

## NEWS

### Seniors learning to read

- **By BRE HARRIS**
- *LSU student writer*
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Four atypical students sat around a table eagerly awaiting a reading lesson.

“I came here because I want to learn how to read and write,” George Spann, 85, said.

After his wife died of cancer, Spann decided to go back to school and is now a member of a reading class of eight students who range in age from their 50s to their late 90s.

“Originally it was an emerging readers class,” Pam Creighton, executive director of Adult Literacy Advocates of Greater Baton Rouge, said of the Senior Scholar Program.

Creighton said that funding was cut for the program for the older readers to focus on people who get their General Educational Development.

The seniors wanted to learn to read, but most of them weren’t interested in getting GEDs, Creighton said.

After the funding cut, Creighton said she felt it was important to keep the class going, because the seniors were so “eager to learn.” She said she wasn’t going to “kick them out,” because they were among the most faithful students.

Creighton found volunteers to teach the class.

Some of these people have endured lifetimes of having to cope with not being able to even read street signs, she said.

When the program moved to a different location, a teacher got on a bus with the seniors and showed them how to get to the new location, Creighton said.

“It would have been traumatic to cancel the class,” Michelle Vining, volunteer coordinator, said of the class that is taught on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

The seniors smile and laugh during the class. Some have never been to school before. Each student has his or her own goal in mind.

“I knew how to write but I didn’t know how to read,” Elnora Hall, 79, said.

Josephine Selders, 75, has been attending the class for almost two years. She wants to be able to better help the children in the foster grandparents program she participates in.

“I want to learn how to read the newspaper,” Rosalie Robinson, 73, said, adding that she also wants to be able to read her Bible.

Jennifer Mayberry, a volunteer tutor who has been working at the center for a year, said the most difficult part of teaching the class is that everyone is at a different level.

The challenge is trying to keep class interesting for the more advanced students while not discouraging the others, she said.

“It’s a good reason to get up (in the morning). These guys are great,” Mayberry said.



RICHARD ALAN HANNON/The Advocate

Volunteer Stella Jackson, left, works with student George Spann, 85, on April 15 during an elderly reading program at Adult Literacy Advocates in Baton Rouge.

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