

Harlan County Teacher chosen for Presidential Academy for American History and Civics

Rosspoint Elementary School Teacher Debbie Napier will be in class this summer, not as a teacher but as a history and civics student. In fact, she will participate in an intense 18 days of classes that will take her to unique classroom settings in Washington D.C., Philadelphia and Gettysburg.

Napier has been selected as 1 of only 60 teachers from across the country to participate in the Presidential Academy for American History and Civics administered through the Ashbrook Center for Public Affairs at Ashland University.

"It is a dream come true," said Napier, who has been a teacher for 16 years.

Harlan County Schools Assistant Superintendent Brent Roark said "This is an amazing accomplishment for Mrs. Napier personally, for her school and for the Harlan County School District. Most importantly, however, is the knowledge and enrichment opportunities she will be able to bring back into her classroom for our students."

The academy will lead teachers in a careful study of the three turning points in American history: The American Revolution, the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement. The study is framed by the three famous documents that "memorialize" these important periods in American history: the Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address, and the 'I have a Dream' speech." Participants will spend over two weeks in the three cities.

Studies take place in each of the cities surrounded by the streets and halls, the battlefields, public places and private lodgings where the history took place.

"The academy is full of history," said Napier. "Every minute is something historical."

Napier shared that an impressive lineup of presenters adds to her excitement about the experience. Professors conducting the academy are among some of the finest scholars of American history and government.

"Dr. Gordon Lloyd is an expert on the constitutional era. Our forefathers come alive through him," said Napier.

Lloyd is a professor at Pepperdine University. Other presenters are David Hackett Fischer of Brandeis University, Allen Guelzo of Gettysburg College, Gary Gallagher of the University of Virginia, Christopher Burkett of Ashland University and Juan Williams of Fox News.

The first academy was held in 2006. Funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, it is part of the History and Civics Act of 2004 originally introduced by Tennessee Senator Lamar Alexander. The program supports the establishment of Presidential Academies for the Teaching of American History and Civics that offer workshops for both veteran and new teachers of American history and civics to strengthen their knowledge and preparation for teaching these subjects.

Napier said she had participated in training at the University of Louisville and learned about the academy and how to apply. She put off the application process for a year or so because of the competition.



“One day my husband, Ralph, asked me if I was going to write the essay and apply and encouraged me to do it,” she recalled. “I did and was selected.”

School guidance counselor Terri Kelly said, “The Academy couldn’t have chosen a more deserving recipient. Mrs. Napier has an incredible passion for teaching history. The information and resources that she will be able to bring back to our students will be invaluable. We are so excited for her. We couldn’t be more proud of her.”

Principal Bryan Howard agrees.

“I have never worked with an individual more passionate about the subject they teach,” said Howard. “She works tirelessly to ensure that her students gain a thorough understanding of both historical and current events. I am very proud of her selection for this honor and blessed to have her on staff.”

Napier teaches American history and social studies to sixth through eighth graders, as well as reading in the content areas.

She said she hopes to bring her experience into the classroom to share with students who may never have the opportunity to visit these historical sites.

Napier attended Southeast Community College and earned her bachelor’s and master’s degrees at Lincoln Memorial University. She holds a Rank I from Union College.

She and her husband have two children, Kaitlin, a sophomore at Harlan County High School, and Damon, a seventh grader at Rosspoint Elementary.

While she is excited about the Academy, she hasn’t packed her bags yet. Prior to class she has a list of homework assignments to complete. These include reading several books and studying various documents.

“I am reading the Federalist Papers right now,” she said with a huge smile. “They are driving me nuts.”