

Museums Keep Educators in the Know

by **Kimberly Fritz**
Staff Writer

While students were learning the value of summer vacation recently, area teachers were sharpening their history skills and discovering the learning opportunities on Fort Lee and in the surrounding community.

The History Underfoot: Community Educators Expedition is held every summer and takes 4th-11th grade teachers to local historical sites.

This is the fourth year the program has been bringing history to Virginia's classrooms. The success of the program facilitated by a comprehensive partnership between the U.S. Army Quartermaster Museum, the U.S. Army Women's Museum, City of Petersburg Museums, Petersburg National Battlefield and the Historic Hopewell Foundation Inc.

"The biggest impact we believe we have with the expedition is in energizing teachers for the fall," said Françoise Bonnell, AWM director. "We have many teachers who remarked that they had returned to their classroom the next year full of new ideas. With the resources they were given they report that they were able to grab their students' interests like never before."

During this year's expedition, 15 area teachers spent four days on tours to places including the World War I training trenches on Fort Lee where they got down and dirty in a

hands-on learning opportunity sponsored by the Fort Lee Archeology Facility.

Other attractions included Civil War historical sites such as the Petersburg National Battlefield and Grant's Headquarters at City Point.

In addition to the field trips to the Tri-Cities' most historical areas, the lesson plans included the Quartermaster Museum's "WhatIZit?"

The program allows students to expand critical thinking skills through artifact identification program, said Laura Baghetti, QMM curator of education.

"Students use their senses to identify hidden objects, trying to discover who used it, how it was used, and why it was important," she said.

After making tactile inferences, students explore galleries to find the 'real things' and put them into historical perspective.

At the AWM, the educators learned of the contributions women have been making to the Army since the birth of the nation. "Yankee Doodle Doodads" is a hands-on lesson plan that includes primary sources and artifacts. Education specialists at the AWM demonstrated how to blend Virginia Standards of Learning with an integrated curriculum to capture student interest and teach the unique history of women in the Army.

The project was funded by the Cameron Foundation and

each teacher received a \$300 stipend and about \$400 worth of supplies to be used in their classrooms. Each "trunk," a reproduction of a Civil War supply crate, contains replicas of items that teachers can use in their classrooms. All of the items are used during the teachers' training by the subject matter experts to model how the item can be used. The resources were well received by the teachers in attendance.

"I can incorporate the items into my teaching," said Lynn Melton, a teacher at L.L. Beazley Elementary School. "They will provide great visuals for my students."

Melton also said the expedition greatly exceeded her expectations.

"This has been, by far, the best training ever – so interactive and educational," she said. "I can use so much of the information I received. The instructors were very knowledgeable, enthusiastic, engaging and had great delivery."

Baghetti said she thinks the History Underfoot program increased the student visits during the school year. During the 2009-2010 academic year, the museums on Fort Lee hosted 147 days of programming for more than 11,000 students, teachers and parents.

To learn more about the programs described in this article or to learn more about the Fort Lee museums, call, (804) 734-4203 or 734-4327.