

# LOCAL NEWS | READING HELP

## Reading ASSIST holds the key to literacy

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Not even a steady rain could prevent volunteers, staff members and strong supporters of the Reading ASSIST Institute (RAI) from holding their annual Appreciation Luncheon for their volunteers and supporters on Friday, April 8 at the Waterfall Banquet and Conference Center in Claymont.

Reading ASSIST is a nonprofit organization that was established in 1989 that trains volunteer tutors and places them in Delaware schools to tutor students who have been identified as being at risk for reading failure. All training and services are free of charge.

If someone wants to become a Volunteer Tutor, they must have a minimum of a high school diploma and be willing to complete the 36 hours of required training. Volunteer tutors are also required to take refresher courses throughout the year. Tutors are then assigned to a school and see the children in need on a rotating basis.

The most unusual aspect to RAI and what makes it such a popular volunteer program is the diverse backgrounds of the volunteers themselves. Bob Christopher, who was recognized at the luncheon for his remarkable contributions to the organization, is a retired DuPont Engineer with a Bachelors degree in English and a Masters degree in Chemical Engineering.

"They come from all different walks of life," said Christopher. "Grandmothers, teachers, moms and corporate executives, all with a range of expertise."

Susan McGrath coordinated the luncheon. She has been a staff member for four years, but volunteered for six years prior to that.

"The volunteers are so incredibly dedicated," gushed McGrath. "That is why I love this event; we ask so much and they give us



Dolores Kern accepts the Betty Kane award from Kane's two daughters, Cathy Irwin, left, and Ellen Kane. DANIELLE BOUCHAT-FRIEDMAN PHOTO

even more."

Sen. Chris Coons was the keynote speaker for the afternoon, but was called back to Washington to deal with the looming budget crisis. Reading ASSIST also honored former state Sen. Nancy Cook for her history of support for our organization. The organization also paid special tribute to Betty Kane, a longtime supporter and one of the original tutors who passed away in October of last year. Reading ASSIST even developed an award in her honor in 2000, which is given to a volunteer who demonstrates "extraordinary volunteer service." This year the award went to Dolores Kern.

Renee Anderson, Marion Howell and Michael Friel all volunteer together as a team at Brandywood Elementary. All three had different reasons for joining the programs; Howell retired from nursing and saw an advertisement in the newspaper to help tutor children. She has been tutoring with RAI for 13 years.

"I am really glad that I did it," Howell said. "I love working with the children."

Anderson has a teaching background and has been tutoring for two years. Friel was

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an advertising manager at DuPont and started tutoring because of a more personal reason: his oldest grandson had trouble reading.

Stephen Reid, who heads RAI's Board of Directors, knows firsthand how well Reading ASSIST works. His son was diagnosed with dyslexia and was enrolled in the program in the first grade. By high school, he was making Dean's List.