



CLEMSON
No. 12 Tigers
run over Jackets
SPORTS / 1B



ACCESSIBILITY
Sumter's 9th annual
installation art
project brings
cultural exchange
SUMTER LIFE / 1C

GET SPOOKY!

Does Sumter have any
ghosts? If you know
of a ghostly
local
legend, share
it with us. The
Item is planning
a feature on Sumter
ghost lore and needs
your help. Send
responses to Crystal
Owens at
cowens@theitem.com
or call her at (803)
774-1270.

TIME TRAVEL

Elloree Heritage
Museum and Cultural
center presents **"A WALK
BACK IN TIME"**-- a guided
tour of the town in
period costumes circa
1886-1900. Tickets are
\$10 per person and
includes museum
admission.

DEATHS

Judy Albrighton
William Blanding
Linton Damon
Pamela Halley
Roosevelt Hodges Sr
Ruby J. Partin
Leroy A. Pringle
Ellnora S. Slater
Constantine Y. Stevens
LeRoy W. Wells

— PAGE 10A

INDEX

6 SECTIONS / 52 PAGES

Agriculture	5D
Business	1D
Classifieds	1E
Daily Planner	6A
Education	7D
Entertainment	1F
Opinion	4D
Outdoor	10B
Public Record	3E
Real Estate	2E

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SUMTER, S.C. — \$1.25

WEATHER
DREARY
Mostly
cloudy with
a couple
showers.
Details on
page 6A.
HIGH: 73 LOW: 49

AN EXTENDED SERIES

THE IMPACT OF POVERTY

Among the 21 most affluent nations, the United States has the highest percentage of poor children, nearly twice that of the next country in line. Experts agree that one of the shortest routes these kids can take out of poverty is a good education.



Photos by Chris Moore / The Item

Fannie Galloway strives to make sure her granddaughters work hard in school so they can get a good education. Experts agree she's doing the single best thing she can do to give them a chance to find a way out of poverty.

How do you get out of poverty? STUDY, STUDY, STUDY

By **MARY DOLAN**
Item Staff Writer

Regina and Rochelle Milton keep their perfect attendance certificates and honor roll merits in two brightly colored paper folders. Fannie Galloway hopes one day to be able to afford frames so she can proudly display the tokens of her granddaughters' success in school — but right now, keeping food on the table takes priority.

Galloway, 57, serves as parent to 9-year-old Regina, 13-year-old Rochelle and their older brother Chris, 18, because her daughter — their mother — has opted out of playing a pivotal role in their lives.

With only a disability check, less than \$100 in food stamps, a Social Security check and a small amount from the Department of Social Services, Galloway struggles to keep her family together, safe, clothed, fed and educated each month.

"It's just ... it's just rough, I tell you, because trying to raise three different ages here, it's just really difficult, and trying to keep food and stuff in here — it's like, instead of going up, I'm going down more and more every day," Galloway said.

Galloway and her three grandchildren live off of less than \$20,000 a year — under the federal poverty line for a family that size.

Serving basic needs such as putting food on the table, keeping the water and electricity turned on and keeping the three grandchildren clothed are Galloway's top priorities. But close behind that is her insistence that they get an education.

She hopes one day they're able to have a better life than she and most others in her family have had.

THE LINK BETWEEN POVERTY AND EDUCATION

"One of the biggest challenges South Carolina faces is trying to help all students who are living in poverty," said Inez Tenenbaum, state superintendent of education. "People ... do not realize the degree and the pervasiveness of poverty in our state."

She noted that in half of all schools in the state, more than two-thirds of the students qualify for free- or reduced-price meals. More than half of all students are eligible for Medicaid.

So what does that mean for educators? School officials — both local and statewide — say that coming from a background of poverty makes succeeding in school far more difficult. These kids tend to come to school less prepared than their peers and find themselves playing catch-up.

"One of the biggest problems I think that children who live in poverty ... experience is a lack of the background information that is expected when you arrive at school, the 'middle class background' information," said Dr. Tammy Pawloski, director of the Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty. "They don't know how to exist in a middle-class school."

The center is a program devoted solely to teaching teachers about the impact of poverty on learning and motivation.

Sumter School District 17 Superintendent Dr. Zona Jefferson agrees this is the challenge her district is presented with. While their peers come from homes with books, magazines and newspapers, children from impoverished homes often have nothing to read. Their parents don't read to them — either because they can't or simply don't choose to — and there's nothing to encourage them to learn how.

So these children come to school already behind because they haven't had many learning experiences at home; they're basically focused on survival, educators say.

It's clear when looking at state test scores such as the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test that poverty and academic success are linked. It seems no coincidence that in school districts with a higher tax base and per-capita income — Lexington School District 1 and Pickens County School District, for example — students performed at a higher level than did those in Clarendon School District 1 and Lee County School District.

This year in Clarendon 1, students met the standards in only 11 of 24 categories. (That means that half of the students scored basic or above in those categories.)



ABOUT THE SERIES:
"The Impact of Poverty" is a month-long look at poverty in our community.

COMING THURSDAY:
In some towns, the lines between rich and poor neighborhoods is clearly drawn. In the rural South, poverty is more pervasive and the lines more blurred.

GET INVOLVED:
We invite reader participation in this public dialogue. Tell us how you would fight poverty. Check out the reader poll at www.theitem.com under "Local News" or write a letter to the editor.

**DAY 5:
EDUCATION
IS KEY**



Galloway walks her granddaughters down the hall after school. Regina and Rochelle Milton know they're expected to work hard academically.

SEE POVERTY ON PAGE 8A

Woman survives wreck

*Husband, friend die
after car hits bridge*

By **JOE PERRY**
Item Staff Writer

A Kingstree woman is in stable condition at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, having survived "with the grace of God" an early Saturday morning single-car wreck in Clarendon County that claimed the lives of her husband and one of his good friends, she said.

Clarendon County Deputy Coroner Bucky Mock said Heyward Arthur Graham, 62, of 85 Latimore Ave. in Kingstree, was driving a 1987 Volkswagen Jetta on McIntosh Road about 3 a.m. when he apparently lost control of the car, hit a bridge and overturned into the water, killing himself and front-seat passenger John Allen Griffin, 41, of 928 McIntosh Road in Kingstree.

Back-seat passenger Christine Griffin, 37, was fully ejected from the vehicle and suffered a broken pelvis and broken legs, she said.

Mock said rescue personnel got the call about the wreck just before 8 a.m.

SEE **WRECK**, PAGE 10A



Photo provided

The heavily damaged car involved in a single-vehicle wreck is seen in Clarendon County below the bridge it hit. The driver and front-seat passenger died in the crash, but a woman in the back seat was ejected and is in stable condition Saturday.

