

Student surveys result in ‘Artists of Tanasi’ exhibit at Reece Museum

Appalachia boasts a tradition of diverse, talented artists, and in 2007 and 2008, graduate students from ETSU’s “Documenting Community Traditions” classes worked with the Tanasi organization in Unicoi County to conduct a cultural survey to identify these area artists and their work.

The classes were taught by Dr. Tess Lloyd and offered through ETSU’s Center for Appalachian Studies and Services and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. The students’ survey, funded by the Appalachian Teaching Project, had two goals: to document artists working in Northeast Tennessee and to promote Tanasi, a proposed arts and crafts sales and educational facility to be located in Unicoi. Those surveyed included 41 artists and craftspeople working in eight Northeast Tennessee counties: Carter, Greene, Hancock, Hawkins, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi and Washington.



As a result of the students’ efforts, a new exhibit – “Artists of Tanasi” – features the work of select artists from this group. It is now on display at ETSU’s Carroll Reece Museum through June 25, with an opening reception planned for Thursday, April 23, from 5-6:30 p.m.

The survey showed that the arts and crafts culture of Northeast Tennessee is represented by numerous innovative, creative artists who work in various genres.

Drawing from Quaker, Native American and European immigrant influences, the pieces in the “Artists of Tanasi” collection offer a glimpse into the life of contemporary Appalachia. They demonstrate the practicality and resourcefulness of area artisans, as well as their creativity, originality and inventiveness.

Some of the work is traditional, such as woodworking, broom-making, blacksmithing and quilting, while some – sculptures, mixed media art and painting – exemplifies the evolution of the modern Appalachian arts and crafts culture.

The students’ survey also identified a need for a place specifically designed to support area artisans and educate the local arts community, which Tanasi, currently under construction off I-26 in Unicoi between Johnson City and Asheville, N.C., will fulfill.

With its name taken from a Native American word for “Tennessee,” the facility will provide space for skilled artists, craftspeople and musicians to demonstrate and sell their creations. Upon completion, the outlet will also feature an authentic “home-style cooking” restaurant, a theater for Appalachian music performances, stables and walking/biking trails.

For more information, call 439-4392.



ETSU ACCENT: Vol. 57 No. 14 April 16, 2009