

# Teachers make marks in, out of classroom

Doing field work on the Northern Fur Seals of the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea off the coast of Alaska; laboring in the lab at the University of Texas; examining gender and geography at Trinity College in Hartford; finding out about China at Yale; doing surveys on tourism and sustainability at the University of Maine; studying with the National Geographic Society in Washington, D.C. and teaching and working with other teachers at Roger Williams University and Rhode Island College, 20 Teacher Consultants (TCs) of the Rhode Island Geography Education Alliance had themselves a busy and productive summer.

The additional 10 who were studying computers in two week workshops sponsored by the Rhode Island Foundation meant that more than one in three of our TCs were actively engaged in some type of professional development activity this summer.

At a time when school districts are getting around to realizing how important such activities are and how they need to be encouraged, subsidized and recognized, our Geography Education Alliance, with sponsorship by the National Geographic and help from government and others, has been doing this since its inception seven years ago.

Working with these Rhode Island teachers, I have been most impressed by their creativity, enthusiasm, talent and the plain hard work that they exhibit. Attending meetings; serving on school, district and state committees; writing letters and professional articles; preparing exhibits for the general public; writing, editing, compiling and publishing

our semi annual newsletter; writing proposals for grants and receiving them; and giving workshops for their peers, all of it on a voluntary and unpaid basis, are activities that often go unrecognized by the general public.

When the National Geographic established this network of Alliances twelve years ago that now includes all states as well as Puerto Rico and Canada, they wisely made it a grassroots organization in which teachers, not administrators, became the leaders in the movement.

This empowerment of teachers is a new experience for them, since too often matters are decided for them by school committees, superintendents, principals, department heads and, believe it or not, sometimes custodians who can determine when and if things happen in the physical plant.

Another impediment for teachers is the lack of communication that takes place among teachers. In a sense the classroom teacher operates as a vendor who provides a service in almost complete isolation. She reports to her classroom in the morning, attends to and teaches her students, may have lunch duty, and sees the children off in the afternoon. All of this takes place with little contact with other teachers.

In too many schools administrators do not call meetings of the teachers, do not provide opportunities, time or places in which teachers can meet to share ideas, do not recognize the outstanding work provided by or awards given to their teachers and may never visit to observe the teacher in the classroom and see how effective is the teacher. So where does this leave the teacher who receives little communication, sharing and attention to what is going in the classroom?

What this Alliance movement has meant for teachers with this interest in geography is to provide a venue where teachers can get together, op-

portunity to share ideas and a sense of camaraderie and helpfulness toward each other. Further, there are many opportunities for professional development and growth that go along with deserved recognition for their hard work.

And all of this pays off. Three of our TCs will receive the Distinguished Teacher of Geography award from the National Council for Geographic Education in Indianapolis in October; one will receive the Advanced Certification in Geography, first in the state to do so; one will be in Japan for three weeks in November to study their education under a Fulbright grant; and one received the Good Neighbor Award from the State Farm Insurance Companies with its \$5,000 grant and a full page ad in six national magazines.

Yes, there are some good things happening in Rhode Island education.

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