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Teacher's 'extra push' helps troubled teens

BY LARRY MUHAMMAD • LMUHAMMAD@COURIER-JOURNAL.COM • JULY 8, 2008

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Claude Spillman had graduated from Central High School, despite living apart from his parents, but he was struggling to get into college.

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Then he got help from Louisville educator Margaret Dunbar-Demaree.

"Ms. Demaree played the role of a mom away from home," said Spillman, a senior at Marshall University in Huntington, W.Va. "She was the extra push that helped me."

A special-education teacher at Central for 26 years, Dunbar-Demaree helped Spillman enroll in Fork Union Military Academy, a college preparatory school in Virginia, and raise his SAT score more than 200 points, from 730 to 960, using

books and sample tests bought at her own expense.

"This is my passion -- helping kids who cut up in class, don't want to follow directions and otherwise wouldn't make it," said Dunbar-Demaree, who mentors dozens of troubled teens and helps them improve academically through her nonprofit tutoring program, 1+1=U Inc.

Founded last year as a volunteer organization, 1+1=U is holding its first fundraiser, a benefit golf scramble at Glenmary Country Club in Louisville, July 24.

Rob McClain, a State Farm insurance agent who organized the event and is an official sponsor, said, "I understand where I was at 14, 15, 16 years old, and if you've achieved some success, you have to give back. So we're going to have an enjoyable day of golf, with giveaways, food and drink, and it's all to help the kids."

The 1+1=U program already has been awarded a \$2,500 matching grant by C.E. & S. Foundation, a Louisville-based philanthropic entity that supports education, quality-of-life and world-peace initiatives. To get the money, 1+1=U must raise \$7,500 from the golf scramble.

Bruce Maza, C.E. & S. Foundation executive director, said of the grant, "This was a very simple, direct grant for a project in which a community leader has risen up and is addressing an educational challenge, and we want to support it."

Through 1+1=U, youngsters receive intense, four-hour tutoring sessions every other Saturday in math, science and language arts. The program also assigns mentors who provide guidance and internships in chosen fields.

The driving force is Dunbar-Demaree, who had assembled an informal corps of volunteers long before 1+1=U was incorporated, personally soliciting about \$15,000 in scholarships.

"I ended up taking my last year's income-tax return and spent it on the Web site," she said. "I had to go out last summer, beating the pavement for people who would buy into my programs. But I have two kids at home, and I understand."

Dunbar-Demaree is a divorced mother of 18-year-old fraternal twins -- Devyn, enrolled in Vanderbilt University, and George, attending Joliet Community College in Illinois.

But somehow she makes time to rescue at-risk children whose own parents fall short for whatever reason.

"Visionary" is what she is called by Kentucky state Rep. Reginald Meeks, D-Louisville, in a testimonial letter, which concluded, "She is attempting to do for our children what parents are often unable to do."

She establishes personal relationships with the students she mentors and hand-picks the tutors.

LaVette Burnette, assistant professor at Middle Georgia College in Cochran, Ga., and a graduate of Central High School, gives Dunbar-Demaree credit for her success. "There are so many kids who come to her with problems, and she gives them her all. She was the first person to get my hair professionally done. She gave me money to buy my class ring. I am



By Sam Upshaw Jr., The Courier-Journal

Tutoring program founder Margaret Dunbar-Demaree worked with Cortez Mack, 16, at Central High.

1+1=U BENEFIT

Golf Scramble

When: July 24; lunch and late registration, 11:30 a.m.; tee time, 1 p.m.

Where: Glenmary Country Club, 10200 Glenmary Farm Drive.

Fees: \$80 per individual, \$320 for a four-person team. Includes lunch, golf cart and an assortment of five beverages. Sponsorships also available.

Information: www.1plus1equalsu.com; (502) 500-0433.

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Dunbar-Demaree said, "God puts us on this earth to see what you'll do with the talent he's given us. Are you going to keep it for yourself, or will you spread it around to help others? I know that's what I'm going to do."

Reporter Larry Muhammad can be reached at (502) 582-7091.

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