Teacher studies Turkey

KATHIE COLGROVE
NCR Reporter

Rebecca Cofield’s trip to Turkey yields life lessons that she can apply in the classroom.

The Hilliard Middle-Senior High School teacher traveled with 27 other national teachers as part of a Teacher Study Tours program sponsored by the Turkish Cultural Foundation in cooperation with the World Affairs Council of America.

The 14-day teaching tour from June 27 to July 11 took the group to Istanbul, where they saw such landmarks as the Topkapı Palace, Hagia Sophia and the Suleymaniye Mosque. Cofield also toured western Turkey, visiting Ephesus, Canakkale, Bursa, the Basilica of St. John, Kusadasi, Pamukkale and the site of ancient Troy and Gallipoli.

"It was a once in a lifetime trip," Cofield said. "It's one of those things that comes along that you never think would happen to you."

After attending a Spotlight on Turkey seminar in March, Cofield submitted an application and a lesson plan outlining how she would integrate Turkish culture into her human geography class. At least 30 teachers attended the seminar as part of a joint effort by the Turkish Cultural Foundation and World Affairs Council of Jacksonville.

The council over sees Great Decisions, an educational program for ninth through 12th graders. Cofield leads the after school program at HMSHS. Yulee High School and nine Duval County high schools also participate.

The program gives students opportunities to consider “complex and critical issues, develop critical thinking, listening and decision-making skills,” according to the World Affairs Council of Jacksonville’s website.

Prior to her flight to Turkey, Cofield had only traveled outside the country on trips to Mexico and the Bahamas.

"We were all teachers," she said. "We were all there to learn. It was one of those things where we were all in amazement."

The historical sites pertaining to the Roman and Ottoman empires were breathtaking as Cofield marveled at the monuments and museums, representing at least 8,000 years of civilization.

"It’s really humbling that our American history is still so young," she said.

Although family and friends have expressed concerns about her travels to Turkey given the recent upheaval in the Middle East, the experience was positive, Cofield said.

"You can’t always believe what you read," she added. "It’s something you may need to go and witness yourself."

Cofield will share her learning experience with students in the coming months. She was accompanied by Denise Nicole Dean of Lakeshore Middle School in Jacksonville and Alina Jinghua Mar of Ponte Vedra High School. They will submit lesson plans and feedback to the World Affairs Council of Jacksonville during a showcase in October. The group will continue collaborating online throughout the school year, integrating information into student curriculum.

"I feel like that anytime you say 'I was there' and you have had a personal experience with a learning concept or a historical site, kids will be more engaged in the classroom," Cofield said.

Submitted

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The Nassau County School Board unanimously approved a tentative millage rate for 2013-14 - slightly more than 7.543 mills on the dollar.

The millage rate is the hold approach of the district’s budget.

The County Board’s proposed fund balance was more than $1 million, higher than the $1.89 million in 2012-13. Increased costs are contributing to the increase.

Council honors teacher

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NCR Reporter

Three Callahan residents expressed interest in filling a council vacancy — but the council couldn’t decide who to appoint Monday.

Mayor Shirley Graham and councilwoman Janet Shaw announced Marty Fontes as the nominees to fill a vacancy for the Aug. 1 departure of Tyndall. Graham said all three have a desire to serve the town.

Kenneth Bass has requested a committee on the town’s Planning Board and served on a committee.