

View of the world gets an Eastern spin

Two Valders teachers spend part of summer soaking up lessons, sights in China

By Jake Phillips

Two Valders High School educators looked at life from the other side of the world this summer and now plan to take that view back into the classroom to give students a glimpse at the opportunities available to them.

Spanish teacher Lucinda Broder and guidance counselor Rae Gutschow spent three weeks in China through the Global Environmental Teachings program at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

Ten teachers from Wisconsin joined another from Puerto Rico and three from South Africa on the trip from July 11 through Aug. 2. The group worked with 12 Chinese educators in a program focusing on China's culture, diverse ecosystems and environmental issues.

The trip included workshops at the Beijing Botanical Gardens, a visit at the Great Wall of China, touring a "green" school, learning about ethnic villages across the country and several interpretive hikes that meshed with other environmental education workshops.

And now, some of that experience will be spread throughout the VHS hallways.

Broder said that it might not look like her



Dressed to Impress

A young boy in the ethnic dress of the Yunnan province in China.

trip could be incorporated into Spanish classes, but she will find ways to work the global issues into her lesson plans.

"I'm going to be doing a huge unit on it," she said.

Although China isn't a Spanish-speaking country, issues like the environment and creating cultural connections can be passed on, especially because some of the viewpoints come from a Puerto Rican teacher who attended, Broder noted.

As a counselor, Gutschow said, one of her goals was to open up students' eyes with a global perspective to the opportunities they have. She said it gives her the chance to impress upon students that many related career paths are available, such as environmental studies and business.

"Traveling is something that teaches you so much," Gutschow said.

She said it was great to find out how connected people can be, even if they come from opposite sides of the globe. Now she'll continue to encourage students to take as many language courses as possible and enhance those connections.

People don't always have the chance to leave their country or state, Broder said, so

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passing on everything they learned is of the utmost importance.

Soaking It Up

A jam-packed schedule every day kept the teachers excited about everything they got to do, from the environmental workshops to sightseeing. Broder had taken a GET trip last year to Puerto Rico with science teacher Dolores Holl and knew that she wanted to seize another great opportunity this summer.

One of the broad messages Broder said she learned is to appreciate everything they have. She said that pollution is a problem plaguing the air and water overseas because China is going through its own version of the industrial revolution.

"It's a real hot spot right now," Broder said about the country, which is striving for environmental improvement.

The teachers learned about some of the environmental effects of poorly regulated industry, which is a result of consumer demand. For example, factories will only turn on pollution-control machines during inspec-

tions in order to cut costs and deliver an inexpensive product, Broder noted.

She said that when Americans shop, many don't think of where a product comes from or what was done to manufacture it.

"We want it and we want it cheap," Broder said.

Gutschow pointed out that even though pollution is a problem in China, it is fueled by demand from the U.S., as our country is still the No. 1 polluter in the world and we don't have nearly the population of China.

She said the focus now is for non-governmental organizations to make a push for reform, and a number of the workshops concentrated on those efforts and how they will be carried out.

But the purpose of the trip wasn't just to learn about problems, as Broder and Gutschow had lots of time to take in the wide variety of cultures found in China and see what life is like there, rather than reading about it.

In addition to touring the botanical gardens in the country's capital, they were able to see almost every ecosystem that the 3.7-mil-

lion-square-mile country has to offer.

They visited the Tianchi Reserve to take in the alpine and meadow ecosystem. The pair also visited Turpan, the second lowest elevation point in the world, as well as glaciers in the Tianshan mountain range.

Broder and Gutschow flew to Jinhong, Xishuangbanna, to learn about life in the very southern part of China, close to Laos and Vietnam.

To conclude their trip, they flew back to Beijing and even got to visit the site where some neighborhoods and communities are being torn down and built up again for the Olympics next summer.

"It was an awesome, awesome opportunity," Broder said.

They said they can't urge people enough to take a once-in-a-lifetime trip to a place like China. Gutschow encourages people to travel, in whatever means possible, through an internship, college courses or graduate work.

Next year will mark the fifth annual GET program and an exchange with Puerto Rican educators will happen in the summer. All teachers in elementary through high school are encouraged to apply.



Going to the Wall

Lucinda Broder, a teacher at Valders High School, stands atop a section of the Great Wall of China. Broder and guidance counselor Rae Gutschow traveled to China on a study trip this summer.