



# Geography News

Volume 34 Issue 2 – Fall 2011

## Coordinator's Corner

Alex Oberle

As the new Coordinator for the GAI, I want to recognize Kay's tremendous contributions to the organization over the past 16 years and thank her for her outstanding efforts enhancing geography education in Iowa. Having arrived to UNI after having some involvement with three other state alliances, I was immediately impressed by Kay's work with the GAI. Through her leadership there has been consistent, quality, diverse programs and professional development opportunities that exceed that of states that are many times our size.

There is no better example of this than Kay's efforts to provide on-the-ground, field-based international opportunities for K-12 educators. Her leadership role in four Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad programs to Nigeria, India, Bangladesh, and Chile underscore her commitment. In fact, the GAI/University of Northern Iowa has had more of these prestigious F-H GPA grants than some big research universities such as the University of Texas-Austin and the University of Washington! Kay realizes that these intensive, multi-week projects are not feasible for many of our GAI members so she has also implemented a regular offering of "family-friendly" excursions that welcome teachers, as well as their friends and family, to join an international excursion with fellow educators. Over the years many of you have travelled to places like Guatemala, Russia, Canada, and Croatia through these programs. Despite all of the excitement and once-in-a-lifetime educational value of international workshops, Kay also knows what great opportunities exist in our own state and she has worked hard to provide regular workshops here in Iowa and arranged excursions that have focused on topics such as railroads, immigration, waterways, agriculture, and many other themes.

Guiding all of these efforts is Kay's true commitment to all Iowa teachers, not just northeast Iowa teachers or educators in our largest districts. It would have been easy to always offer workshops at UNI or work with a few select districts that are historically well-connected with the university or organization, but Kay has instead worked

tirelessly to expand the GAI to ensure that teachers all across the state have equal access to professional development opportunities. Indeed, the GAI Steering Committee represents an outstanding cross section of Iowa K-12 educators and our membership as a whole now includes over 2,500 educators/geographers in 98 of Iowa's 99 counties, and even some out-of-state members. Recent workshops have taken the GAI "on the road" to Davenport, Mt Pleasant, Epworth, and Forest City and because of Kay's initiative the GAI expects to offer professional development in south-central and northwest Iowa next year (summer 2012) and Internet-based workshops beginning in early 2013.

The GAI is fortunate to secure consistent funding from the National Geographic Society and Kay has maximized the impact of this money. Because of her careful and steady fiscal management we have been able to weather the recession (including about an approximately 50% cut to our endowment payout last year), as her judicious use of earlier years' funding resulted in some carry over funds that we could use to support professional development this past summer. Without this, the alliance would have had to suspend workshops to focus our limited yearly money on strategic planning and core operations.

Although she will be moving to Kansas in the near future, Kay will continue to serve the alliance as a member of the GAI Steering Committee and she will likely participate in, and perhaps even lead, some GAI workshops from time to time. When you get a free moment please call or e-mail Kay to thank her for all that she has done for Iowa educators, geographers, and geography education.

## Strategic Planning

I want to give a special thanks to Eric Schulz (Anamosa), Kimn Hassenfritz (Mt. Pleasant), Marcia Hummel (Lake View), and Tracy Elmer (Iowa City) for their ongoing thoughtful dedication to the GAI's strategic planning efforts. Required of all state alliances and supported by the National Geography Society, the GAI began its formal strategic planning process in March and it will continue until April, 2012. As the strategic planning process continues, our

committee is systematically evaluating every aspect of the GAI, including its mission/vision, primary goals/objectives, organizational structure, financial plan, and related areas, as well as the current state of geography education in Iowa. I also want to thank all of you who provided feedback by completing our on-line survey. Thanks too for everybody's understanding our need to scale back programming in 2011; a combination of redirecting funds towards strategic planning combined with a decline in our endowment payout resulted in fewer workshop offerings.



### A Geographer's view of RAGBRAI

A geographic perspective of Iowa and its participating communities on Ragbrai 2011, thru the eyes of a social studies teacher. It is all about the geography of Iowa, the culture and hospitality of Iowans.

On your way... you will climb across Iowa to the tune of 20371 feet. I bet you never thought Iowa was so elevated. Riders had many big hills, especially the first two days from Glenwood to Atlantic to Carroll. You know, going into the river valleys, (Missouri, Des Moines, Iowa and Mississippi River valleys) that out you will have to climb. Days were hot and humid... it is that Humid Continental climate we find here in July. The total route went from (SW) Iowa...Glenwood, to Atlantic, Carroll, Boone, Altoona, Grinnell, Coralville and down into Davenport. Yea! IT WAS DONE ... for another year.

Riding the roads of Iowa, we were very appreciative of the highway patrolmen & women, directing the car and bike traffic. While in Carroll and Boone, a friend and I geo cased. It was an experience since I had just taken a class working with GPS for the classroom and the Iowa Core. Some great lesson plans will be forthcoming with class activities. Now, I also marked on my GPS some of the highpoints of the ride which includes the High Trestle Trail Bridge over the Des Moines River, the Colfax hill, the German Hausbarn from Schleswig – Holstein, Germany in Manning Iowa, and the Amana Colonies. If you wanted to see agriculture in action, Iowa was the place with corn that measured over 7 feet tall, awesome looking beans and the fresh smell of cut hay, along with wineries and of course the

Templeton Rye distillery. We even made it to a few farmers markets.

In closing and ending the ride, I met many new friends along the way from most all of the 50 states, and the following countries...Netherlands, Canada, Mexico, Germany, England, and more...I guess I needed a note pad. Hope your summer is going well, I will be looking forward to another RAGBRAI in 363 more days or less. May you ride with the wind to your back and the sun up ahead!!! Ride on...

Sue Dufel (Social Studies Teacher reporting on Ragbrai 2011)

### Planned 2012 Workshops

While specific dates and registration will be announced via the list serve and the May 2012 newsletter, I'm pleased to announce funding for three professional development opportunities for Summer 2012:

- Kathy Sundstedt and Steve Oaks will lead two "Geography and the Iowa Core Curriculum" workshops. Based on extraordinarily successful past workshops in Forest City, Epworth, Mt. Pleasant, Davenport, and Cedar Falls, we plan to offer one of the workshops in northwestern Iowa and another in south-central Iowa. Focusing on the Iowa Core Curriculum, our two veteran educators present a wide variety of geography lessons and activities that can span all grade levels and a number of subject areas. The workshops include both cutting edge technologies like Google Earth and GPS, as well as tried-and-true "paper and pencil" techniques.
- The GAI is teaming up with UNI's Center for Holocaust and Genocide Education and UI's Center for Human Rights to provide a new workshop that will connect geography and human rights. Designed as a tribute to the late Rex Honey, this workshop will present geographic aspects of contemporary human rights issues such as the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sudan, and Congo.
- Texas State University's Grosvenor Center for Geography Education has developed an on-line delivery system for high quality geography education lessons, currently "globalization" and "water resources" with other topics planned for subsequent years. A group of facilitators from Texas State will arrive this summer to host a workshop for GAI members who wish to lead on-line workshops for other teachers beginning in January 2013 (with anticipated GAI support).

Geographic Alliance of Iowa

Department of Geography

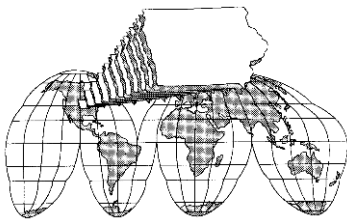
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### **Putting Iowa in its Place!**



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