



## Elmer Smith | Bigger boys helping boys



ALEJANDRO A. ALVAREZ/Daily News

Maurice Roth-Miller (top), 17, is a mentor to Tyree Harrison, 13. TAKES YEARS to grow into one of those blue blazers that Girard College seniors get to wear.

Maurice Roth-Hiller looks like his was hand-tailored for him. But he had to spend a couple years just working on his shoulders before it fit him right.

He did his heavy lifting by taking on some additional responsibility as a mentor to a quiet fifth-grader named Tyree Harrison, who kind of reminded him of himself at that age.

It got so good for him that he became a Big Brother to another fifth-grader the following year. He is signing on with his third little brother this year.

When he's not hitting the books or hanging out with one of his Little Brothers, he's challenging other upperclassmen to get involved with the mentoring program that Big Brothers Big Sisters has established on the Girard College campus.

Big Brothers Big Sisters has been showing up on college campuses, at work sites, in churches and anywhere else men gather. They are facing a critical shortage of men, especially black men, who are willing to spend a few hours a month with a boy.

The program has not been able to whittle down a waiting list of boys who need mentors. They can't take new applications from mothers who want their sons to spend some time with an adult male role model.

While they're working on ways to clear up that logjam, Big Brothers Big Sisters is recruiting older boys to mentor younger boys. Maurice Roth-Hiller more than fits the bill.

"I was in the 10th grade when I heard about it," said Roth-Hiller, who is a graduating senior in Girard's high-school program.

"I thought I would work with the elementary school because they're younger and need more help.

"Tyree was kind of a quiet kid like I was. He didn't like to talk a lot in public. I'd see him walking around on campus by himself a lot.

"But he became close to me. It was fun for me too. We played sports together, had fun. But I was serious with him, too."

It wasn't a hard adjustment for Maurice. He has two younger brothers and a younger sister. He rarely sees them since his mother moved to Florida.

What he has never had is a chance to be on the other side of the big/little relationship.

"I think I wouldn't have been so shy when I was younger," Maurice said. "My grades would have improved and my behavior would have been better."

He has helped himself in all those areas by working with his little brothers on campus.

"I feel like I have a part in improving how they act now," he said. "That makes me feel good.

"You learn to carry yourself better. Your behavior improves because you can't be a negative influence for them.

"You learn to be more tolerant because sometimes they can be a little crazy."

Tyree Harrison is in the seventh grade now. He will tell you that his relationship with Maurice has helped him take control of his own life.

"Half the time, I was just sitting around on the steps or doing whatever anyone else wanted to do," he recalled.

"I think I would like to become a mentor to teach someone what Maurice taught me in the fifth grade, how you get to be yourself."

You can help a boy get to be himself. You don't need a degree. No experience is required. All it costs is a few hours per month to spend with a boy.

The Big Brothers Big Sisters program will provide all the support you need. They do require a background check. But even men who have had a minor brush with the law can get through it.

If you're ready to take on a life-changing challenge, just call Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern PA at 215-701-8100.