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**Shelia Stewart is 'Queen'
of the SAT Prep Course**

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Shelia Stewart is 'Queen' of the SAT Prep Course

By Jim Irish

Shelia Stewart is the "queen" of the SAT prep course. In the span of a few years, she has developed a reputation for instructing students on improving their scores on the college admissions exam.

While homeschooling her two children four years ago, Shelia began tutoring her friends' children. As a CPA, she had the background in mathematics. She liked that she was helping her friends while at the same time making some extra income. When her daughter, Samantha, became old enough to be dual enrolled (homeschool and college at GRU), she had more freedom. "I wanted something to do without going back to work," she says. "I liked auditing, but I liked tutoring more."

Shelia had worked closely with her son, Ben, to prepare him for the SAT. She studied books and videos on the subject. Ben and she took practice exams together. If he missed a math problem, she told him to return and try to find the correct answer. If he wasn't able to solve it, she would try it herself. "I was able to figure some out that he couldn't," says Shelia, a resident of Hargrove. "If we (both) couldn't figure it out, then we got help."

Their diligent preparation paid off. At age 14, Ben scored a perfect 800 in math. Later, her daughter, Samantha, missed only one problem and had a 770.

A homeschool cooperative at Westminster Presbyterian, where Shelia taught, asked her to teach a SAT prep class. "I took the same techniques that I did with Ben and designed a class around it," Shelia says. After that, she saw a need for SAT prep classes in the community and started them in her home. Last fall, she held two on Mondays, one from 3:30-6 pm and another from 6:30-8:30 pm. Because of practice after school, athletes attended her second class. Shelia says she fits 18 students comfortably in her upstairs bonus room.

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The course runs 12 weeks and costs \$225, which includes the book. Students take five practice exams as part of 30 hours of homework. By comparison, Kaplan Test Prep offers an 18-hour course for \$699. While Kaplan guarantees a higher score,

Shelia Stewart with her family.
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Shelia does not. But she says that students who take her course improve, on average, 200 points.

Ariel Mouser, of North Augusta, improved 260 points, including an 800 in critical reading, on the three-part exam after taking Shelia's course. "The lessons showed me how to approach questions quickly, which was vital in the area of math," says Ariel, a rising sophomore at the King's College in New York City.

Last summer, Shelia taught an intensive two-week SAT prep class for four hours a day to 27 students at Augusta Christian. This summer, the same course attracted 28 students from seven high schools and homeschools, many who are athletes or band members unable to attend during the fall. The

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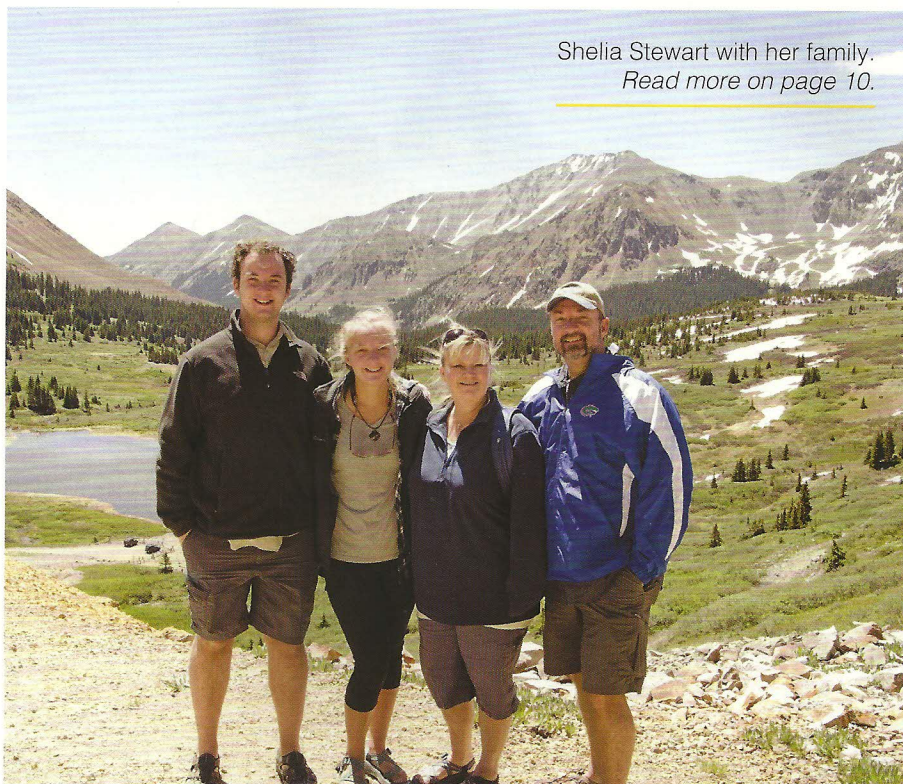


problem with the summer course, Shelia says, is that it ends in July, and the next SAT is not until October. She gives them a schedule to continue studying on their own.

