

WELLSVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Volunteers go one-on-one with students

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BY LARA BRENCKLE

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The workday whistle has blown at Pennex Aluminum in Wellsville for accountant Liz Calaman, but the York resident isn't ready to head home just yet.

She leaves the office and goes to Wellsville Elementary School, where for 50 minutes once a week she and five other Pennex employees wedge into grade-school-sized chairs to tutor students in a program that pairs community leaders with struggling students.

Calaman is working with fourth-grader Zach Stauffer, 11, on spelling and science. Zach has high hopes, saying he wants to "bring my grades up to, like, 100 or 90 for the whole grade because I would be able to pass this year."

The decision to volunteer was easy, Calaman said. "It's fun to help the kids, and God knows I needed it when I was their age."

Marc Anderson, in his first year as Wellsville's principal, resurrected the program. Pennex was immediately receptive, he said.

"It's really important for the community to feel ownership of the school," Anderson said. For now, the program is open to six children selected by their teachers. To qualify, the students had to be falling behind in one or more subject and be willing to accept help. Teachers set the lessons based on each child's needs, and the tutors are there to coach them through the difficult parts.

Eventually, Anderson said, he would like to create opportunities for other volunteers to tutor more children. Before taking over at Wellsville, Anderson was assistant principal at Northern High School. He said he's seen what happens to kids who lose interest in school.

"If I can help those kids catch up now, then they're ready for middle school and then high school," he said. "They won't drop out or not graduate on time." Deb Stoll of Wellsville said she works every night with her son, Joseph, 7, on reading, spelling and math.

Even though her son has had only two sessions with his tutor, she can see it's helped. "He learns more when he's one-on-one, with someone explaining things to him," Stoll said. "He doesn't always want to do things for Mom and Dad, but he will do them for someone else."

Dawn Wuorinen of Dover, a human resources assistant at Pennex, said she understands that line of thinking. "Sometimes, when [they are learning from] somebody they don't know, they like to show off what they do know," Wuorinen said.

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