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Grant enables WECHS teacher to visit European sites in summer

By Luci Weldon

A \$5,000 Fund For Teachers grant enabled Warren Early College High School English teacher Ryan Hurley to visit a number of European sites that inspired several of the most well-known authors whose works high school students still study today.

"When I was at Warren County High School two years ago, I saw a flyer posted ... that mentioned a grant opportunity available," he said.

That grant opportunity was available through the organization Fund For Teachers, which developed from a pilot program established in Minneapolis, Minn. by Raymond Plank, a citizen who wanted to provide summer learning opportunities for teachers.

Fund For Teachers is designed to support teachers as they pursue learning opportunities around the world that will have an impact on their work, students and their school communities.

"I found that I could not apply (for grant funding) until I had taught for three years," Hurley said. "In my third year, I asked if I could apply in my third year and found out that I could."

He spent all of January writing his grant application, and learned that it had been accepted in late March.

Hurley based his grant application on visiting and researching sites in Europe that inspired authors Frank McCourt, William Shakespeare, Ernest Hemingway and Homer.

"The sites were chosen due to specific literary works I teach in class," he said.

From June 28-July 17, Hurley traveled in Ireland, England, France, Italy and Greece.

Prior to the trip, he researched guidebooks and literary texts to learn more about what specific areas were important in the lives of the writers.

"It was easy to find places that inspired McCourt and Shakespeare," Hurley said. "I had to look more to find places of interest for Hemingway and Homer."

However, his journey involved more than just visiting these sites and taking photographs, as tourists would. He talked to residents of the areas and tour guides to learn more about the places he was visiting and their connections with the writers.

"While I was touring the sites, I used a small, portable video camera," Hurley said. "As I interviewed people along the way ... I recorded that."

One tour guide recorded a message specifically for his students.

"A tour guide in London was very excited to learn that I was an English teacher and would be bringing my information back to the classroom," Hurley said.

During interviews, his subjects discussed the area where they live and what they knew about the authors.

"Many people had insights into the authors," Hurley said. "The people in Ithica take their role in literature very seriously. They talk to visitors about 'The Odyssey.'"



Warren Early College High School English teacher Ryan Hurley stands beside a statue of Homer's protagonist, Odysseus, on the Greek island of Ithaca during a visit to sites in Ireland, England, France and Greece that inspired noted authors.

He also found that for many of the people interviewed, reading the literary works means much more than seeing a famous [text](#).

"For my students, reading these works is exciting and interesting, but for the people I talked to, reading literature is like reading their history, reading their own lives," Hurley said.

Now, he will bring these insights into his classroom, teaching how literary works shaped the lives of the people living in areas important to authors.

"I plan to use many photos and videos when I am introducing the works by the authors, to give a better context of the writing," Hurley said.

He also hopes to inspire his students to learn more about how places influenced writers.

"Through my research, I hope to inspire them to go somewhere, and if they do not go, to investigate, to read the background of an author, what inspired them to write in such a rich way, the joys and sorrows," Hurley said.

For him, the trip to Europe was a dream come true.

"I had such a wonderful time," Hurley said. "It was a trip of a lifetime. I never would have been able to afford it without the grant."

He wants to encourage other teachers to take advantage of the opportunities offered through the Fund For Teachers, which is operated in North Carolina through a partnership with the Rural School and Community Trust.

"If there is someplace in the world you want to go to inspire you as a teacher and give you more initiative as a teacher, I encourage you (to learn more)," Hurley said.

For more information about Fund For Teachers, visit the Web site: www.fundforteachers.org.