People learn of Shelia's classes by word of mouth and Facebook. She sometimes has doubts of not reaching the minimum number of students. "Nearly every class has not only had enough students to make it a go, but nearly every time it fills to the limit," she says. "I really do not like to turn students away."

Shelia also tutors individual students who are either athletes required to reach a minimum SAT score or students already with scores in the 600s wanting a higher score for admission to an Ivy League college or for a scholarship.

As a Christian, Shelia says she starts each class with a short devotional, which includes God's word from the Bible. "I feel this is a ministry where I can share the hope of Jesus and help students reach their goals on the SAT," she says. ■



Shelia Stewart with her family.
Read more on page 10.

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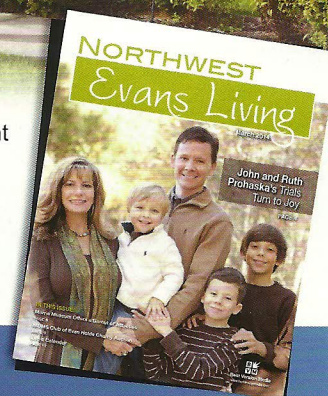


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Stewart Family Likes Flexibility of Homeschooling

By Jim Irish

THE STEWART FAMILY STUMBLED UPON HOMESCHOOLING.

Ben, the older of Jason and Shelia Stewart's two children, attended kindergarten at a private school in Augusta, skipped first grade, and continued at the same school for second grade. At the end of the academic year, he told his mother that he was bored. He had a friend who was homeschooled and wondered about trying it. "Homeschooling?" Shelia thought to herself. "Why would (he) want to do that? I was surprised. He's

very outgoing. I thought he'd want to be at school around all the kids."

Using A Beka Book curriculum, Shelia started homeschooling Ben in the third grade. They used Apologia for science and Saxon for math after the first year. In fourth grade, they joined Veritas Academy, a homeschool cooperative at Westminster Presbyterian. Except for the ninth grade at Augusta Prep, Ben was homeschooled through high school. He was also dual enrolled his final two years at then Augusta State and earned 45 college credits by his high school graduation.

**"I got to spend a lot
more time with my kids."**

>>> Shelia Stewart

Although gifted academically, Ben had other interests. He participated in Social and went on mission trips to Ukraine, Mexico, and Panama with his church. At graduation, he was named the top high school student of the Best and Brightest by *The Augusta Chronicle*. A rising senior with a 3.5 GPA at Georgia Tech, Ben, 20, will graduate in May with a degree in mechanical engineering.



He says being homeschooled was the best option for him. "When you're homeschooled, there's the ability to learn at your own pace," he says. "It's very personalized and customized to you and your needs. I was able to come into Tech having already taken college courses. I would not have been able to do that had I not been homeschooled."

Except for kindergarten, Samantha, 17, has also been homeschooled. She started college courses in the 10th grade, a year earlier than Ben. Among her accomplishments is reaching the 2008 National Spelling Bee in Washington, D.C. This

summer, she was among 16 students from Georgia and Alabama selected for the Auburn Summer Science Institute, a week long study taught by professors at Auburn University. She has passions outside of academics. She plays volleyball with the Eagles, a homeschool team, and also participated in Social, including a year of cotillion. "I really like to dance," says Samantha, who took ballet and jazz growing up.

Like Ben, Samantha wants to attend Georgia Tech and pursue a degree in biology or in the medical field.

Samantha says taking college courses has allowed her to "get a step ahead."

Jason, a civilian employee at Fort Gordon, says homeschooling their children also permitted greater flexibility when they lived in London for three years. They visited 13 countries. "It allowed us to do a lot of traveling," Jason says. "That was part of the kids' education."

Shelia admits that she has homeschooled for selfish reasons. "I got to spend a lot more time with my kids," she says, tearing up. ■