

CLAYTON COUNTY NEWS DAILY

NOVEMBER 10, 2005

After-school program hosts open house tonight

By Jeffery Whitfield

Cameron Woods maintains that high grades have been the hallmark of his schoolwork. But the 8-year-old receives help with homework—something he has gotten every day since Sept. 12 when he began attending an after school program at Forest Park.

"If there is something I'm stuck on, they explain to me what I have to do to figure it out," said Woods, a third-grader at Fountain Elementary School in Forest Park. Woods said he recently has received help on his English homework.

Woods is one of 32 children that regularly attend the LifeShape Communities In Transformation after-school program at the First Baptist Church in Forest Park. Students in third through fifth grade have been going to the program on weekdays from 3 to 5 p.m. since its inception in September.

An open house for the after-school program will be held today from 5 to 6 p.m. at the First Baptist Church in Forest Park, which is located at 634 Main Street. A dinner reception catered by Chick-fil-A will be served at the event.

"We've invited educators, community leaders and parents," said Toni Branyon, director of LifeShape Communities In Transformation. The program, an initiative of LifeShape Inc., a non-profit group founded by Trudy Cathy, daughter of Chic-fil-A founder S. Truett Cathy, promotes academic achievement and character development among students.

"They (teachers) need the full support of the communities," said John White, executive director of LifeShape Inc.

"They can't do it alone."

Though the program was conceived only this year, Branyon said she hopes it will grow to include more students in future years.

"It's for the community to come to work together and work as a team," she said.

The after-school program is a resource for students considered "at-risk" and may be useful for children living in single-parent homes, Branyon said.

"We try to get to them before they get to middle school, before they get to a critical age as teenagers," she said.

When children arrive at the after-school program, they receive help from organizers who assist them with numerous subjects.

Children also are helped with subjects that are tested on the Criterion Referenced Competency Tests, standardized tests given to children in elementary and middle school grades. The exams test subjects such as math and language arts.

After academic work is complete, students often participate in games.

Cameron's mom Valerie said the program has been helpful to her, particularly after a full day of work. The elder Woods commutes to work at Georgia State University in Atlanta.

"I check his homework every night, but, while he's (at the after-school program) he gets his homework done," she said. "He has people to help him do it."

The 38-year-old has Cameron in the after-school program because she believes it is a positive environment for him.

She became aware of the program after her son brought home a flyer about it from school. Branyon said she has spoken with teachers from Hendrix Drive Elementary and Fountain Elementary about the program and received positive input.

Groups that work with or support the after-school program include First Baptist of Forest Park, St. Francis Anglican Church, Forest Park Police Department and Forest Park Library and the Forest Park Kiwanis Club.

For more information about the open-house, e-mail Branyon at tbranyon@LifeShape.org.