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OU professor brings history and archaeology alive to elementary students

By **Katie Land**, news editor

Oakland University associate anthropology professor Richard Stamps is helping to bring history and archaeology alive for fourth and fifth grade students in the Waterford School District.

As part of an innovative and successful program funded through a Teaching American History grant, Stamps and creator Carol Bacak-Egbo work to provide new methods for teachers to engage their students in national history, based on learning the history of their own community.

"The grant uses archaeology to make learning about local history help make national history relevant to kids. What happens with this method is that it does get kids excited to learn," Stamps said.

The program helps teachers learn how to dig into the past by using census bureau information, land records, historical maps, title information and more to uncover the history of the area their students live in.

For example, one class created a timeline of their school's history. They began by discovering who originally owned the property as a farm and ended up learning about the farmer, his children, and the families that used to live there. They saw the land change hands over the years and became an elementary school. Students continued their search and interviewed the original principal, bringing themselves up through history to present day.

At that point in a study, Stamps, affectionately known as the "head archaeologist" brings his team of OU students into the mix. They work with teams of students to create a real archaeological dig. The students become diggers, screeners, note takers, photographers and more to analyze their findings.

"We're getting OU students to do an inter-generational study with little kids, while motivating these students and getting them excited about history and archaeology," Stamps said. "It is a holistic integrative activity that helps kids see the big picture."

For many students, the Civil War is something that happened long ago, in a faraway place. Utilizing the "Dig into the Past" techniques, students can read the diary of a soldier from Waterford, and his letters home during the war. Visiting the gravestone of a soldier or finding out about local "stations" of the Underground Railroad can make the lesson more meaningful to local students, Stamps said.

"This is a new, cutting edge technique for people who traditionally look at history through written documents. Adding the archaeology dimension breaks new ground, and students really respond to it."

This is the second TAH grant used for the program. Of the 18 Waterford Schools, Schoolcraft and Houghton have benefitted from the grant so far.

Stamps and Bacak-Egbo traveled to Washington, D.C. this December to present, "Digging into the Past: Strategies for Using Archaeology to Engage Teachers," at the Teaching American History Annual Project Directors Conference.

SUMMARY

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