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Shady Oaks helps students catch up

SCHOOLS

**By Larry Rea,
Special to Cordova Appeal
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Shady Oaks students (from left) Timothy Stevenson, 12, Lane Ferguson, 11, Gunnar Holder, 9, Christa Kieffer, 9, and school founder/director Sue Martin are ready for a learning experience. Chris Gadd

"They just don't have the confidence and they don't realize that they are smart. Their behavior will change. Their attitude will change. It just gets really exciting."

Sue Martin

Founder and director of Shady Oaks School

Remedial tutoring gets kids to work through challenges

As the founder and director of Shady Oaks School in Cordova, Sue Martin says all of her students are special.

The same thing might be said of Martin, according to the hundreds of students, parents and friends and student relatives she has touched since she came up with the idea the school 31 years ago.

This is what's known as a remedial school.

"Our goal is to remediate the children," Martin said. "To catch them up to where they need to be. Some of them are very smart children. They are not retarded children. They just cannot make it in a big class. Some of the children, we can 'catch them up' and they go right to another school where they need to be."

Martin, a former teacher in the Memphis and Shelby County school systems, had been tutoring children, but she couldn't find a school where "they could individualize for children, like tutoring, except at the school. What we do is really individualize, tailor-make everything for the children."

At Shady Oaks School, located in St. Luke's Lutheran Church on Germantown Parkway, the classes are made up of 11 or 12 students ranging from first through the eighth grade. There are only three classes at the school, which has an enrollment of 36. Keeping a small enrollment is part of Martin's original goal. Each

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class is grouped according to age for social reasons. Ages range from 7 through 14.

"Children come here who have learning difficulties and ADD (attention deficit disorder)," Martin said. "The ADD children are very distractible and so that's why it's really good because we're a small school. We have a unique situation. We have children that if they need to they can go to a table in the hall and they can take a partner with them and work out in the hall work or somewhere else.

"Even in a small classroom, if they are distracted or can't sit still that long, they can walk up and down the hall and then come back."

In other words, the students get what Martin calls "a lot of freedom" to move around.

During her time as a teacher in the regular school system, Martin knew there was a need for a specialized school for students who needed individualized help.

Martin teaches the class for older students, which includes seventh- and eighth-graders.

Each class has a teacher, along with an assistant.

"If you were to come out to our school, say in the morning, you'd probably see her (assistant) sitting out in the hall with maybe two or three children that need reinforcement or drill of that type thing," Martin said.

Class time is from 8:15 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Martin was born and raised in Memphis. She attended White Station High and Hutchison School and got her college degree in education at what was then Memphis State.

Two of Martin's three daughters are involved in education -- Suzanne Padgett, 35, who teaches Spanish at Shady Oaks, and Pam Patterson, 32, who is married, lives in Germantown and is high school guidance counselor at Hutchison School.

This is a pay-to-attend state accredited school with certified instructors. Tuition is \$650 per month or \$6,500 for the school year. Students come from as far away as Mississippi and Arkansas.

Since the school moved to Cordova in the summer of 2003, it has gotten a lot of students from Cordova and Bartlett. The school had been located for about 10 years at a Lutheran church on Mendenhall in southeast Memphis. When that church closed, the school moved to its present location.

Not that the school is affiliated with the Lutheran church.

Martin is a member of Bellevue Baptist.

"We do have close connection with the church (St. Luke Lutheran Church) as far as they enjoy participating with us," she said. "Sometimes they send tutors over from the church. Members of the church come over and help us tutoring one-on-one children. One of the (church) members came and did

physical education with our students. They have a really nice gym. Last year they built a huge playground."

The parents or guardians of perspective students usually call the school first for information. Martin mails them a brochure. The school has a Web site (*shadyoaksmemphis.com*), which Martin's son-in-law is reconstructing.

After all these years, Martin, who lives in East Memphis, said her enthusiasm for the school hasn't changed.

In fact, it's gotten more passionate.

"It gets more exciting every year," she said. "It really does. To see children come to us without self-confidence. Their parents come to me and tell me, 'You know, I see so much more confidence in this child now. This child is so happy.' The child may have been picked on at another school because he or she didn't have the confidence to stand up for themselves. The parents tell me, 'He's a different child.'"

Many of Martin's students come to Shady Oaks because of past difficulties in a regular classroom at another school.

"They just don't have the confidence and they don't realize that they are smart," she said. "Their behavior will change. Their attitude will change. It just gets really exciting."

What's really exciting for Martin is when past students return to thank her.

We're talking about former students who were at the school years and years ago.

"That's exciting," Martin said.

Plus, there's the satisfaction of working with her students.

"To tell you the truth I was kind of bored (during the holiday break)," she said with a laugh. "You get used to being in a position where you are helping people and that makes you feel so good. When I'm sitting around (at home) I'll say, 'I can't wait to get back to school.'"

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