

Excellence in geography in the schools

MOST PEOPLE know of the National Geographic Society through its well-known magazine, nine million of which are mailed out each month and most of which now reside in attics throughout the world.

Throughout its distinguished 111-year history, stories and pictures, ranging from the common and local to the foreign and exotic, have captivated imaginations, and in the process helped us to learn a little about the geography of places in the world.

But what many do not realize is the \$80 million effort over the past 12 years that the Geographic has made in the schools of the country to make our teachers and children better understand the world around them. This it has done through its support of Geography Alliances established in every state, Canada, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia.

With all the criticism of our schools, at some point we need also to recognize the outstanding programs that help improve the work of teachers and their students, and this is one of them.

Similar to other state alliances, the Rhode Island Geography Education Alliance, based at Rhode Island College, has now been supported by the National Geographic Society, state government and foundations over the past eight years of its existence to the tune of almost a half million dollars. In that time, about 100 teachers have been through a training program and have become Teacher Consultants. With the status of a TC, the teacher now becomes part of a national network of 14,000 TCs who work for the improvement of geography instruction in their various states.

Thousands of students have now felt the effect of this program. As an example, over five million youngsters, grades 4 through 8, have recently completed the Geography Bee competition, sponsored by NGS, and the \$50,000 of scholarship money is awarded after the nationally televised final competition is held at the Geographic in Washington. Three years ago, a Rhode Island student captured the \$15,000 second-place prize.

But more important than competition and prizes are the new interest and professional development on the part of teachers. And this is where Rhode Island teachers have proven themselves to be worthy of national recognition. This year, for example, NGS awarded 20 teacher grants for which these 14,000 TCs could apply, and three of them went to Rhode Island TCs. Two of the three received maximum awards of \$1,250 and one received \$1,188.

Henry DeVona of the Johnston schools will work with his students on "Project WASTE: Wanting Answers to State's Troubled Environment"; Carolyn Carnevale, also of the Johnston schools, will work with other teachers and students on "The Ocean State: A Lighthouse Journey"; and Helen Johnson of the North Kingstown schools will study "Duck Cove Salt Marsh Restoration" with her students.

And the list goes on: Denise Frederick of North Kingstown schools will receive the Distinguished Teacher Award at the annual meeting of the National Council for

Geographic Education in Boston on Nov. 5; Maureen Spaight will study at Gray's Reef in Georgia this summer with the distinguished oceanographer Sylvia Earle, with sponsorship by the Geographic and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Ellen Thompson of St. Luke's in Barrington will be in Japan for three weeks through the Fulbright program; Jerry LaPierre of Central Falls schools and Mike Mackillop of the Warwick schools will be at the Geographic in Washington for three weeks to study leadership; and four TCs went to Colorado to study assessments and standards, 20 teachers took a course on China sponsored by the Five Colleges Center at Smith College and 15 TCs will be studying in London this summer.

And this only during the first six months of the year! The list is too long to

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recount what Rhode Island teachers have done to improve their teaching and geography skills over this past eight years, but suffice it to say that these professionals are doing things in Rhode Island schools that never would have occurred without the support of the National Geographic Society and its Alliance movement.

Next summer, the Rhode Island Alliance will conduct another intensive, 80-hour, two-week institute at which another 20 teacher consultants will be trained so that they can go out to their respective school districts to give workshops, get on curriculum committees, talk with administrators, work with parents and bring their new-found excitement and skills to their students.

The Alliance will continue to sponsor conferences and meetings, publish the

semiannual newsletter, provide teaching materials that to date have a value of over \$125,000, all provided free to the TCs and their schools, and continue to work for greater professional development by providing opportunities for study and travel all over the world.

Yes, there are some good things happening in Rhode Island schools, and Rhode Island teachers are in the forefront of gaining knowledge and skills to provide improved and even exciting teaching for their students. The National Geographic Society, through this Alliance movement, is to be thanked for making this national effort to have better informed teachers who can work to inspire our young people.

Anne K. Petry is a professor of education at Rhode Island College and Chester E. Smolski is professor emeritus of geography at Rhode Island College. The two are coordinators of the Rhode Island Geography Education Alliance.

