

THE ITAWAMBA COUNTY TIMES

"The Only Newspaper in The World That Cares Anything About Itawamba County!"

A Journal Publishing Company product

Itawamba360.com

Wednesday, December 17, 2008

Mantachie Elementary principal honored with regional award

By **ADAM ARMOUR**
Staff Writer

"You know, I was a Headstart kid at one time," Principal Jamie Dill said from behind his desk at Mantachie Elementary School. Sitting atop it was the Region V. Mississippi Action for Progress James W. Hunt Award. Dill's smile could be seen through the transparent glass and etched lettering of the award.

"I realize now what kind of chance being in Headstart gave me," Dill continued. "It gave me a lot of background knowledge before I started first grade ... What little time they did have with us helped us grow and gave us the kind of skills we needed to do well in first grade. I think we were well prepared because of Headstart."

Dill is a believer in the Headstart program. A frequent visitor to the Mantachie Headstart, Dill's passion for education earned him both the respect of its teachers and the aforementioned award, given annually to a person who has displayed a dedication to working with Headstart students.

"Mr. Dill has gone above and beyond his duty for us," said Mantachie Headstart Administrator Phyllis Kitchens. "He's wonderful to work with and a great person."

even brought pencil grips in order to show the kids how to properly hold a writing utensil.

"It may seem like a lot of little things, but these are really big things to them and us," he said. "Anything that we can possibly do to make that transition easier we try to do."

He offered another example: "For instance, at Headstart, they were just writing on plain paper. There were no boundaries," Dill explained. "So, we asked if they could start using lined paper, which they are now. Little things like that are like leaps and bounds for us.



DILL

"I was just speechless for once. But, I share that award with all of those people who work at Headstart. Without them working with our children, they wouldn't be where they are before they get to us."

Jamie Dill
Mantachie Elementary Principal

According to Kitchens, Dill was selected from nominees in each of MAP's 22 counties of coverage. He received his award on Nov. 24 to great surprise and less fanfare than he likely deserves.

"I felt quite honored," Dill admitted. "I was just speechless for once. But, I share that award with all of those people who work at Headstart. Without them working with our children, they wouldn't be where they are before they get to us. That's why they call it Headstart: They're giving themselves a chance to be prepared before they come to us."

He added that the receipt of the award was more than just an honor, it was a symbol reaffirming that the working relationship between the elementary school and Headstart program is a good thing.

"Sometimes we question whether or not we're going in the right direction,"

Dill explained. "To receive that reward tells me that we're doing enough to get to know those students and involve them. We're moving in the right direction."

For years, Dill has developed a close working relationship with Mantachie's Headstart facility. He has tried to not only get to know the kids who will soon attend his school but also prepare them for what's to come.

"When they come from Headstart, most of them come to kindergarten here. If they've built some background in what we're doing here, it helps the teachers and kids," Dill said.

He and other teachers also take Headstart parents packets about what to expect when their children start kindergarten, make monthly visits to read to Headstart students and once

See **Principal** page 8A

keeping their writing between the lines."

But, it's not really what Dill and his faculty have done for Headstart that garnered him accolades but his belief in what Headstart's teachers do for the children under their tutelage and what the program itself offers to a budding mind.

"It's not just about education. It's about social development," he said. "They need to know how to get along with each other ... and know that there's an expected way for them to behave. It's setting down guidelines and establish-

kindergarten education programs and a focus on improving the overall education system in the United States, programs like Headstart will play an increasingly important role in the coming years.

"With all the changes in the economy and different ways in which the curriculum changes within our schools, Headstart's going to provide those kids with a jump on what's expected of them in public schools," he said, adding, "It's doing exactly what its name implies: Giving those students a head start."