Lee officers ask council for salary change

By **RANDY BURNS**
Item Staff Writer

BISHOPVILLE — A lack of a salary scale and subsequent low pay in the Lee County Sheriff's Department is causing some officers to find employment elsewhere.

"I have officers who are hard working and underpaid," said Lee County Sheriff E.J. Melvin. "My job is to take care of my guys. It's very important for the department to have a salary scale. Officers come and work for three or four years and leave for higher salaries. And I don't blame them. They have to provide for their families."

Maj. Daniel Simon of the sheriff's department said officers have received a 4 percent pay raise in the past three years while the cost of living has gone up 18 percent. The beginning salary for officers is \$22,000, he said.

"The biggest problem we have is we don't have a pay scale," Simon said. "Our beginning salaries are not that bad. But we have officers with 15 to 20 years of experience who are not making much more than those starting out in other places." Simon said the department currently has two openings after recently losing one officer to Sumter County.

"Our officers don't complain, but it's just a matter of time that some will find a job that pays more," he said.

SEE **SALARY**, PAGE 10A



MELVIN



SIMON

EDUCATION BY THE NUMBERS



By MARY DOLAN
Item Staff Writer

Nearly one-fourth of all the children in South Carolina live in poverty — 23 percent.

These children come from an array of backgrounds: There are those who have homes but have little or none of the material possessions their peers have. Some live with two or three other families in cramped mobile homes. Some live in what can only be called shacks with no running water or electricity. Still others are homeless and don't know where they're going to sleep each night.

Those 23 percent of the 1 million children living in the Palmetto State face obstacles the other 77 percent can likely not even begin to comprehend. Many are hungry. Others are confronted with the effects of unemployment, drug use, gang activity and crime. Most will start school well behind their peers.

Educators say that children who have more resources may come to school excited to see class-

mates or nervous about their performance on a test, while children of poverty tend to be thinking about anything *but* school. Instead, they say, these kids are worried about whether anyone will be home when they get there in the afternoon. They're wondering if they're going to have anything to eat for dinner that night. And they're hoping they're not going to be cold when they go to sleep.

Because of the rate of poverty and other related issues, the 2006 Kids Count report ranks South Carolina 47th among the 50 states in the nation in regard to child well-being.

Locally, Clarendon County has the fourth highest percentage in the state of children living in poverty — 30.3 percent. Lee County fares only slightly better with 27.8 percent, while 23.2 percent of all the children in Sumter County find themselves living in poverty. Pickens has the lowest percentage in the state — 14.4 — and Allendale has the highest — 35.4.

And by almost any reckoning, Clarendon School District 1 and the Lee school district are the two with the highest levels of poverty both locally and statewide.

POOR STUDENTS

One way to determine the economic status of students within a particular district is to look at how many qualify for free- or reduced-price lunches, as calculated by the federal government through Title 1 funding. Across the state, about 60 percent of students eat free or reduced-price lunches.

How do local districts fare?

Clarendon District 1 has the highest number — 94.65 percent qualify. Superintendent Dr. Rose Wilder said the number is so high and the district receives so much funding for those lunches, it's able to offer the other 5 percent a free lunch, too.

Lee comes in right behind, with 93.64 percent of its students qualifying. All of the others are higher

than the state average except Clarendon School District 3 in Turberville:

- Clarendon 2 — 73.69 percent
- Sumter 2 — 69.65 percent
- Sumter 17 — 65.74 percent
- Clarendon 3 — 59.71 percent

The state Department of Education also calculates a poverty index for each school district by combining figures for free/reduced lunch eligibility and Medicaid eligibility. This figure allows the department to compare districts when the state issues district report cards, detailing their statistical makeup and academic performance on various tests. The local district's poverty indexes are:

- Clarendon 1 — 96.47 percent
- Lee — 93.38 percent
- Clarendon 2 — 83.94 percent
- Sumter 2 — 76.1 percent
- Sumter 17 — 69.36 percent
- Clarendon 3 — 67.75 percent

POOR COUNTIES

Other statistics combine to paint a more complete picture of the area's poverty.

Lee and Clarendon have a higher percentage of rural/agricultural space than many counties. In the three counties, only 6 to 11 percent of the population holds at least a bachelor's degree. In 2002, South Carolina's per-capita income was \$25,502. Lee County lagged behind that figure by almost \$8,000 at \$17,744. Clarendon County's was \$19,015, and Sumter County's was \$21,577. In these three counties, most employees tend to work in manufacturing and educational jobs or health and social services. According to the state's Budget and Control Board, far fewer work in potentially higher-paying categories such as "professional," "scientific," "management," "administrative," "finance," "insurance" or "real estate."

Of South Carolina's total population, 60.5 percent is urban and 39.5 percent is rural. In Clarendon County, 85.3 percent of the population is rural and in Lee County, 81.3 percent is rural. Sumter is closer to the state average, with 62.1 percent urban, 37.9 percent rural.

Of those South Carolinians 25 and older, the highest percentage (30) are high school graduates. Just over 19 percent have some college experience but no degree. Another 15.4 percent attended high school but didn't graduate, and 13.5 percent have a bachelor's degree.

In Sumter County, 29.6 percent of that same population are high school graduates, 21.7 have some college and 16.2 percent have no diploma. Only 10.7 percent hold at least a bachelor's degree.

In Clarendon County, 34.5 percent are high school graduates, 21.6 percent attended high school but didn't get a diploma, and 14.5 percent have had some college but no degree. Only 7.7 have a bachelor's degree.

In Lee County, 35.1 percent graduated from high school, 24.3 percent attended high school but have no diploma, and 14.3 percent have less than a ninth-grade education. Only 6.5 percent have a bachelor's degree.



Chris Moore / The Item

Fannie Galloway is proud of her granddaughters' academic accomplishments. She keeps their perfect attendance certificates and honor roll merits in two bright paper folders; she says someday, when money's not so tight, she's going to buy some nice frames to put them in. Galloway knows that education is the key to escaping poverty, and she wants to make sure her grandchildren have a fighting chance at a better future.

POVERTY

FROM PAGE 1A

Students in third through eighth grade are tested in four subject areas for the PACT.

The range of those meeting the standard went from a low of 25.3 percent (seventh-graders tested in science) to a high of 98.4 percent (third-graders tested in social studies). The most frequently occurring percent range for those scoring basic or above was the 30-percent range; six out of 24 times, the percentage of students meeting the standard fell within that range.

In Lee County the numbers are even more dismal; more than 50 percent of students scored at or above basic in only eight of those 24 categories. On the low end were the 17.4 percent of sixth-graders tested in science; on the high end, 76.4 percent of third-graders tested in English/language arts.

