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Profiles

Gertrude Shaffer



Ovid — A woman of vision and action, South Seneca English teacher Gertrude Shaffer recently received the Global Educator Award at the United Nations. Shaffer nurtures her students to become world citizens through her innovative human rights curriculum. The “Words to Deeds” service-learning framework, taught for a decade, encompasses the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Millennium Development Goals’ ideals. Through a collaboration with the United Nations Department of Information and NGO Global Education Motivators, the curriculum focuses on annual themes such as the eradication of poverty, respecting the rights of indigenous peoples, the impact of climate change on human rights, addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and promoting access to fresh water for all, to name a few. International videoconferencing brings the world into her classroom.

Shaffer’s extraordinary vision has brought her students’ “Words to Deeds” service-learning project ideas to fruition through countless humanitarian projects and has shared results with Delta Kappa Gamma, Cornell University, various universities and colleges, and the United Nations. Projects include infant quilts for American Red Cross fire victims, fundraisers for local animal shelters, flood relief, UNICEF, Toys for Tots, Habitat for Humanity, a cancer hospital, Christmas angel tree gifts, food pantries, Hurricane Katrina victims and many more. Her energetic fundraising projects impact more than 200 middle-school students, 45 staff and the community.

Shaffer is a member of the South Seneca Teachers Association, a local of NYSUT.

Fundraising projects include bake sales, sport tournaments, “Cardboard City Overnight” (an overnight in cardboard shelters with sponsors), snack shack, bottle and can redemption, ‘wear-a-hat-day’ and donations from local businesses. Through those fundraisers, the following donations have been given since 2007: Lost Boys of Sudan, \$1,300; Global Run Water Project for Uganda, \$10,000; Seneca County Habitat for Humanity, \$4,245; UNICEF, \$250; Rwanda’s Mizeru (Hope Fund), \$3,000;

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SEVA (Native Americans), \$250; Juba, Sudan "Walk for Water, \$3500; Maasai, Kenya Salvage Good Outreach Organization, \$4,550.50; and Trees for Tanzania, \$800.



As a participating teacher in the "E-Twinning Project" (E for Electronic and Twinning is another word for pen pal) sponsored by Cornell University's Einaudi Center for International Studies, Shaffer has been invited to visit schools in Poland and Slovakia. During her two-week visit to Europe, Shaffer will observe classrooms and teaching methods in the two post-communist democracies. She will bring her enriching experiences back to her South Seneca Middle School students. Bringing the world into the classroom, the goal of the "E-Twinning Project" project is to link local rural schools in New York State with schools in Poland and Slovakia. Despite a linguistic barrier, students from different countries make friends and learn about Europe through the lens of their European peers, participate in intellectually challenging and stimulating activities conducted via distance learning technologies such as Skype, Wiki pages, email, videos and websites.

— By Betsy Sayer

South Seneca Central School

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