

GWU students experience heat of pottery kiln

Katherine Burch
Pilot Editor

Ten Gardner-Webb students were allowed to participate in an old tradition that was prominent in the Catawba Valley region: firing pottery in a groundhog kiln.

"It was interesting to see how they used to do it by going to cut wood, fire the kiln and load the kiln," said Abby Myers, a GWU student who helped in the exhibition of this historical ritual.

This particular type of kiln was special because it is fired outside with wood in a day and age of electric and gas kilns.

The groundhog kiln and its firing were a central part of the festival at Hart Square located in Lincolnton, NC this past weekend.

The big burning kiln received its name due to its low tunnel shape, much like the shape of a groundhog, thus the name.

Both Myers and Charlie Baber went into the kiln.

Baber described, "I was cramped over for two hours. I still have quartz and dust in my pockets."

As for the size and

cramped space, Myers said it was dusty and small.

The kiln was built in 1987 built exactly as potters long ago in the Catawba Valley would have built kilns.

The festival itself was not only an educational experience for all levels of potters but a chance to look and compare works of pottery and explain to the public how pottery works.

"It was neat to look at everybody's stuff to get ideas," said Myers.

The Heart Square Festival is held in a village that represents most of the major guilds of the 1800s: leather working, gunsmith, metal shop and among other things a potter.

GWU pottery students worked alongside other college students in this picturesque 19th century village by filling the 10-by-15-foot high kiln with pieces of all size, shape, color and skill.

"There were about 250 pieces in the kiln," said Dr. Doug Knotts, an art professor at Gardner-Webb University.

The fired pieces at the kiln are heated up to 2500 degrees fahrenheit created by the fast burning pine

slabs used to heat the kiln. This heat produces the typical green color of pottery found in Catawba Valley.

Inside the kiln, there is room for 250 pots from one pint to 20-gallon in size, with the average firing taking ten hours.

Other students cut the pine slabs and stacked them accordingly for the firing and blasting of the kiln the next day.

For those involved, in the event pottery was in their blood as an artist, some were there to learn and others were there just to make the grade.

The experience could teach love or hate of what they had worked on countless hours of the semester.

"It was like Christmas or a funeral," said Baber. "How the pots turned out was going to be good or bad."

At any point during the firing, loading and unloading the potter could lose these hours in a matter of seconds if the work was dropped or had some quick death.

Myers tried to prepare herself for a broken pot.

"I made myself not get attached to pieces. It



Photo courtesy Professor Doug Knotts

Pottery inside the Heart Square Groundhog Kiln.

helped," said Myers.

The tradition of this particular kiln is rich in international heritage with both Asian and German histories coming together to form this unique kiln and type of pottery.

The ten students from Gardner-Webb represented both introductory and advanced clay students, who have worked hard this semester on thrown and hand, built pottery forms. Not only were GWU students present but pottery students from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and Gaston College.

The work fired in the kiln will be on display at the

Gaston College Art Gallery during November. Later November, hopeful students could place pieces in a national show at the Charlotte Douglas Airport.

"Some 65 to 70 pieces were chosen by myself and Paulette Perkinson for show on the Concourse," said Knotts.

This particular show is part of a vast number of shows hosted in Charlotte for the National Council on Educational Ceramic Arts. Pottery exhibits have already begun at the Mint Museum.

Students collect can tabs

Two-year-old girl helped by GWU dorms

Jessica Webb
Pilot staff

Two-year-old Madison Allen has cancer and Decker residents are pitching in aluminum can tabs to help out.

Madison has bilateral retinoblastoma, which causes tumors in the retinas of the eye. She is a cousin of Jennifer Reed, a Gardner-Webb sophomore.

As a service project for this year, the girls in Decker have collected gallons of can tabs to go towards helping Madison have a place to stay when she gets chemotherapy treatments.

Every week Madison and her parents must travel to Philadelphia for her cancer treatments.

In Philadelphia, they stay at the Ronald McDonald House. Here, the tabs are redeemable for the stay. It is not necessary to pay, but many people like to have something to offer.

"The girls can see this is directly affecting someone's life. It gives me goose-bumps," said Julie Laughlin, North-side area director and RHA advisor.

However, the residents had a different intention when they began the project this year. At first they were

collecting can tabs for the Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte. At the hospital, one gallon of tabs equals a free cancer treatment for a child.

During midterms, the plans changed. As Reed's parents picked her up, her dad saw the tabs in the hallway and said that they could be used for Madison. When Reed returned to school she told her RA and the girls began collecting for Madison.

"It's an added bonus to be helping someone on the hall," said Ashley Buchanan, the second-floor RA who began the project.

The Decker RA's have had a good response from the girls on this project. Many have even gotten their families into it and bring sandwich bags and gallon containers from home.

Madison's family has been grateful for the help: they have sent letters to the residents to show their appreciation.

The giving has also spread to Spangler residence hall, who has collected several gallons already. According to Buchanan, the project will continue until the end of this year or until January.