In the wealthier Lexington School District 5, at least half the students

scored at or above basic in every single category, 24 out of 24 times.

And their low percentage was much higher than either Clarendon 1 or Lee — 69.4 percent of seventh-graders tested in social studies. The "average" range for those scoring basic or above was 80 percent.

Pickens County students taking the PACT also fared far better, with at least half the students meeting the standard in every category.

"IT'S A VICIOUS CYCLE"

Clarendon School District 3 Superintendent Dr. Mary Rice-Crenshaw acknowledges the poverty-test score connection.

"It's a real issue because ... when you look at your test scores ... (the lower ones) are the kids mostly from impoverished backgrounds."

Pawloski said she "absolutely" believes students of poverty tend to do poorly on standardized tests. She noted the "high needs" areas can clearly be seen as the ones struggling to make the grade most frequently.

It's not a new problem. Clarendon 1 Superintendent Dr. Rose Wilder finds herself struggling to help a district that for years has educated some of the poorest children in the state and produced some of the lowest test scores.

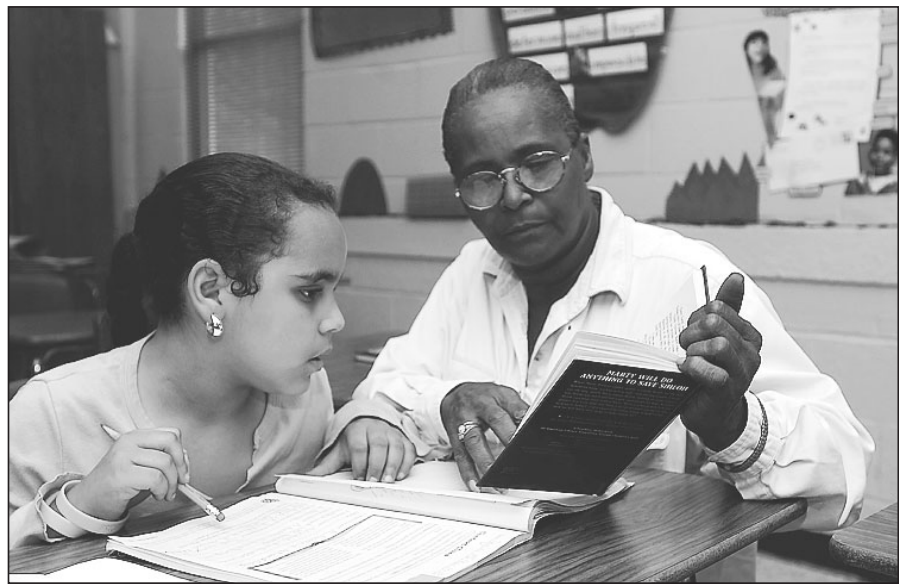
"We're battling with generations of the same problem," Wilder said. "It's a vicious cycle."

The children in school today in the district are from families of poverty, and their parents, too, came from families of poverty.

Wilder said perhaps the biggest challenge is helping people understand that a different way of life is possible. If people don't realize they can do better for themselves, it's virtually impossible to break free, she said. And in her opinion, breaking that cycle can't be done solely by working with the children.

"... We have to change the mindset of the adults," Wilder said.

It's hard for a child to understand the importance of education, Wilder said, if his parents do not. But just because a child comes from a background of poverty



Chris Moore / The Item

Galloway helps Regina with her schoolwork. The 9-year-old is in the gifted and talented program at St. Paul Primary. Her 13-year-old sister Rochelle also does well in school. Their grandmother makes it a point to spend time in each girl's school.

ty doesn't mean that understanding has to be missing.

Wilder said she grew up "dirt poor" just down the road in Santee. Her mother possessed only an eighth-grade education, and her father only made it through the fourth grade. Still, she said, they pushed her to succeed: "Education was valued in my home."

When education isn't a priority, children come to school lacking. They lack parental motivation, they have no reading materials in the household, they lack even simple family conversations, and they lack experiences outside their home. This puts these children at a huge disadvantage when they enter the classroom.

"They have needs that have to be addressed," said Suzanne Wates, director of Title 1 for District 17. Increasingly, she said, schools are "filling in holes they have in their backgrounds."

And more and more, schools are having to be the ones to introduce children to books, to teach them how to read, to impart interpersonal relation skills — as well as provide counseling and, in some cases, purchase clothing and shoes.

Some argue that it shouldn't be a school's job to step in and try to compensate for all that's missing when a child comes to them, but if parents aren't doing these things, who will?

"Education's supposed to do everything," Wates said.

"PARENTS HAVE TO BE INVOLVED"

It's nearly a given: Parents have to be involved if schools are going to make a difference. All six local school districts are working to enter the homes of children from poverty in an effort to talk to parents and better understand what these kids are exposed to. There are parent facilitators and coordinators and social workers whose job it is to reach out to parents and get them involved in and maybe even excited about their children's education.

District 17 social worker Cindy Jennings makes home visits weekly to students' families when she finds they are without necessary school materials, are

experiencing problems in school or seem to be lacking support at home. She makes these visits "to be a bridge between the school and the home."

Jennings tries to fill parents in on their children's academic situations and also gain a better understanding of their situation.

Wilder said her district tries to bring parents to the schools as often as possible with regular events. In Clarendon 2, there are monthly parenting workshops "because we do see parents as the first teachers," Superintendent John Tindal said.

Rice-Crenshaw agrees districts have to tap into the families and the homes for the initial desire to learn to develop. "It has to come from the home," she said.

Fannie Galloway knows this. From volunteering in their school cafeterias to attending parent-teacher organization meetings to instructing them to do their homework every day, Galloway makes sure her granddaughters understand the importance of attending school and doing well.

"I want *them* to get *their* education," she said. "That is the main thing I stay on them about, their education."

Though Galloway did graduate from a vocational high school in Maryland, she never sought any further education. Not everyone in her family completed high school, and few attended college.

"A lot of them in my family don't have education," she said. "Some of them are slack in reading. I'm slack in reading."

Regina, however, has already demonstrated such a firm grasp on academics that she's in the gifted and talented program at St. Paul Primary School in Clarendon 1, and both Regina and Rochelle, a student at Scott's Branch Intermediate School, have received attendance and academic honors.

"I want them to get a very good education and get a very good job," Galloway said.

Regina wants to be a preacher or a doctor someday. Rochelle would like to be a math teacher "because math is easy."

EDUCATION

FROM PAGE 8A

Both girls would like to go to college. Their financial circumstances may be working against them, but experts agree that such involvement in their lives from their grandmother will be the key to their escaping poverty.

