



Photo by Ryan Dearing

# Everything You Read

## Teens for Literacy fosters leadership and involvement among inner-city school children

Story By Jonathan Brennan

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llen Berger is flipping through the pages of a photo album. He is reveling in the wonderful beginning of an extraordinary program. Berger, The Heckert Professor of Reading and

Writing at Miami, has coordinated one of the most innovative and successful programs to date dealing with the problem of illiteracy.

Teens for Literacy is a program designed to foster a love for the written word. In the program teenagers in a given school act as tutors, mentors, and advocates for literacy. They are given the freedom to design and execute anything that fosters or encourages reading.

According to Berger, "the teens have developed a Big Brother/Big Sister Reading Program, selected and displayed posters in school corridors before during and after Right to Read Week. They have read with little children, tutored their peers (including the multi-handicapped) before, during and after school with books and computer software, helped other teachers, and read to senior citizens. Some have 1,000 Minute Reading Clubs. One team designed and arranged for the setting up of a billboard encouraging

Antonio Brown, a student who was involved at Cincinnati's inner-city Porter Middle School, tutored first grade youngsters at nearby Hays Elementary School as part of the project. He beams with satisfaction as he watches youngsters gain in skills and confidence.

"This one little girl won't let me read to her anymore. She wants to read to herself now," he says.

"It's been a real eye opener to see kids my age in my own school who can't read," says Brad Maple, who helps developmentally handicapped students at Vail Middle School.

The program currently operates in six local schools: Porter Middle School (Cincinnati), Peoples Middle School (Cincinnati), Gamble Middle School (Cincinnati), Schwab Middle School (Cincinnati), Garfield Junior High School (Hamilton) and Verity Middle School (Middletown). Each school has at least one team, which consists of four or five students and a teacher who advises the project.

"This goes beyond just being a volunteer. It gives youngsters a sense that they can do things— that they can be change agents. There are very few opportunities in the typical school system for that to take place," says Deanna Spring, supervisor of English and