

Sock monkeys, roller skates and Nintendo

Collin College Students Help Preserve the Past

by Heather Darrow



Katie Divine

Local passersby typically ignore the ever-present historical marker about the notorious train robber Sam Bass, but it caught Katie Divine's eye as she drove to class. However, she could never have imagined that this static testament to days long gone would foreshadow her dynamic future. For Divine, history was always something she enjoyed from afar in a book. One class irrevocably altered her perspective and gave her the opportunity to become an integral member of a team striving for historical preservation.

Divine took U.S. History from Professor Brett Adams, which included a service-learning component. She and more than 40 other students had the option to volunteer for the Heritage Association of Frisco's museum exhibit "Toys, Toys, Toys" or Shawnee Trail Day, which celebrates the trail now known as Preston Road. Divine researched dollhouses, sock monkeys, roller skates and Raggedy Ann and Andy dolls.

If you ask Divine about the Raggedy Ann dolls she won't spend a lot of time giving you dates or detached details. Instead, she will tell you the story about a cartoonist and his daughter who found her mother's old rag doll and how it became her playmate when she was ill. She will explain how her father included the doll in his cartoons and how he celebrated this young life after her death.

"I'd never given much thought to these toys before. You wouldn't expect the doll to become famous. The cartoonist wrote Raggedy Ann and Andy books. That's how they became so big in American culture."

Divine learned that doll houses were initially created for adults and sock monkeys had their origin in the fact that the company

producing the socks tried to differentiate itself from a competitor by adding red heels, which eventually became the sock monkey's lips.

"I had to find advertisements for these toys. It was perfect because the sock monkey is in a Kia commercial, which shows how it is still relevant today. Roller skates had a lot of failed attempts. Some were not functional or fun because they couldn't go fast, and the potential of crashing was high," she said with a smirk.

"In one of the debuts, a person who invented skates was performing on a violin while rolling and he lost control and smashed into a mirror. Those skates were not popular," she said, laughing.

In addition to researching and providing information and advertisements for the exhibit, Divine wrote a reflection paper and reviews on scholarly articles on Sam Bass and the early Texas settlers. "I tried to write my best paper ever for the museum because it was going up on a placard.

"The act of preserving history is what we were learning to do in history class. The art of being a part of your community and actually preserving history is the point of history."

The volunteer-based Heritage Association of Frisco came to Collin College looking for a partnership and Adams volunteered to be a member of the board of directors. Today, he is the vice president of the board of directors.

"Every third grade class in Frisco ISD comes to the museum. Most people in Frisco aren't from Frisco, so the service learning is a good way to raise the profile of the college in the community. It also provides an opportunity for the students to learn about the museum," said Adams.

According to Adams, the Heritage Association of Frisco recently received the Community Partner Award from the Preston Ridge Campus.

Susanne Kerley, board member of the Heritage Association of Frisco, says approximately 1,500 people saw the "Toys, Toys, Toys" exhibit.

"The value of the time given by a volunteer in Texas according to Independent Sector is \$21.79 an hour. More than 40 students gave not only time that helped the museum volunteers, but also a monetary equivalent of more than \$4,000," Kerley said.

"The service-learning made this exhibit possible. I was overwhelmed by the number of students that wanted to participate. The partnership with the college has brought a new dynamic," she added.

Kerley was impressed with Divine's research, the work of another student who created QR codes for the exhibit as well as student Chris Phillips' effort to locate and purchase an original Atari 9600 and Nintendo NES. The functional game exhibit is so popular with children and adults that it is still standing.

Student Amir Harandi helped Phillips with the research and storyboards for the project. It was important to Phillips that everything

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Chris Phillips

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was as close to the time period as possible, so he found an old television on eBay in Grand Prairie and hired three young men to help him move the heavy console. He also received a donation of three old televisions from Best Buy. One is currently being used in the cotton exhibit.

"It was a labor of love. I grew up in the 70s. Video games fundamentally changed the childhood experience. Children went from playing outdoors to sedentary and indoors. Other than the PC, it was one of the biggest changes we have seen since children worked in factories. It impacted my life a lot. With Nintendo, my brother and I didn't leave the house for three weeks."

Phillips said he initially planned to attend Collin College for one semester and transfer to a university; however, this plan changed once he took his first classes in the fall of 2012.

"The professors are of such high caliber at Collin College, so I decided to take every possible undergraduate course and attend a university once I am at the point where hours will no longer transfer."

It had been nearly 20 years since Phillips, who owns a computer company, had stepped into a classroom, but he was ready to pursue his dream of becoming a counselor. He never imagined the impetus behind his long-term goals would dovetail into his first classroom experience.

"I want to do something more fulfilling. I love my job, but I wanted to give back a little. Professor Adams' class was my first class. He is the quintessential history professor. He is smart, interesting and loves history as much as I do. Service learning is a genius idea. This is why I came back to school. I want to do something for the community."

For more information about Collin College, visit Collin.edu; about the Heritage Association of Frisco, visit <http://www.friscoheritage.org/>. ❖

Heather Darrow is a public information writer for Collin College.

Photos: Nick Young, Collin College.