

# Program creates memories for child

## ■ Mentor, student getting along great

By Will Brumleve

Nine-year-old Matt Brown does a lot of great things with his new but significantly older friend, Sandy Schweighart.

From going out to the movies together, going to apple orchards, spending time at Six Flags and playing practical jokes on Sandy's husband, the unlikely duo, at times, seems almost inseparable.

At least that's been the case every Monday following school, from about 4-7 p.m., since June. That's when the 49-year-old Schweighart has been taking Brown out as a volunteer mentor for the Big Brothers & Big Sisters of Ford County program.

Big Brothers & Big Sisters Program Manager Alison Tammen, who paired the two with one another June 7, said the arrangement has been one of the most rewarding she has witnessed in the program's relatively brief history.

Schweighart and Brown couldn't agree more.

"I think part of my job is to create some great memories for him, and he does a lot of things he wouldn't generally be doing," said Schweighart,

the wife of Al Schweighart and secretary at Clara Peterson Elementary School, where Brown is a student.

"It's fun," Brown said, with a huge grin on his face.

Brown said some of his fondest memories were when he and Schweighart played a couple of practical jokes on Schweighart's unsuspecting husband.

With money he received from his birthday, Brown purchased some silly string, and Schweighart and Brown hid, waited for Al to come into sight and then ambushed him with the foamy substance.

"He just loves to play tricks," said Schweighart.

On another Monday night, after Schweighart bought Brown a set of Nerf guns for his birthday, the pair had a contest to see who could score the most "points" by hitting certain targets on Al's body, such as his head or chest. Schweighart's husband was sitting on the front porch reading the newspaper when he was once again ambushed.

"Al joins in on the fun sometimes, but unfortunately he's the victim of our tricks sometimes," said Sandy Schweighart, who has made plans with Brown to surprise Al with snowballs once winter arrives.

Another fond memory was the first

time Schweighart hung out with Brown, the son of Stella Gessel of Loda. On that day, June 7, the school was closed, so they ran through the halls, shot hoops, ran outside and played on playground equipment.

"Matt thought it was awesome," Schweighart said.

Other activities have included going to Curtis Apple Orchard in Champaign and Hardee's Reindeer Ranch in Rantoul. At the reindeer ranch, they went through a corn maze and drove go-carts.

The Big Brothers & Big Sisters program also provides certain activities for Schweighart and Brown. The pair was among 14 people from the Ford County program to travel on a bus with matches from the Champaign Big Brothers & Big Sisters program to Six Flags theme park in St. Louis.

It marked the first time Brown had been to Six Flags. At the park, Brown and Schweighart, along with Brown's mother, got soaked during a water ride called "The Title Wave."

Schweighart and Brown also got wet when they went swimming in August at Millie Baier's home on East Pells Street.

They have also taken four trips to the Beverly Cinemas in Champaign

since June. Matt said one time they were the only people in the theater, and they moved back and forth between the rows freely.

"We took up all the rows," Schweighart said.

"It's fun to go to the theaters," Brown said.

Schweighart and Brown also play games together, such as rummy, Yatzee, Sorry and other card games. "He's a big game player, so there's just a ton of games we play," Schweighart said.

Many times, they will go to Schweighart's Paxton home and play games before cooking and eating dinner.

Sometimes dinner consists of the "Matt Taco" — a meat, sour cream and cheese taco with no shell that Brown invented and named after himself.

After dinner, Schweighart drops Brown off at his home by 7 p.m. Once the pair have been together for at least six months, they may be allowed to spend entire nights with one another through the program, if that's what both want.

Tammen said, "I know a lot of the kids are counting down the days."

Next summer, Schweighart and Brown plan to travel to Lake Mattoon and go boating.

Tammen said more volunteers are needed for the Big Brothers & Big Sisters of Ford County program, especially adult male mentors. Volunteers can work with boys two to four times a month for any amount of time. Tammen said there are 13 boys on the waiting list for the program waiting to be matched with a mentor. Anyone older than 16 may sign up to be a mentor for the program.

Those interested in volunteering can call Tammen at 379-9990 to set up an interview and match.

# Ford, Iroquois jobless rates down

## IDES official cites return to school year

By Will Brumleve

The unemployment rates for both Ford and Iroquois counties fell for the second-straight month in September.

number of workers unemployed dropped by 53 from August to September in Iroquois County, while the number of those employed rose