

## **Briarwood volunteer honored for selfless service and contributions**



Before the staff and students arrive at Briarwood Elementary School, volunteer Julian Underwood is there.

And he stays throughout the day to help with breakfast and lunch lines as well as other in-school activities. When he's not in classes helping, he's outside sprucing up the landscaping.

That's why Principal Olivia Roberson Givens nominated the 85-year-old retiree for the 2006 Nine Who Care Award. On Sept. 13, WSOC-TV Channel 9 honored Underwood and eight others at a luncheon recognizing their "selfless service and extraordinary contributions to their communities."

Principal Givens said he's an ever-present help.

"We are really blessed to have him here at Briarwood," she said. "Nominating him was just one small way of letting him know how much we appreciate what he does each day."

Underwood arrives at Briarwood Elementary at 6:30 a.m. each school day. He welcomes staff, students and parents with a warm greeting and contagious smile, holding the door open or assisting them with whatever they may be carrying.

After his greetings and assisting with breakfast, he changes clothes and works on the school's landscaping. He planted most of the flower gardens that surround the school and he secured grants that furnished Briarwood's playground equipment and park benches.

At lunchtime, Underwood changes clothes again and returns to assist with cafeteria monitoring. He's kept that routine for about 20 years.

"I really wanted to be a schoolteacher," he said. "My father was a sharecropper and I knew I couldn't afford college. Since I couldn't be a teacher, this is the nearest thing to it."

In addition to volunteering, Underwood established The Julian Underwood Scholarship at the school. Each year, a boy and girl receive a savings bond that he hopes they use to further their education.



"I just want at them to get the education I didn't get," he said.

Though he never became a teacher, Underwood has touched many lives at Briarwood.

"The kids come in with their outstretched arms looking for love and I just love them right back," he said. "I know this is where the good lord wants me."