"Many researchers and theorists believe that the degree to which a parent is involved in school is the single most important factor or one of the most important factors that determines a child's school success," Pawloski said.

And educational success is often linked to raised expectations and greater motivation to "move up."

So whether it's right or wrong, schools are trying to teach parents how to be parents.

FIRST, TEACH THE TEACHERS

So schools are teaching parents how to better approach their children's education — and now they're working harder to teach teachers what it means to be poor and how to best relate to children of poverty.

Rice-Crenshaw said when she first came to her district two years ago, she drove around the area to get an idea of where her students were coming from. "I was surprised," she admitted.

To give her teachers the same exposure, she put them on a bus at the beginning of the school year so they could drive through their students' neighborhoods — the good ones, the bad ones and the ones that serve as pockets for poverty.

The program designed specifically to "Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty" is housed at Francis Marion University and is entering its third year. The center was the brainchild of Dr. Lorin Anderson, a University of South Carolina professor and a witness for the plaintiffs in South Carolina's education equity funding trial.

Many school districts are encouraging or even requiring teachers to read Ruby K. Payne's book, "A Framework for Understanding."

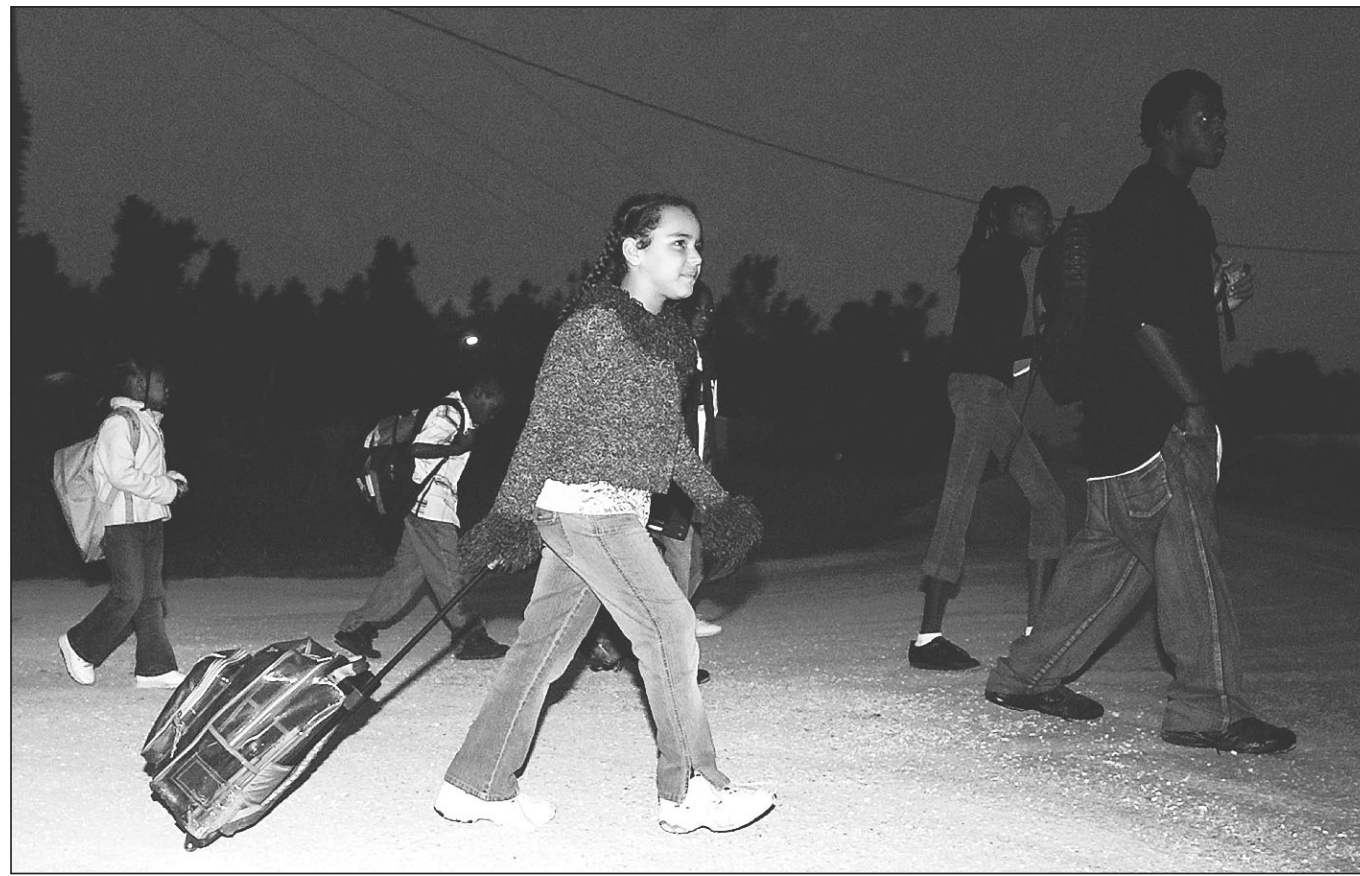
Payne believes that it is necessary for teachers to understand the "chaotic lives" of students who live below the poverty line.

Several schools in Sumter 17 have read the book recently. Rice-Crenshaw has also asked her teachers to read it. Knowing where students are coming from is essential, Rice-Crenshaw said, "so that as a staff, we can become sensitive to their needs."

Payne's representatives visited with administrators in Sumter 2 in 2005, and Public Relations Coordinator Mary Sheridan noted virtually all administrators in the district and many teachers have read the book and use it as a tool to better relate to the students in the primarily rural school district.

Like Rice-Crenshaw, Sumter 2 Superintendent Dr. Frank Baker encourages his principals and teachers to visit the neighborhoods their students are coming from.

Jennings noted that District 17 is also trying to find more ways to help teachers understand their students' backgrounds. She said they ask teachers to go light on



Keith Gedamike / The Item

Fannie Galloway drives her grandchildren to their bus stop even though it's down a long road and around a corner, and she doesn't like to send them out in the early morning without being able to see them.

homework loads or not make a big deal if a student doesn't turn homework in, particularly those students the teacher knows come from homes of poverty.

This helps ensure these students don't stand out on a bus at the beginning of the school year so they could drive through their students' neighborhoods — the good ones, the bad ones and the ones that serve as pockets for poverty.

"If they're worried about where they're going to stay, they're not worried about homework," Jennings said.

