

Smythe goes back to school

Retired educator continues to volunteer

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Sandra Smythe worked hard her entire life. Her career path led her on a journey of writing and teaching that spanned over half a century.

So you'd think when she retired as an educator at The Seven Hills School in 2011, she would want to kick back and relax.

Not exactly.

Right after retirement, the Hyde Park resident embarked on her next adventure – volunteering to teach a journalism class at Oyler High School. She says couldn't say no to the chance to mold, shape and educate students in Lower Price Hill, the neighborhood in which she grew up.

As a former English and journalism teacher, Smythe loved the idea of going home, but it was the promise of reviving the school newspaper that really tugged at her heartstrings. It was Smythe who, as a student there in the 1960s, founded the paper *The Griffin* at Oyler.

She believed she could resurrect *The Griffin*, which had been published sporadically since, and at the same time teach a new set of skills that would be helpful throughout her students' lives.

Under her careful tutelage, the newspaper evolved into a focal point of the entire Lower Price Hill



Retired teacher Sandra Smythe, 78, works with Alexis Gibson, 17, on *The Oyler Griffin*, the monthly publication from Oyler Community Schools.

community with a readership of 2,400. The paper, named for the mythological winged half-eagle, half-lion creature that adorns the façade of the school, is now a must-read paper for students and area residents, focusing on not just school issues, but community, national and international issues as well.

For that exhausting and relentless work, the 77-year-old earned the John E. Pepper Education Community Service Award, given to an outstand-

ing school volunteer. The award is given in partnership with The Cincinnati Association, the University of Cincinnati, Northern Kentucky University and Xavier University.

Smythe grew up on Hatmaker Street, the same street on which the school sits. She says it was a blue-collar town, but a thriving community.

"The communal sense in that little four- or five-street neighborhood is still there, and it's a lovely part of the Oyler community," Smythe said. "I

and all of the people who work with these kids fall in love with them. They are wonderful kids and they're truly interesting and bright and they learn well."

Justin Leach, the assistant principal at Hyde Park School and Mt. Washington School helped found the journalism program when he was still a teacher at the school.

It hasn't gone unnoticed, he says, that a good portion of her journalism students are going on to graduate high school and attend college. For many of them, he adds, they are the first in their families to do so.

Daniel Barnes, editor-in-chief of *The Griffin*, has worked his way up the ranks at the newspaper the last four years. Now a senior, Barnes will head to the University of Cincinnati in the fall to pursue a business degree. No one in his family has had that chance.

"(Smythe) really helped me get on the right track to do what I need to do to work towards a brighter future," Barnes said, adding that Smythe has helped him work on his professionalism and his public speaking skills.

"A big part of why I work so hard is seeing that she doesn't have to do this, but this is something she wants to do," Barnes said. "Not everyone wakes up that early when they don't have to and drives that far when they don't need to."

Smythe returns the compliment. "The drug of choice for any teacher is to watch kids develop and succeed and," she says, "that's what keeps you going."