

Retaining and revitalizing teachers

Bankers do it; corporate members do it; even non-re-fundable profits do it, so why in the world can't teachers do it? What I'm talking about is the opportunity to get away from the job for a short period to have some free time, to contemplate, to talk with your colleagues, be pampered and to learn. This so-called retreat provides the opportunity to relax and reflect on your life and your work, to refresh yourself and to be recognized for the important work that you do. This is what they do for teachers in North Carolina, the only state to have such a program and a facility in which to do this.

Nestled on 30 acres in the Great Smoky Mountains is the state owned and operated \$7.6 million lodge of the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching, a place where teachers go to get revitalized. Housed and fed for five days and four nights, with the state even paying for substitute teachers to cover for them, teachers experience a world they do not know: sessions to discuss with colleagues issues and problems of their profession, time for walks, reflection, reading or workouts in the health center, and every-

where, adult conversations. Every year nearly 2,000 teachers have this experience, about 2.5 percent of the state's teachers.

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— teacher retention, at a time when teachers are needed to fill the nation's requirement for two million new teachers in the next ten years. This is especially the case in this ninth fastest growing state, registering a 21 percent population increase in the past decade.

It also may explain why North Carolina ranks among the top states in the recent *Education Week* study done on state efforts for improved education, ranking number one in Improving Teacher Quality. As a result of the program teachers say they feel appreciated and are proud to say that they are teachers. And they go back to their classrooms

The program helps serve an important necessity in the state

feeling that someone cares and recognizes their work as an important profession. According to the *New York Times*, the Center's \$4 million annual budget is a small part of the \$7.6 billion spent by the state for elementary and secondary education.

Here in Rhode Island our own small organization, the Rhode Island Geography Education Alliance, feels the same way about its Teacher Consultants, those teachers who have gone through our training period to better teach geography in the schools of the state. For this reason we will be conducting a weekend retreat to do with them much the same; with discussions of teacher issues and problems, good food, some outdoor activities and time, to relax, converse, reflect and discover that person who is a teacher.

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