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High School Students Produce Video Documentaries

More than 40 community videos created with Picturing America in Your Community program

(LANSING)-----Over the past year, students from 11 high schools across Michigan worked with the Michigan Humanities Council to create video documentaries that interpret unique aspects of their community. Students in social studies and history classes teamed with film producers from Michigan Television to learn video production techniques, including skills such as interviewing and storyboarding. Students controlled the concept and artistic direction. By the end of the program, 42 videos were created by students from 11 high schools: Allegan, Bay City, Bear Lake, Bloomfield Hills International Academy, Burt Township (Grand Marais), Frankfort, Harper Woods, Hartland, Lansing Everett, Warren Mott, and Waterford Mott.

The project was conceived by the Michigan Humanities Council to complement the National Endowment for the Humanities' Picturing America program, through which the schools received prints of famous American artworks as a context to understand American history.

“At a time when Michigan schools are facing economic challenges, we are grateful to be able to create this unique, creative learning program,” said Jan Fedewa, executive director of the Michigan Humanities Council. “The program demonstrates how students gain a better understanding of the humanities by connecting today’s technology with the history of their community.”

Some of the 42 short films created by students included:

- Allegan High School students’ documentary about the World War II prisoner of war camp in Allegan.
- Bay City High School students interviewing locals about the history of the Defoe Shipbuilding Company, which closed in Bay City in 1978.
- Bear Lake High School students’ documentary about the community’s reaction to a local adult theater.
- Bloomfield Hills International Academy students’ discussion about the impact on the community of the economic challenges affecting General Motors.
- Lansing Everett High School students’ documentary about the history of the Lansing Theatre District.

(more)

Teachers noted the learning impact of the project on their students: “The one thing that my students took away from this opportunity was that local history came alive to them in a way they had not noticed before,” said Lothar Konietzko, American history teacher at Lansing Everett High School. “Being able to connect a broad topic, like generalized U.S. History, to a local angle brings history home to a kid and it always makes the educational experience more relevant and interesting.”

“The class learned many stories about our small town and enjoyed digging for information,” said Michael Grahl, a teacher at Bear Lake High School. “Personally, it was a great experience to see excitement from students involved in a project in which they had very little past experience.”

“Not only did they learn the technical aspects of making a documentary; they also got to know our local community much better,” said Terri Cafcalas, a visual arts instructor at Bloomfield Hills International Academy. “The process of researching, writing, interviewing, editing, and taking pictures helped them form insightful conclusions and points of view about their topics.”

“This project was a great way to teach kids how to research their local history using primary sources and historical society resources,” said Dave Jackson, a teacher at Frankfort High School. “It was a fantastic hands-on learning experience to which the kids really responded.”

The public can watch each of the 42 videos available online at the Council’s media archive at www.michiganhumanities.org, or on its YouTube site at www.youtube.com/michiganhumanities.

Picturing America in Your Community video documentary participating schools				
Teacher	Name	School	City	E-mail
Sarah	Tiles	Allegan Senior High School	Allegan	stiles@alleganps.org
Craig	Windt	Bay City Central High School	Bay City	windtc@bcschools.net
Michael	Grahl	Bear Lake High School	Bear Lake	grahlm@manistee.org
Terri	Cafcalas	Bloomfield Hills Int’l Academy	Bloomfield Hills	tcafcaldas@bloomfield.org
Seth	Hoopingarner	Burt Township School	Grand Marais	gmhsrocks@yahoo.com
Lothar	Konietzko	Everett High School	Lansing	teach_thinking@hotmail.com
Dave	Jackson	Frankfort High School	Frankfort	djackson@frankfort.tbaisd.k12.mi.us
Monica	Lenhard	Harper Woods High School	Harper Woods	monica.lenhard@hwoods.k12.mi.us
John	Denzer	Hartland High School	Hartland	johndenzer@hartlandschools.us
Jim	French	Warren Mott High School	Warren	frenchj@mail.wcs.k12.mi.us
Andrew	Dalian	Waterford Mott High School	Waterford	ad13owat@wsdmi.org

The Michigan Humanities Council, founded in 1974, is a private, non-profit organization, funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities. For additional information, please visit: www.michiganhumanities.org or call 517-372-7770.

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