

Where on Earth is Hartford?

Class works to research, place buildings on Google Earth

by Mike Peterson
Editor

HARTFORD — At a time of year when senioritis and spring fever are rampant, Mike Hathorn is pretty sure the course he's team-teaching with Woody Rothe is getting through to the kids.

"At the end of this class, they've got 15 minutes to get to where they need to be next, but you'll see them still sitting here working away," he says.

Around the room, students are focused on their computer screens, talking quietly as they share problems and tips but continuing to work throughout the class with little direction from

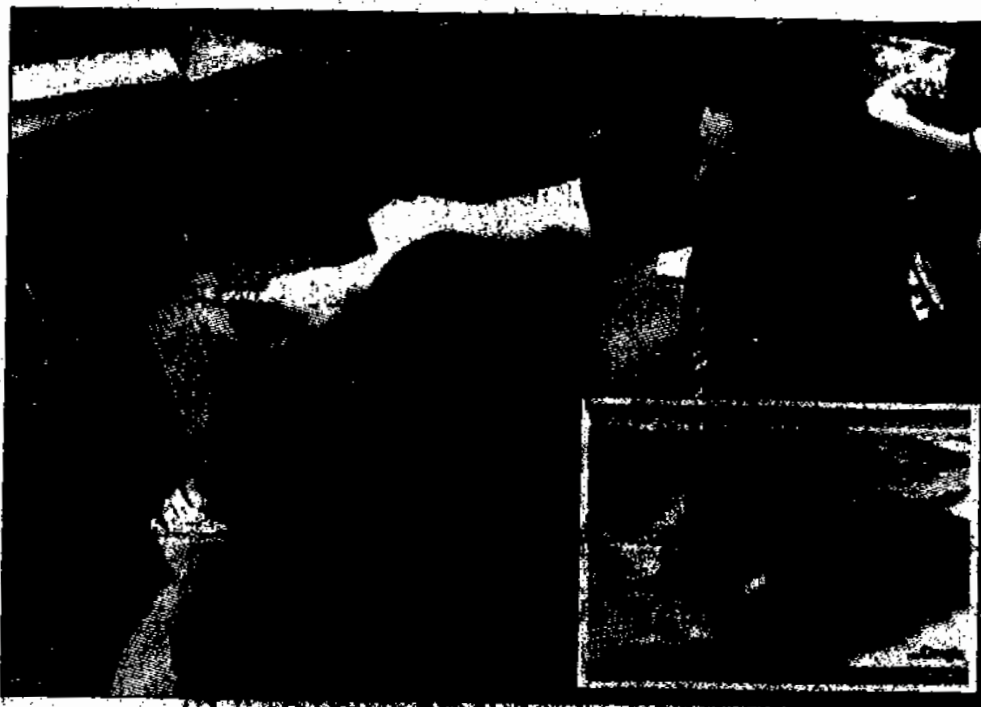


photo by Mike Peterson

Nikita Wilson helps Kim Fedele solve an issue with her model of the Polka Dot Diner. (inset) Wilson's rendition of the office building that stands on the side of the Twin Fruit Building.

Hathorn, Rothe or their student teacher.

Hathorn confesses that this intense self-direction is a fairly recent development, and that there had been more active instruction going on earlier in the course, until the students began to master both the subject matter and the necessary technology. The subject matter is the his-

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history of Hartford, and, in this first year of the course, specifically that of White River Junction.

The technology is "Google SketchUp," an application which allows students to create three-dimensional models of White River Junction buildings with historic significance, then upload them so they appear on Google Earth.

The course is credited as social studies but, while both teachers are certified for that area, Hathorn's specialty is technology while Rothe's is English. It took two years for them to create this combination of research and creation, including both curriculum planning and grant-writing.

The results, which can be seen not only on Google Earth but in greater depth at www.creating-hartfordvt.com, combine their Google Earth map enhancements with short write-ups on the history of the buildings, together with videos of oral history interviews with a variety of local residents.

There's even a video of the first V-8 engine in America, which was in a locally owned Cadillac that is now in Fairlee and which was started up for the student videographers. Other specific topics being covered are the hurricane of 1938, the flood of 1927 and the 494, the train that graces downtown White

River Junction (and now graces Google Earth as well).

Rothe and Hathorn are excited by the success they have had in bringing the outside community into their classroom, and in bringing their students into that community.

Enhancing Google Earth was the topic of a contest in which college students created their own campuses using the technology, and which was won by Dartmouth students. Jess Glago, who graduated last June, was on that team and has been acting as a technical advisor to the students.

They've also had help from the Hartford Historical Society and CATV cable access, while Don Cook of Tele Atlas originally suggested the project and Mascoma National Bank's foundation underwrote the iMac and other computers needed for the specific technology being used.

Kim Fedele sits working to complete the Polka Dot Diner, and admits that, although math is her favorite subject, she was more reluctant than her project partner, Nikita Wilson, to jump in on the technical side. "I was mostly doing the research; she was doing the building," she says.

Each team is responsible for three buildings, so Wilson created Railroad Row, the building now on the site of the Interstate Tire building, while they got used to the process. Now, while

Fedele works on the Polka Dot, Wilson is completing the building that is currently used for office space where the Twin State Fruit building once stood.

"It really isn't that hard," she says, as she shows how she was able to place the three-dimensional Railroad Row building onto the Google Earth satellite photo of the lot.

It involved photographing the building from all sides and researching its history, but much of the actual creation was eased by Google SketchUp, which provides a siding template. "I just had to match the color," Wilson says. "We took a lot of photos, but the only one I used was the sign. The rest I was able to get from Google SketchUp."

Both seniors are headed for college in the fall; Fedele is going to UVM, while Wilson is facing the modern dilemma of choosing between the expensive college she really wants or a less expensive school.

But the future will have to wait for the past: They've got two more buildings to complete and upload.

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