

Jack and Jill

Future leaders groomed today



(Back) Dr. Jameca Falconer, Barbara Ingram, Jennifer Loiseau, LaVonne Walker, (front) Janice Williams and Melissa Hill

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When Kellier Baker Dixon was in college, she heard about a program called Jack and Jill, which was founded in 1938 in Philadelphia, Penn. with a goal of providing social, cultural and educational opportunities for youth aged two to 19.

When Kellier relocated to the Treasure Coast, she wanted her own children to benefit from such a program that would enrich their lives. So, along with 37 other mothers, she created a Treasure Coast Chapter of Jack and Jill, one of 220 chapters nationwide.

For local moms like Melissa Hill, Janice Williams, LaVonne Walker, Jameca Falconer, Jennifer Loiseau and Barbara Ingram, Jack and Jill has been much more than a helpful organization – it's been a lifeline and support group to help them navigate the murky waters of parenthood. As their children practice singing in preparation for a performance at the Greater Mount Pleasant Primitive Baptist Church, the group of dedicated moms talked about how important it is to participate in an organization where social, cultural, and educational opportunities abound and occur seamlessly with service projects and a passion for stimulating growth and development in youth of all ages.

"Since 1986, Jack and Jill has been working with children from the time they're very young," said Melissa Hill. "We are grooming them to become future leaders and try to present our children with opportunities like a national teen conference, community service projects, and activities that help the children develop their skills."

In addition to the moms who help coordinate service projects like food collection, Black Family Day and even help to build homes in the wake of Hurricane Katrina,

Jack and Jill also has a father's auxiliary group that supports the chapter's activities. Locally, the group has donated heavily to Missionary Flights International, SafeSpace and Dogs & Cats Forever.

"The common ideas that we have one goal as mothers to give wholesome, safe and age-appropriate activities creates a bond of harmony and cooperation," said Melissa. "We trust each other with our children, have common values and morals, and we truly like each other. There is not a child in Jack and Jill who does not love it and begin looking forward to the Teen Conference as soon as they leave the Humpty Dumpty, early age group portion of the program. We try to instill into our children the importance of giving back to the community to make it a better place."

The bonus is that this social connection creates strong bonds and solid friendships between the moms and the children.

Even when Jack and Jill children go away to college, the organization's Mothers Away from Home Project assigns a 'surrogate' mom in the community to a child away at school for the first time. The co-ed knows he or she has someone to call for help, advice or just to enjoy a home-cooked meal and some family-style company, even when they're away at school.

As much as you might think it's the moms driving the program, the surprise is the children really push their moms to continue to be actively involved. And, the children seem to take that camaraderie and strong bond with them through high school, college and into their adult lives. Many children who grew up in Jack and Jill become its newest members when they begin their own families.

If you'd like to learn more about the organization, visit www.jackandjilltc.org.

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