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MEDIA RELEASE

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Ashwaubenon Art Teachers Spend July In Mexico As NEH Scholars

Ashwaubenon, WI – October 18, 2011 – Ashwaubenon School District Art Teachers Kathleen Kowalczyk and Dean Stadel spent July 2011 in Mexico as National Endowment of Humanities (NEH) Scholars. They participated in an institute entitled “Mesoamerican Cultures and their Histories: Spotlight on Oaxaca.”

Kowalczyk and Stadel, who teach at Pioneer Elementary and Ashwaubenon High respectively, were two of twenty seven teachers selected from a national competitive pool of applicants from all academic disciplines, grades K-12. Through this grant award, educators are given the unique opportunity to study with experts in humanities disciplines. The aim of the NEH program is to prepare summer scholars to return to their classrooms with a deeper knowledge in key fields of the humanities.

Each of the four weeks of the Mesoamerican Institute had a distinct theme, including: archaeology, architecture, ethnohistory, and cultural perspectives in the arts: music, textiles, pottery, woodworking, photography, and film. Throughout their stay, Kowalczyk and Stadel delved into indigenous cultures and their histories from readings, lectures, and experiential learning through excursions in southern Mexico. “We were exposed to an incredible array of people and places. With all the personal stories and photographs we have gathered and produced, the Mexican Arts that I teach will be greatly authentically enhanced”, Kowalczyk said.

In Teotitlan del Valle, a town famous for its textiles, they visited a women’s weaving cooperative and the workshops of several textile producing families. Kowalczyk and Stadel photographed demonstrations of the labor intensive steps involved in hand spinning the yarns, natural dye production, and weaving rugs. According to Kowalczyk, “Each year I teach a fourth grade weaving unit. My students love the warmth and technical challenges of weaving.”

They also visited San Marcos Tlapazol, a Zapotec village in the valley of Oaxaca where women have been using the same method of pottery making for thousands of years. Kowalczyk and Stadel are developing a multi-grade level pottery unit featuring examples of animal forms from pre-Columbian times that are exhibited in the Rufino Tamayo Museum, in Oaxaca.

Kowalczyk and Stadel made multiple visits to Arrazola, a town famous for carved wooden figures painted in bright colors, known as alebrijes. They worked closely with renowned woodcarvers Armando Jiménez Arragón and Claudio Ojeda Morales. They purchased several hand-carved, hand-painted alebrijes signed by the artists to add to their art collection. “I was fascinated by the tremendous variety of wood carving styles and painting

techniques. I plan on inviting Claudio Ojeda Morales to visit our school district for an artist in residency in the future,” Stadel said.

Based on their experiences, photographs, video footage, folk arts, and artifacts, Kowalczyk and Stadel are currently designing new art based interdisciplinary curricular units for use in their own classrooms. They plan to make the units available to other teachers nationwide. They are in the process of creating a display of their photographs and art work they acquired from their travels in southern Mexico.

For more information, please contact Kathleen Kowalczyk, Art Teacher, Pioneer Elementary School at 920-492-2925 extension 6131 or kkowalczyk@ashwaubenon.k12.wi.us.

Picture attached: ASD-PIHS-ArtTeachersMexico.jpg

Caption: Dean Stadel and Claudio Ojeda Morales (Photo by Kathleen Kowalczyk)

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