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alternative funding. It has five goals: to develop education programs that enable graduates to "effectively teach children of poverty;" to provide professional development that will improve the curriculum and delivery of it in schools that serve a large population of poor students; to equip teachers to find and utilize community resources; to develop a master's degree program to offer certification specifically for teachers of poor children; and to be a resource in the state for helping teachers better educate poor children.

Pawloski, a professor at Francis Marion, served as a teacher in Allendale County, one of the poorest counties in the state, and said it was there that she got a glimpse of what some students are coming from. She saw children whose only meals during a day were the ones they ate at school, children who went home in the afternoon to no supervision, children whose parents were openly involved in illegal activities; children with little or no health care.

She and others believe that in order for these kids to learn — and even to excel academically — they need a bigger push from all the key players in their life, because they have more obstacles to push out of their way.

"If people understand what children handle when they get home, they would be much more understanding about why they haven't met educational goals," Tenenbaum said.

WHAT ELSE IS BEING DONE?

Lee School District Superintendent Dr. Lloyd Hunter thinks establishing safe, clean, happy learning environments with teachers who care about their students is the first step toward success with poor students. If a student doesn't have all of that at home, Hunter hopes they at least will find them in his schools.

He's working now to renovate facilities to make them places more conducive to learning. He's also trying to hire and retain the most qualified teachers he can, but it's a challenge — it's tough to

entice teachers to a poor region, he said. Poor districts can't pay as much as richer districts, and often, the community doesn't have nearly as many amenities as a wealthier county.

Hunter said it's a hard proposition all the way around, because society doesn't value the poor. And, he said, "It's not as easy to get someone to be excited and proud to serve a population that's not valued."

But he does think he has effective teachers in place and that all his students are capable of achieving academic success. He thinks it's important for students not to dwell on where they come from or in what ways they might be lacking. "I believe children of the poor ... can't have the feeling the world owes them something because they're poor."

Tindal notes the presence of poverty in his district's schools is noticeable. "Poverty, I think, impacts education in the same way it impacts other areas of living," he said.

One of the biggest deficits he has noticed is the poorer students' lack of "incidental learning" — they've never been on trips to the zoo or a museum or even an amusement park and learned about things outside their daily realm, or how to behave in different settings. So Tindal encourages field trips.

Tenenbaum advocates an increase in early childhood programs, a longer school year and longer school days. She also believes keeping students on grade level is essential; when a student falls behind, she said, he often loses motivation. And she thinks it's important to get parents who didn't complete their high school education back in school.

"When students see their own parents learning, they are more inclined to put more value in education as well," she said. "Our state is challenged with multiple generations not completing school, and it's very hard to motivate students when for generations the family has not finished school."

"That's what we're facing in South Carolina — it's a culture of quitting."

Contact Staff Writer Mary Dolan at mdolan@theitem.com or call (803) 774-1294.



Chris Moore / The Item

Experts say family relationships and education are two of the most important factors in breaking the generational cycle of poverty. Fannie Galloway of Summertown is glad she's able to be a parent to her granddaughters. "I want them to be together. And they're a part of me," she said.

The Item has been asking its readers to address poverty in our community -- how would you tackle the problems -- both the causes and the results? We're running the responses throughout the series. Today, a former assistant principal responds.

WHAT ARE THE ROOT CAUSES?

■ "Poverty could be eliminated through education. An educated populace will not make decisions that lead directly to poverty."

■ "Students must not be allowed to quit school. There is never a good reason for quitting school. For those students that will not behave, we must create an alternative school where they will behave and where they will learn."

■ "Pregnancy before marriage along with emotional and mental immaturity condemns two generations to poverty. Parenting is the most difficult job in the world. It has many rewards but must never be taken lightly. Being a parent must only be entered into when two adults are ready to commit their all to raise a new generation."

HOW CAN POVERTY BE ELIMINATED?

"It will take many years, but poverty can be eliminated through education. The state should create a centrally located alternative school where students are housed. Students convicted of crimes are not to be admitted. DJJ currently has facilities for them. This alternative school is for those students that will not behave in the public schools. Instead of being expelled to the streets, they should be sent to this alternative school. If at the end of each academic year, their behavior has improved and they are making adequate academic progress they would be offered the option of returning to their home school. Every citizen needs at least a high school diploma.

"Additionally, I would commit millions to reduce the class size for students in (pre-kindergarten) through 5th grade. If students could leave elementary school able to speak, read, and write English as well as demonstrate mathematical prowess, they would be successful in all future educational endeavors.

"Eliminating poverty requires sacrifices: taxpayers must be willing to finance a better educational system; people must be willing to delay becoming a parent until they are married as well as financially, emotionally, mentally prepared to care for a child; people that are working poor must sacrifice by saving money instead of purchasing unnecessary items."

MARK D. SWEETMAN
Retired educator

HELP

FROM PAGE 1A

There were more calls from people who wanted to know who they could talk to to address some of the specific needs they'd read about and one letter from a reader, Shirley Lesane of Mayesville, who wanted to know how she could get help.

She said she's in worse shape than many of the people receiving federal assistance but can't get any herself. "I worked 28 years at Sumter Cabinet before it closed down," she said. "And I've never had any kind of federal assistance. (But) my house is falling down ... I have my ceiling down in my bedroom, and I can see the ground when I walk on the floor."

Some respondents bristled at the personal stories, challenging us to "print the truth," saying that people are poor because they "choose to be" — because they're "lazy and don't choose to find a way out."

"These people have to be willing to let us help them," one reader wrote. "We have raised a society that waits for someone to come along and help them," said another. Still another wrote: "The result of our government's futile war on poverty is to breed dependency and self-destructive behavior, which have become the hallmark of the underclass. Unemployment ... is not caused by the lack of jobs but by the inability to get up every morning and go to work."

That writer said the solution to poverty is to "reinforce the simple principles of economics: Hard work, sacrifice and delayed gratification are the keys to ending the vicious cycle of poverty. It is not the government's responsibility to fix the problem of poverty — it is a personal responsibility."

More than one person challenged those sentiments. A 34-year-old woman who fell into hard times after losing the decent-paying job she'd held for 15 years said she's more than willing to work. All she wants, she says, is "a job and some insurance. That's all." Another woman said she works full time and still can't make ends meet. She's frustrated by the system, which she said doesn't dole out help fairly.

And a Lee County reader who earns \$27,000 a year struggles every day with monetary decisions, wondering "pay-check to paycheck if I should buy my medicines, pay all the bills, buy food, buy gas for the car or get my daughter the clothes, shoes or whatever she needs for school. Have you ever heard that old saying, 'robbing Peter to pay Paul'? I rob them both every month."

