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1964

Greenwood, Miss.-- "In my math class, my trigonometry student continually is asking for more homework," explains Carolyn Egan of Portland, who is teaching in a freedom school here. "He's never missed a day of class and is always there on time. He's really eager to learn. And we have a number of other students who are like that."

Carolyn, 21 year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Edward C. Egan of 1385 SW 84th Street, is one of close to 1,000 volunteers--students, teachers, doctors, lawyers and clergymen--participating in the Mississippi Summer Project.

"This boy gets up at 5:30 to help us canvas for voter registration before people go out to work in the cotton fields. Then he comes to the freedom school. They don't teach trigonometry at the Negro school here, only geometry and algebra. A lot of the kids have

Carolyn Egan--add one

commented on how they're able to take subjects not available at their public school."

This youngster is one of about 50 who regularly attend the freedom school here which meets daily at the Friendship Baptist Church. They are taught by about five other volunteers like Carolyn.

"His parents are very proud of him," Carolyn continued. "They let him go to a planning committee meeting in Jackson a couple weeks ago and last week they let him go to the freedom school convention in Meridian."

Carolyn explains that because of fear, many parents don't openly support their children going to the freedom school.

"About half the students said their parents don't want them to come but they come anyway. Some said their parents were afraid at the beginning but let them come the first day anyway. Then after the students talked things over with their parents, they could come all the time. More students would come if the parents said it was alright."

Greenwood, county seat of LeFlore County, is the national home of the White Citizens' Councils and the council controls much of the town. It is also home of Byron De La Beckwith, accused killer of Medgar Evers, who received a royal welcome from city officials when he was released. Despite a two year old voter registration drive organized by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, less than two percent of the eligible Negroes were registered in the county as of July. Fear and violence fill this delta town of 21,000 situated halfway between the state capital Jackson and the Tennessee border.

"Getting back to my favorite student," Carolyn said, "he plans on going to college and we're trying to gather all the information we

can on scholarships for Negroes in the South. He talks about majoring in math but he's doing well in political science too. He's more than competent in a number of things. He's just not certain what he wants to major in so he would like to go to a liberal arts college."

The Greenwood freedom school is one of 39 in the state.

"We didn't start the school right away," Carolyn said. "We took a week to discuss what we would teach and to prepare ourselves to teach Negro history. We also canvassed the neighborhoods, introducing ourselves, trying to get people interested, and making announcements in churches.

"We met in the church here for the first week but then the minister told us not to come back. The police circled the building all that week probably to make sure we didn't use it. But after a meeting with the minister, he let us come back."

The courses taught include citizenship, American and Negro history, the U.S. and Mississippi Constitutions and non-violence. Electives available include French, German, Spanish, trigonometry, algebra, geometry and political science. In the afternoon the students work on a newspaper they write and print themselves and have a drama class in which they have been writing their own plays.

"It's more of a chance for them to discuss their own situation," Carolyn explains.

A baseball team has also been organized which plays teams organized by other freedom schools.

"I've been teaching German, trigonometry, geometry, citizenship and Negro history. There are about five in my German class, one in each of my math classes and about ten in citizenship. In Negro

history each of us gives a lecture to the whole group and then we break down into smaller discussion groups."

The Greenwood Negro public school is closed now, but the one for the county is open so that it can close in September and October, freeing Negro children to work picking cotton in the fields. For this reason, night classes are held in the rural areas. Also a literacy class is held at the Greenwood community center.

"The kids are great," Carolyn admits. "They just throw out and pick up an idea right away. And they help the SNCC workers canvas for voter registration too. It's been a tremendous experience for those of us who plan on going into teaching."

Carolyn is an American history major at Stanford University where she first heard about the summer project.

"Fourteen students came to Mississippi last fall to help in the freedom vote campaign when NAACP state president Aaron Henry was running for governor. A good friend of mine was one of them. Because of this activity a Friends of SNCC group got going and the national SNCC office sent us all their information. I found out about the project that way.

"You get so tired of seeing people sit around so self-satisfied. But for those people who have been given a lot, a lot should be expected. I was able to work while going to school spring quarter to pay for most of my expenses so I could come down. I have one more quarter to go before I graduate. I'll go back in the fall and finish up. Then I plan on working a bit and coming down again in the spring to help get another freedom school going next summer."