Breaux Bridge High program matches seniors with freshmen

By ANGELA SIMONEAUX

REX BRAEUX - If they’re lucky, most high school freshmen can expect seniors to ignore them, or to pick on them if they aren’t lucky. But every freshman at Breaux Bridge High School has a senior who can go to help, advice and reassurance.

Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Breaux Bridge High is the brainchild of Assistant Principal Verna Narcisse. Narcisse, in her second year at BBHS, is in charge of discipline. After her first year there ended, she looked back at the work she had done to get a handle on the discipline problems at the school.

“I noticed that a lot of the problems were with freshmen,” Narcisse said. “So I sat down and tried to think of a way to make my life easier.”

Narcisse’s idea was to team each freshman with a senior mentor. “Freshmen usually have no sense of belonging. They may be withdrawn, but when their big brother or big sister says hello to them, they put their chest out. It makes them feel good because they know this senior,” Narcisse explained.

Fifty seniors were selected as mentors this year. Each has five or six freshmen to watch over. They are responsible for learning the freshmen’s names and something about them. The mentors try to help the freshmen make the adjustment to high school, explained Lauren Cassel, a big sister in the program.

Narcisse’s plan ended up being a big success. “It’s really helping our freshmen,” she said. “It would probably help on any campus.”

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Breaux Bridge High School seniors Lauren Cassel, 17, left, and Elijah Lewis, 17, pose with their freshmen little brothers and sisters, who are, from left, Sara Boudreaux, 14; Murphy Williams, 14; Kellie Douet, 14; Joseph Fitch, 15, and Jonathan Zenon, 14.

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—This is a big school, and sometimes the older ones tend to pick on the younger ones,” Cassel said. “We held meetings to learn more about them, and we talk to them to see how they are doing, if they need anything.”

Elijah Lewis, a big brother in the program, helps his little brothers and sisters stay on the right path.

“The first week of school, I helped them find their classes, let them know who to talk to, how to stay out of trouble,” Lewis said. “I’ll help them out with anything they need, even advice on women.”

—Lewis, 17, said he has won over all figured out. He also said he helps his little brothers by giving them advice on how to talk to girls, but also how to treat each other.

“Murphy Williams, Lewis’ little brother, said Lewis ‘gives me good advice.’

—He tells me how to act around girls, and other people, too,” Williams said. “Any time I’m ups, he’ll tell me to calm out. In junior high, everybody’s kind of loud, but here we have to be quiet. We have to grow up, and learn responsibility.”

—Williams had no idea what he would do without his big brother.

“I think I would be in a lot of trouble by now,” he said.

—Jonathan Zenon, another of Lewis’ little brothers, said Lewis keeps tabs on his behavior.

“The first day I come here, he told me to be good, to make sure I’m respectful to my teachers, respectful to other students,” Zenon said. “He told me I should be nice to the girls, be nice to my friends, and stay out of trouble; to do what he does.”

Zenon said he knew who Lewis was, but didn’t know him well before the program started.

—He asked about what I’m interested in, and I asked about him,” Zenon said. “I think of Elijah in my role model now.”

Cassel, too, said Lewis is the big brother she never had.

—Cassel really helped her because she missed orientation,” Cassel said.

“I asked her about school, and about where my classes are, and I know where my classes are, and I know somebody here,” Boudreaux said.

“Kellie Douet, another of Cassel’s little sisters, said Casel really helped her because she missed orientation.

—I asked her about school, and about where my classes were,” Douet said. “This school can be kind of intimidating.”

—Joseph Fitch, Cassel’s little brother, said he got good advice on how to avoid trouble.

—He told me how to get around, who is good to hang around, and who I shouldn’t hang around, so

I wouldn’t get mixed up with people who will get me into trouble,” Fitch said.

—This is a big school, he said.

“You can get lost real easy, so I asked her how to get around,” he said.

Each senior must learn several things about his little brothers and sisters, and vice versa, Narcisse said. They are responsible for letting her know what they have learned.

—Joseph Fitch, another of Lewis’ little brothers, said he knows that Lewis plays basketball and piano.

“He showed me how to meet people, how to talk to girls,” he said.

Narcisse said she already can see a difference in the way incoming freshmen are handling the adjustment of high school.

—with the seniors helping them find their classes, and little problems, it makes a difference,” she said. “Sometimes the adjustment is hard on the timid kids, but if their big brother or big sister is on-site, it makes them proud.”

Narcisse said she picked the seniors who will be mentors, and sets them up with freshmen they may already know. She already has volunteered for next year’s program.

“It’s really helping our freshmen,” she said. “It would probably help on my campus.”