Experts agreed that it's tough to pay the bills with some of the jobs that are open in this area. A couple argued that pushing people into low-paying jobs isn't doing anyone any good, that job reform is crucial to any crack in the poverty wall. They also said the current system just "isn't designed to make it better," that welfare and food stamps and education extras were "never meant to break the cycle of poverty."

Nearly everyone agreed that a good education is absolutely essential to helping someone out of poverty.

"It won't save everyone," one writer said, "but for those who want to work, education is the lifeline."

But some suggested that people who are poor "don't have the desire" to be educated.

"Many here seem to prefer to remain ignorant of the world around them," one person wrote. "Give them a plate of food and a bed to lay in and they feel they have all they need. ... Seems to me with all the opportunities to improve one's life out there, all that's required is the desire to go and do it. Many just chose not to."

And still others showed that stereotypes and bad information aren't going away anytime soon. They wrote about how mad they get when they see welfare moms "having one baby after another just to make more money," or how angry they feel when they see people "using their food stamps to buy beer and cigarettes." Several commented that it "burned them up" to see all those "lazy" people live on welfare for the rest of their lives without even trying to get up and find a job.

"The solution?" wrote one person. "DON'T HAVE CHILDREN UNTIL YOU CAN AFFORD THEM. Don't come to me (the taxpayer) and expect me to pay for your irresponsibility. Birth control is less expensive than kids."

The truth is, welfare reform addressed those issues a decade ago. South Carolina's requirements, in fact, are among the toughest in the nation. There are time limits on public assistance, recipients are required to work, and aid is limited to the number of children you had when you signed up. And you can't buy beer or cigarettes with food stamps.

And then there was this: A man wrote after reading one woman's story that it was "an excellent reason to keep abortions legal."

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

One longtime reader, local educator Nancy Bishop, pointed out that perhaps the reason people don't want to talk about poverty — or talk about it with such cynicism — is that it's a scary sub-



Volunteers Bobby Peterson, left, and Jack Reyling load Thanksgiving dinner boxes into a vehicle outside of United Ministries last year. The group distributed more than 130 dinners to local families. There are lots of ways people can volunteer their time and other resources to help families in need.

ject.

"I fear poverty," she admitted. "I avoid that which I fear." Why is poverty scary? It "takes away all your options and gives you only misery and isolation."

The Christian solution is simple, she said: "Jesus would tell us to go to those in poverty and provide for their needs."

There were 37 million of those people living in the United States in 2005, 638,643 of them in South Carolina. Three years ago, official U.S. Census Bureau figures listed Sumter's poverty rate at 16.3 percent — higher by four percentage points than the national average. Together, 27,590 residents of Sumter, Lee and Clarendon counties lived below the poverty line.

"So what can we do to help?" Sandi Dixon wrote. "I think so many more people would love to open their hearts and help if only they knew how."

Here's a very brief list of some of the ways you can help make a difference in the life of someone in poverty.

One reader suggested "county leadership and developers could work together to move Sumter forward: Punch new roads through bad neighborhoods to make them more attractive, get rid of abandoned buildings, and work to acquire land in the areas for mixed-income housing and businesses."

Others suggested volunteering in schools or at soup kitchens, getting to know someone who's struggling and learning more about individual situations.

Volunteer opportunities are available at most schools in the local districts. Alice Drive Elementary Principal Debbie Thomas said her school has "a really strong volunteer program." It consists mostly of parents and grandparents, but others who are interested in helping out should contact their neighborhood schools. Volunteers can work in the classrooms helping teachers, put up bulletin boards, work in the media center, assist on field trips and other tasks.

Get involved in the community. Find out how people who are different from you live. Volunteer to serve on boards for social service agencies such as the Department of Social Services, the Foster Care Review Board, the Disabilities and Special Needs Board and others. Contact your local legislative delegation to get applications. Terms typically end in December or June.

Here are a few of the local groups that could use your help, either by donating money or time or other items.

UNITED MINISTRIES

36 S. Artillery Drive, 775-0757. Director Mark Champagne says the goal of this crisis ministry is to not only provide those in need with the tangibles — help with utility bills or clothing, for example — but to counsel them about ways to help themselves move out of poverty. He quotes

James 2:17 on the ministry's answering machine: "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." People who'd like to volunteer their time or make monetary donations should contact him. The building is open Monday through Thursday 9 to 12:30.

FIRESIDE FUND

Donations of any amount are accepted and go to the Salvation Army to give to those in need help staying warm during the fall and winter. Mail checks payable to The Item, P.O. Box 1677, Sumter, 29151, or bring your contribution by our offices at 20 N. Magnolia St.



Volunteers Bill Horne, far left, and Barbara Deonier place celery into boxes as Devin Solberg, 12, puts bags of fruit into them at United Ministries. They were packing boxes for Thanksgiving last year.

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

30 Bridge Court, 775-5767. Director Derek Burruss says people can volunteer their time doing manual labor and otherwise helping to build homes that will be sold to low-income families in the area. Anyone 14 or older can volunteer, you don't have to be particularly skilled and all tools and materials are supplied. Habitat is working on three houses it plans to finish in December. Call or email them at sumterhabitat@scrr.com

BUILDING DREAMS MENTORING PROGRAM

Call Regina McBride at 775-8607. Building Dreams matches adult mentors with children aged 6 to 15 who have an incarcerated parent. There were more than 500 children in Sumter with a parent in jail in August 2005, when the program began. Mentors must submit to a background check and training and commit to at least one year with the program. The Sumter Citizens Coalition organizes group activities for the mentors and children. Call the office to apply.

LEE COUNTY COOPERATIVE MINISTRIES

315 N. Dennis Ave., Bishopville, SC 29010. Call Director Gwendolyn Noel or President Joseph Petrovitz at 484-6350. This ministry helps by offering counseling, food, clothing and vouchers for medicine, utilities, rent and other financial needs and by making referrals. If you'd like to donate money, food or other essentials, go by the building Tuesday through Thursday, 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. If you'd like to volunteer or help out in the office, call for an application.

SUCCESS BY 6

215 N. Washington St., Sumter, SC 29150, (803) 773-7935. This early childhood school readiness initiative offers

opportunities for kids to succeed in school and life. Open weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to noon.

SALKENHATCHIE SUMMER SERVICE

Call or write to Tammy Fulmer, assistant to the director of Connectional Ministries c/o Outreach Section, 4908 Colonial Drive, Suite 101, Columbia, S.C. 29203 — 1-888-678-6272. Salkenhatchie Summer Service is a housing rehabilitation program sponsored by the South Carolina United Methodist Conference. In recent years, work sites have included Lee, Sumter and Clarendon counties. Cash contributions are needed and appreciated.

