



SVC EDUCATION CLUB COMPLETES SERVICE IN TITUSVILLE

Public Relations

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Saint Vincent College Education Club travelled to Titusville on February 4 for a service project to reach out to a rural, 100-year old, elementary school in desperate need of an aesthetic facelift to the former high school gymnasium and community fallout shelter.

Main Street Elementary in the Titusville School District (1912) was “once the high school of the town known to have more millionaires per 1,000 population than anywhere else in the world,” said Mr. Terry Funk, principal for 33 years in the district. “Today, the school building is used as one of the three elementary schools and enrolls nearly 53% of children eligible for free and reduced lunch.” “While the building had been remodeled extensively in the 1960s and had new gymnasium additions and updates occurring since, the one location that seemed lost in time was the old basement high school gymnasium that is now too small for official sporting activities. The space is used today for occasional inside recess and classroom physical education exercises.”

Dr. Veronica I. Ent, associate professor and chair of the Education Department and Education Club advisor at Saint Vincent College, contacted Mr. Funk after researching for older, rural elementary buildings in locations in Pennsylvania that were considered in need due to the economic downturn and employment outlooks.

“Focusing our efforts on locations that would appreciate the service is key to the success of the Club’s projects,” Dr. Ent said. “With so many options for service and little time to do them, finding a school and a principal, like Main Street Elementary and Mr. Funk, really contributed to the overwhelming returns it provided to Saint Vincent Education students as well as the teachers, families and children of Titusville.” Dr. Ent continued. Following the format of last year’s service project in a Gaston County Elementary School in North Carolina, the Club collected more than seven large boxes of school supplies and Dr. Ent designed a wall mural for the school. However, this year’s project surpassed last year in that the mural was three times the size and involved research of the Titusville area.

In addition to expertise in instructional technology and design, Dr. Ent holds a degree in art. “Speaking with the school principal led to an inspiration,” she stated, “and the wall space speaks for itself!” In this case, the history of the town, the vintage of the building and the principal’s support led Dr. Ent to develop

the Titusville area history mural including the Drake Well, the high bridge, area wildlife and foliage and the timber industry. Two weeks prior to the planned school visit, Dr. Ent visited the school to draw the image and deliver the boxes of school supplies. "Mr. Funk was so supportive and easy to work with," she said. "When the students arrived two weeks later, he helped paint and assisted us the entire day while talking to them about becoming teachers, sharing experiences on classroom management, and the dos and don'ts of teaching."

"The message of 'service to others' is such a vital part of the mission of educators in these difficult economic times," Dr. Ent noted.

"To see a group of students such as this one that actively pursue the chance to improve the lives of children, with whom they have had no previous contact, speaks volumes to the character of those in your organization," Mr. Funk said. "It was so obvious that the Education Club has picked up on Dr. Ent's lead and they function as a family. I was deeply impressed with the kind and compassionate way that they all got along and the teasing yet respectful way that they treated one another. Titusville plans to hire teachers in the coming year, and we look for the best. While we may receive nearly 300 applications for each teacher position, we look for teachers who go the extra mile and Saint Vincent College students should not hesitate to apply."

During the next school day, the children were escorted down to the old gym and were shown the mural by Mr. Funk. The students were told about the historical details that were incorporated into the image as a teachable moment. "Watching the student's expression as they caught their first glimpse of the mural was priceless. There were actually audible 'oohs' and 'aahs' much like when they watch fireworks," Mr. Funk commented.

Seven Saint Vincent College students participated in the service project including Sarah Dillon, a senior English education major from Bethel Park; Shelly Pruchnik, a senior chemistry education major from Johnstown; Chris Morrone, a senior mathematics education major from Irwin; Natalie Larson, a junior education/psychology major from Harrisburg; Owen Barton, a junior mathematics education major from Irwin; Heidi Hellmuth, a junior English education major from Walkersville, Maryland; and Aaron Frech, a junior middle grade education/social studies major from Leechburg.

Photo: (left to right), *Mr. Terry Funk (Principal), Shelly Pruchnik, Owen Barton, Natalie Larson, Aaron Frech, Sarah Dillon (club president), Chris Morrone, Heidi Hellmuth, Dr. Veronica Ent, and Christopher Dombrowski (age 11).*