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Local teachers trek to China

By **Shenandoah Sowash**

Journal staff July 6, 2007

Two local public school teachers will participate in a graduate-level summer environmental education event through the Global Environmental Teachings Program at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

Kathleen Kruthoff, a fifth-grade teacher at Washington Service Learning Center, and Tina Sivek, a second-grade teacher at McKinley Center, will visit China from July 11 through Aug. 2.

Ten Wisconsin teachers as well as three educators from South Africa and one from Puerto Rico will travel together through varied landscapes, learning and collaborating. Previous GET exchanges have included visits to South Africa, Puerto Rico and Australia.

"It's not just eco-tourism," program coordinator Susan Ermer said. "It's about cultural exchange, curriculum practices, teaching methods and how they implement education in their schools."

The program is divided into three components: an online portion, the trip itself and a final component in which teachers reflect on what they have learned and how they will implement their knowledge in the classroom.

"The Chinese don't have much exposure on how to teach in the outdoors. Their typical structure is a lecture style," Ermer said. "Environmental education is new, and so is the concept of protecting the environment. It didn't catch on until they looked outside to see how other cultures are preserving the environment."

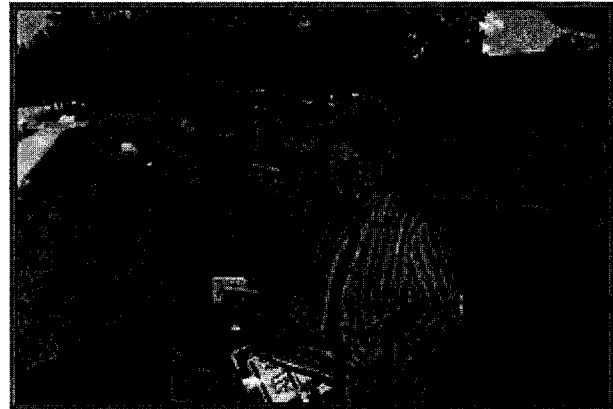
Because of the recent development of environmentalism in China, Ermer believes it is particularly important American teachers travel and learn in that country.



Both Sivek and Kruthoff hope to return from their trip inspired and challenged.

"Even at the second-grade level, I try to help students become more aware of the world, learn that it is a big place," Sivek said. "It's a good opportunity to broaden our horizons."

Kruthoff echoes Sivek with her enthusiasm for cultural exchange and world awareness.

"The ability to walk over to a faucet and get a drink of water is just amazing, and I don't think



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Tina Sivek, left, and Kathleen Kruthoff are teachers from Stevens Point who will go to China for three weeks as part of cultural exchange program focusing on international ecosystem education.
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our kids know that. I want to bring those lessons home to the kids," Kruthoff said.

UWSP professor of environmental education Dan Sivek will assist in leading the program.

"There's a lot of advanced work in terms of having to meet peoples' needs 24/7 for three weeks."

Participants are asked to keep a journal during their time in China, and Dan Sivek offers advice to guide their contemplative experience.

"Each day we like them to make observations on the environment and connections they see between the culture and the environment," he said. "When they return, we ask them to reflect on their journal and incorporate that work into some lesson plans.

"We hear from a lot of Wisconsin teachers that some of their students scarcely get out of the county, so we want to bring the wider world to them."

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