HARVEST HOPE FOOD BANK

P.O. Box 451, 2220 Shop Road, Columbia, S.C. 29202, (803) 254-4432 2513 West Lucas St., Florence, S.C. 29503, (843) 661-0826

This non-profit organization provides assistance to thousands of hungry people in 18 counties of central South Carolina including Sumter, Clarendon and Lee. Food and related products, both donated and purchased, are distributed to 15 member agencies and organizations in Sumter, seven in Clarendon and six in Lee serving the abused, poor, disabled, elderly and young. These agencies include food pantries, soup kitchens, group homes, shelters, churches and other non-profit organizations. For a complete list of agencies served, visit the Web site at www.harvesthope.org.

AMERICAN RED CROSS

1155 N. Guignard Dr., Suite 2, Sumter, SC 29150, (803) 775-2363

The Sumter office serves Sumter, Lee and Clarendon counties. They're always in need of blood donations, but there are plenty of other ways to help, too. They need disaster volunteers, office help and donations.

SALVATION ARMY

16 Kendrick St., P.O. Box 2229, Sumter, SC 29151, (803) 775-9336

The Salvation Army offers counseling, financial help and referrals. It uses a voucher system to provide medicine, utilities, rent and other essential services. Money, food and other essentials are always needed. Open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday, closed from noon to 1 p.m. for lunch.

GOOD SAMARITANS FOR ALL PEOPLE INC.

18 Boone Lane, Bishopville, SC 29010, (803) 428-4448. This group provides school supplies, food, toys and clothing to the needy in the Pee Dee area. Holds annual Thanksgiving and Christmas give-aways each year of toys, food, clothing and furniture.

YWCA SAFE HOUSE OFFICE

246 Church St., Sumter, SC 29150,

(803) 773-7158. This arm of the YWCA provides food, shelter and clothing to victims of domestic violence and their families as well as advocacy. The office hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. Call if you need help or if you'd like to volunteer time, money or other resources.

UNITED WAY

Call (803) 773-7935 to find out how you can contribute to many different community service organizations in Sumter, Lee and Clarendon counties through this one umbrella group.

SAMARITAN HOUSE

320 W. Oakland Ave., Sumter, SC 29150, (803) 775-0024. Provides shelter and food to the homeless and needy. Open from 6 p.m. to 7 a.m. every day. Call if you'd like to donate food or money or if you know someone who needs a temporary place to stay.

CHRISTIAN CHARITIES

110 S. Purdy St., Sumter, SC 29150, (803) 773-2443. This group gives non-perishable food to people who don't have access to food stamps. Accepts money and food items. Open 9 to 11:30 a.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

EMMANUEL SOUP KITCHEN

Emmanuel United Methodist Church, 421 S. Main St., Sumter, SC 29150, (803) 773-6197. Several local churches provide a hot meal at noon Monday through Friday and a bag lunch on weekends to people who are hungry. Accepts contributions of food or money. Volunteers are welcomed.

AGING COUNCILS

Santee Senior Services, 110 N. Salem Ave., P.O. Box 832, Sumter, SC 29151, (803) 775-5815.

Lee County Council on Aging, 51 Wilkerson Road, P.O. Box 343 Bishopville, SC 29010, (803) 484-6212.

Clarendon County Council on Aging, P.O. Box 522, Manning, SC 29102, (803) 435-8593.

These tri-county programs for seniors are state agencies that are dependent upon United Way funding and private donations. Services include activities, transportation and meals, both at the center and in homes. All are open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

DEVELOPMENTAL & SPECIAL NEEDS BOARDS
For Clarendon County:

P.O. Drawer 40, Manning, SC 29102 (803) 435-2330

For Lee County: P.O. Box 648, Bishopville, SC 29010, (803) 484-9473

For Sumter County: P.O. Box 2847, Sumter, SC 29151, (803) 778-1669

These state agencies are dependent upon private donations. They help people with mental and physical disabilities. Open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

POVERTY

FROM PAGE 1A

Taken together, those numbers mean younger minorities should be growing up to fill the jobs that older residents will be vacating in the coming years as they reach retirement age. The question is whether they will be prepared to fill those jobs.

This region needs to "get very sober" and figure out how to get all its students through school successfully, he said. Otherwise, jobs will flock to those areas that have been able to prepare their young people, and the economy here will continue to constrict.

While Georgia and North Carolina can expect their workforces to grow, Darby said, South Carolina will be struggling just to fill the jobs of retirees, let alone new jobs.

"We need everybody. We absolutely need everybody to make our numbers work," he said. For too long, South Carolina hasn't had much impetus to look at poverty, he said. It's been considered a problem of compassion, but not a problem for policymakers.

"It's no longer an elective. It's a must," he said. Now, the state is shifting away from low-tech, unskilled jobs with low wages to highly-skilled jobs that require a higher level of education.

Unfortunately, the state is losing many of its young minorities because it isn't reaching them through the current educational system, he said.

As painful as it will be, Darby said, South Carolina, and particularly the areas south of the Interstate 20 corridor, must allow more flexibility into the educational system to reach divergent learners, children who don't do

well in traditional classroom settings. He doesn't want the state to give up on its standards; instead, he wants the state to give local school districts more room to experiment with different methodologies to reach different students.

Low-income students *can* learn, he said. "We've somehow gotten poverty and intellectual capacity confused. That's an error," he said.

Similarly, he said, most people don't realize that while the tools to escape poverty are teachable, many poor people haven't learned them. Those skills haven't been modeled for them, so they often simply don't know what they need to do to become economically independent, Darby said.

"They don't know what to do. That seems very strange to a

families who helped build and then purchased the 100 Sumter Habitat houses still live in them.

"They're able to own a part of the American dream," Burruss said. "It's something that everybody needs — a home."

Burruss thinks other service agencies such as Wateree Community Actions Inc. and United Ministries are a big help in the community. WCAl provides services such as the weatherization of homes to make them more heating- or cooling-efficient, assists low-income families with utility bills, and operates several Head Start programs in the area.

WCAl Executive Director Willie Bethune touts Head Start as one of the most effective programs targeting poor kids.

Bethune says that the earlier children can be reached, the better they can be educated and the more likely they are to succeed.

United Ministries of Sumter also seeks to help poor people become more self-sufficient. It offers services like help with bills or rent, but perhaps the most effective piece of aid it offers is its counseling, observers say.

Director Mark Champagne noted that while United Ministries provides quick fixes for people who are struggling financially, it ultimately seeks to help them for the long-term.

"A lot of people like to fix things from a distance," Champagne said. "That's not what happens here. We have something here that draws people to us. We have the chance to sit and talk with someone. People here care and are trying to give lasting advice."

