each session was focused on a different subject. One session saw the seniors explaining what school and life was like when they were children. The fourth graders then got to share their experience as a modern day student with the seniors. Another session saw the students discussing their skills with the seniors, who in turn were able to tell them about their past careers and give the students some advice on how they could turn their skills into a career.

"One of the seniors taught her kids about embroidery during the special skills session, and now those kids come in during their lunch and recess period to do embroidering," LeCompte said.

LeCompte was adamant that she would like to see the program continue in the future, saying she would like to expand it so the third through sixth grades could

participate. She noted that the students and seniors seemed to benefit greatly from it.

DiGrigoli agreed with LeCompte's sentiments, adding that it really is a unique way to give the seniors something to look forward to and get them involved in the community.

"The children and seniors have formed a special bond, the kind you might find between a grandparent and their grandchild," DiGrigoli said. She added that a few of the seniors became very attached to their group of children and were happy to participate.

The Bridges Together program is set to culminate on March 20 in an event held at the Council on Aging center at 9 a.m. LeCompte said that the children have prepared a couple of surprises for the seniors.

"It really is so moving," LeCompte said of the work the children have prepared. The event will also include a presentation of some of the work the children and the seniors have completed during their weekly sessions, as well as a video presentation and a photographic slideshow documenting their time spent together over these past six weeks.