Local High School Students Share Civic Stories during the “San Jose Walks and Talks” Downtown Historical Tour

IFT Grant recipient and local history teacher, Greg Adler, tells the story of San Jose Walks & Talks, his student-run walking tour company. “Creating a business with students is not a ticket to a spot on the FORTUNE 500, but it did open the door to take history beyond the classroom. It was also an ideal way to teach entrepreneurship. This start-up company has been a hit among locals and tourists alike and, even more importantly, has connected kids to their community in ways no one could have imagined. As student-tour guides, they are responsible for bringing San Jose’s past out of the history books and back to life.”

Greg Adler (above left in hat) joined a dozen-and-a-half special invited guests from the CTA Presidents Conference on a July 19th evening walking tour of downtown San Jose. His student guides, wearing the company’s distinctive black and white t-shirts, revealed interesting historical facts about California’s third-largest city to curious teachers from around the state.

Adler says, “As my students uncovered how San Jose had transformed itself from a rustic adobe village into sharp modern condominiums, they were transformed from teenagers with rough textbook outlines to diligent researchers building a clear and strong foundation for a tour script. Were these really the same kids who had been sitting in rows of desks in my class, half-heartedly answering my questions in between attempts to dash off a text message? The fact that kids suddenly were becoming avid history detectives was exciting to witness. It was one of many unexpected benefits from initiating this student business venture.”

Adler adds that the work crossed over into a variety of curricular areas. “Our library research was interrupted by trips to the Small Business Administration for tips on accounting and grant writing. The student marketing team attended meetings with neighborhood associations as other students went store to store, conducting personal interviews with business owners. Meanwhile, our school’s art department ran a contest to select a student created logo that would go on our t-shirts and on the website. Finally students employed Google Earth and Google Maps to determine the routes for our tours that now included art, music and even a ghost story.”
IFT is supporting strength-based teacher driven change and promoting CTA’s Strategic Goal of Transforming Our Profession

Promoting teacher leadership through strength-based teacher driven change has been the driving force behind CTA’s Institute for Teaching for decades. Now, with the increased urgency to “take back our profession” clearly reflected in CTA’s Strategic Plan, the message has become more urgent and ambitious: “to shift the social narrative on education reform toward a student-centered agenda that fully incorporates the insights and expertise of education professionals.”

To demonstrate the efficacy of this desired outcome, IFT offers to continue to partner with our members and local Associations on teacher driven grants and strength-based school transformation projects.

IFT staff take advantage of many opportunities to engage with CTA members and leaders to discuss the serious business of public education. Most recently, at July’s CTA Presidents Conference, Dr. Yale Wishnick (left), IFT emeritus staff, spoke with the leaders of CTA’s Strategic Plan Implementation Workgroup about Appreciative Inquiry (AI). He will also train the members of the CTA Board in on AI in early September. (At Right) IFT Manager Dick Gale and Program Consultant Dr. Anita Benitas are all smiles as they staff the IFT Table, looking for one-on-one conversations with leaders. They also met with more than two dozen presidents at two weekend workshops. This was IFT’s 43rd CTA Conference since 2009.

Appreciative Inquiry: A Primer

The premise of Appreciative Inquiry is that the most effective, sustaining plans are built upon what “gives life” to an organizing effort. A strategic plan is in fact a collage created from the “best of the pasts.” The founder of Appreciative Inquiry, David Cooperrider said, “Organizations are centers of human relatedness, first and foremost, and relationships thrive where there is an appreciative eye- when people see the best in one another, where they share their dreams and ultimate concerns in affirming ways, and when they are connected in full voice to not just create new worlds, but better worlds. Where appreciation is alive and stakeholders throughout an organization or community are connected in discovery, hope grows and organizational capacity is enriched.”

- Appreciative Inquiry focuses on a desired future outcome, built on strengths and passions of the past and present.
- Problem-solving attempts to analyze deficits, identify root causes, then fix problems or correct errors; because it searches for problems, it finds them.