

EDEN - Before Jackie Cantrell volunteered to help teach youth tennis in Rockingham County this summer, she had never even held a tennis racquet in her hands – much less played the game.

“I did not go out for sports when I was a child so I never had the opportunity to play tennis,” the 67-year-old Halifax County native said.

Last Spring, Shelby Rhyne, a newcomer to the area, was teaching seniors at The Garden of Eden Senior Center to play Mahjong. Rhyne asked about adult volunteers for her first summer of youth tennis in the county.

“One name was suggested more than others,” Rhyne said.

“If it’s children, ask Jackie,” several seniors told Rhyne. “She loves to work with children.”

Their recommendations were true as Cantrell readily volunteered to assist with the tennis programs.

“I enjoy working with children,” said Cantrell, the mother of one son, Isaac, 31, living in Reidsville. She also had a son, Ken, who died at 22, in an automobile accident.

“When my boys were small, I was a Den Mother and helped with class parties and went on all the field trips,” she said. Cantrell was involved with everything from camping to cooking in the kitchen to counseling and teaching.

“I spent my entire life working with children. “

The week before Rhyne’s request, Cantrell had asked senior center Director Carla Huffman if she could help with the city’s summer camp.

But before summer camp began, Cantrell was in training to teach youth tennis.

“A volunteer does not need to know anything about tennis,” Cantrell said. “They just need to be willing to learn and to work with children.”

During the summer, Cantrell participated as a volunteer coach at more than 25 summer events including the Kids Tennis Clubs at four summer day camps, Play Days and a Family Tennis Festival at RiverFest. She also traveled with her tennis students whenever they played in playoffs in Reidsville and Madison.

As a result, Cantrell learned to play tennis even though she had only participated at the teaching level

This fall Cantrell is coaching/play supervisor partner in continuing monthly clinics at the YMCA After School Kids Tennis Clubs at South End, Williamsburg and Leaksville-Spray Elementary schools.

“But that’s not the big news,” Rhyne said. “Jackie is learning to play tennis! She had a breakthrough day on the mini-courts at South End Elementary School on Oct. 2.”

This was Cantrell’s first real attempt at playing the game she had been teaching others to play.

“I still am not a tennis player but I play with the kids,” she said.

Cantrell moved to Eden from Colorado in 2000 to look her mother, Margaret Cantrell, who passed away four years later. Throughout her adult years, Jackie was employed in service work for others: a certified nursing assistant for 20 years and then in group homes for the elderly and counseled children in Challenges Group Homes.

Now residing at Hidden Valley, Cantrell devotes much of her time to the Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary. She served as chaplain for 10 years but now is the Junior Vice Commander.

“I do all kinds of stuff to help our veterans,” she said. Cantrell sells tickets for raffles, helps with stews and can be found at festivals raising money for DAV.

Cantrell attends the Fieldcrest Church of God where she works in children’s church.

”I have worked with youth my whole youth,” Cantrell said. “I love working with them.”

Shelby – 614-284-4716.

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612-5206 Jackie

10/6/2014 from Shelby Rhyne