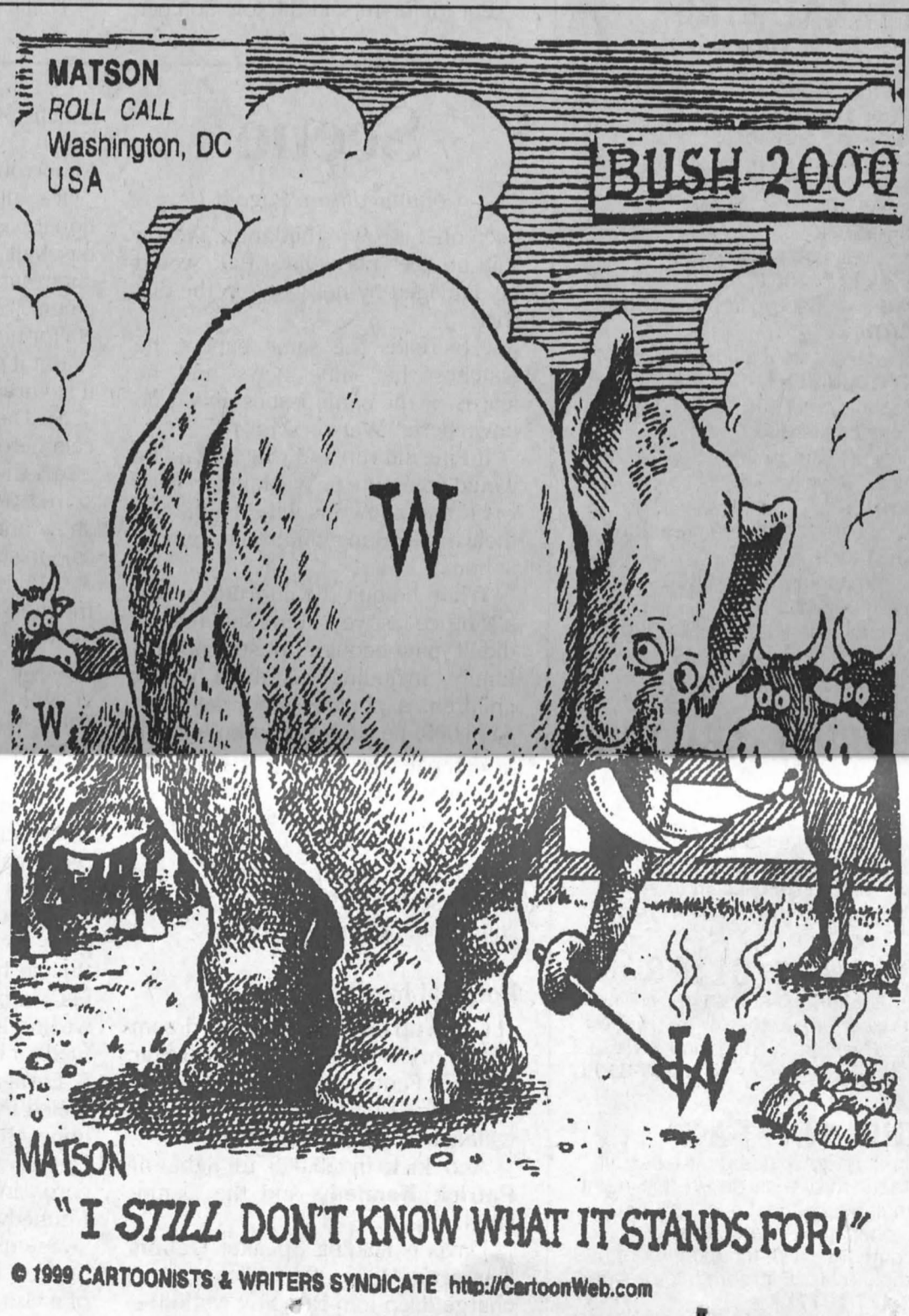
Achorn joins the Journal

Edward C. Achorn has joined The Providence Journal as deputy editorial page editor.

Before joining the Journal, Mr. Achorn was executive editor of The Eagle-Tribune, a Pulitzer Prize-winning daily newspaper based in Lawrence, Mass., that serves a wide area of northern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. He has more than 20 years of experience in New England journalism as an award-winning reporter, columnist, news editor and editorial page editor. He spent six years as a Washington correspondent. As a reporter, he toured Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand, was an eyewitness to the

Challenger explosion, and helped cover the story of Willie Horton and the Massachusetts prisoner-furlough system, which became a pivotal issue in the 1988 presidential campaign. He is co-author of a book, *How to Land a Job in Journalism*.

Achorn is a 1975 graduate of Westboro (Mass.) High School and a 1979 graduate of Boston College, where he majored in English literature and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He lives with his wife, Christine, and their three children, Jean, Matthew and Joshua. He is a baseball addict and a keen student of its early years, when Providence boasted a great major league team.



"I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT IT STANDS FOR!"

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