He said caseworkers see 70-80 people a week. "There's so much ... suffering," he said; "people need medicine, food, heat. And if they're on fixed incomes, they're going to have those same problems next year, too."

Each individual who comes in for help is counseled and given help creating a budget. *These* are the areas in which they really need help, he said.

"When someone comes in for a utility bill, that's not the problem," he said. United Ministries tries to get down to the "root cause."

"It's true people have made some bad choices," he said, "but sometimes, no one has ever talked to them about those bad choices."

Champagne named the Samaritan House, the Salvation Army and the Crisis Closet as other programs he thinks are effectively helping those in need. The Samaritan House provides temporary shelter for the homeless, the Salvation Army assists the needy and makes available low-cost clothing and the Crisis Closet also provides clothing and blankets to those in need.

WHAT ELSE CAN HELP?

Bell thinks a reordering of priorities is necessary to help the problem of poverty. He points out that the Sumter area seems to be "very anti-tax," but he believes taxes are necessary in order to create "effective social programs."

"Poverty programs ... tend to subsidize poverty rather than work against it," Bell said. "That has to change somehow."

He also thinks education is important. "I think there has to be some sort of ... focus on keeping poor children ... mainstreamed in the schools so they don't fall so far behind."

Bethune agrees schools can be part of the solution. "I think the key fact is we have to educate our citizens," Bethune said.

He thinks schools are important because they reach children so early. And the earlier the better. He notes this area is one within which a lot of children come from homes of poverty, and he thinks these children need to be enrolled in educational programs as early as possible.

Bethune believes summer programs are important, too: Giving poor kids a chance to be in school doing *something* virtually all year "round means they are being reached in an educational manner and aren't out getting into trouble."

Clarendon School District 1 Superintendent Dr. Rose Wilder warns, however, not to rely solely on education to be the solution. She thinks a change in attitude from those living in poverty is ultimately what is necessary.

"The premise that public schools have to do it all just doesn't work anymore," Wilder said.

Contact Staff Writer Mary Dolan at mdolan@theitem.com or (803) 774-1294.

The Item has been asking its readers to comment on issues related to poverty for a little more than a month now. We've run some of the comments we received throughout the series. Readers responded to three questions:

1. How do you think Sumter — either its citizens, its government or both — should attack the problem of poverty?
2. What are the root causes of poverty Can they be eliminated? How?
3. If you had \$10 million to use toward the elimination of poverty, how would you spend it and why?

CRYSTAL PHILLIPS IS A MARRIED MOTHER OF THREE CHILDREN

"I know what it is like to live in poverty," she said. "At one time, we received a welfare check for \$202 a month and had a family of three."

She and her husband married young; neither had an education, though she later received her GED. Her husband "caught a break" by getting a job at the local Xpress Lube. In 2002 he was changing oil; today, he's the manager.

"We lived in low-income housing and had it really rough. We could not even buy diapers for our son," she said. "He makes pretty good money now, but we also have three kids. His income is ... not enough for a family of five."

She's frustrated because she believes that if they weren't married, they would qualify for food stamps.

"That is one reason why these people never settle down and get married," she said. "After you get married they will take (some of) your benefits away most of the time. And people wonder why there are so many unmarried women out there living off the government. They can't get a job because they have no education, and they can't settle down and get married because if their spouse works they will no longer qualify for any help and the income may not be enough to support them."

She said another source of frustration was the stereotypes that exist about poverty and welfare. She and her family are white; "it was a lot harder for us," she said, "because people 'expected more' from us. I am just glad that someone gave us a chance and we were able to move above the poverty level we were in."

She says that the first thing Sumter should do is "raise the awareness and get people involved to help."

She believes a lack of education is chief among the root causes of poverty.

"People (who don't) have a good enough education to obtain good paying jobs ... rely on welfare to take care of themselves. Keeping kids in school would be one way to eliminate poverty. An education is the key to getting a good-paying job. Also, the cost of living is higher than our minimum wage. The minimum wage should be raised."

She says that she'd use her \$10 million to "bring some better jobs to our area," and suggests that we "send people that have no education to school to obtain the training that they need to obtain the better jobs that they need."

READER BETTY JOHNSON

said that to address the issue of poverty fully, we "have to start with the parents, to educate them more about nutrition, self-esteem and the importance of education." She believes the root cause of poverty is "under-education" and that it's a cause that can be eliminated. If she had \$10 million to help out, she'd "set up education programs about malnutrition, the effects and the solution (and) give some type of incentive for participation."

ROBERT MITZENHEIM IS A FORMER DISTRICT 17 TEACHER

He believes that while not everyone living in poverty turns to a life of crime, "it sure is a large enough factor that it can no longer be overlooked. Allow the police officials to do their jobs. If people are dangerous, make them not so."

He wrote this about how he might attack the problem of poverty: "Attack is the right word to use here, because much of the problem deals with crime. I am not talking about the elderly poor or handicapped but those who cheat the government to get handouts they do not deserve. Can this be eliminated? Sure, but it will take some government officials who are not afraid to buck the political correctness of the day."

"I would not throw the money at education unless it would be used for teacher raises. We already went from half day kindergarten to full day, which is after Success By Six, pre-kindergarten, First Steps and all the other programs that proved not to work."

"Do you realize how many kids have to try and do their sleeping in school? It all comes down to parents and how kids are raised at home. Even if the kids are in bed they still can be kept awake. Loud music, TV, fighting etc. have a lot to do with how a child learns. Teachers have a heck of a time trying to figure out what is happening to 'their' kids and why they are not measuring up to their potential. Then getting a parent to come in for a conference is like pulling teeth. ...

"Some of that \$10 million should be used for prisons and raises for correctional officers. If it weren't so dangerous, I'd let the gangs eliminate each other, but since that won't happen, the government is going to have to do it. The electric chair would come in handy. Age ... no limit. Drug dealers? Should be shot. Twice if they sell to kids or use kids as mules. That's the unpollitical correct thing to do. Tough. A person who CHOOSES to break the law should be shown society does not want him or her. Once there are a few empty desks at school or work, people will get the idea government is serious about upholding the law."

"If a person is sentenced to five years make the person stay the whole five years. Some say if that happens the inmate would not have anything to look forward to (good time off). Well ya know what? Tough. Inmates should be made to feel they are lucky just to get fed. Inmates know just how much they can get away with even as far as bring a lawsuit against the courts from the prison library! Stop it. Plain and simple. Make it extremely unpleasant for those that start trouble. ... When a political party says to get tough on crime, they better damn well mean it."

To comment on the issue of poverty, how you think the community should address it, what the root causes are and what steps could be taken to eliminate them, go to the poverty banner on www.theitem.com.