

AG'S SPOTLIGHT ON EDUCATION

FSEMS Teacher Honored by WXTU as Teacher of the Month

Three minutes before the bell, a group of talkative seventh-graders began queuing up outside George Allen's classroom door, waiting for the second half of block B to begin.

Most of the middle school students had just returned from attending PE during the break in the schedule. Adrenaline was running high, yet the students were eager to get beyond the closed door and back into their seats.

Judging from the banter, it became clear the students' heightened excitement level was due as much to anticipating their next lesson as it was to getting their heart rates going during PE.

"He's really funny," said student Omar Arocho of Mr. Allen. "But he's also strict." Student Allison Carr declared, "The projects are cool." Student Suz Eitler offered her own opinion: "He makes class fun. He jokes around during lessons, but we still learn a lot."

Could these be middle school students heading to a social studies class? You bet.

Allen, a second-year teacher at Fred S. Engle Middle School, has a solid reputation among his students as being a fun, yet challenging teacher.

His sense of humor and wit appeal to the kids, who are quick to assure he balances the levity with high expectations. While Allen loves to mix a little humor in with his history lessons, he doesn't tolerate any nonsense, according to his students.

For these reasons and more, student Wesley Matthias nominated Allen for a Teacher of the Month award sponsored by WXTU 92.5 FM, Philadelphia's country radio station.

The station's morning personalities, Evans and Andie, announced Allen's name on air Oct. 27, and the station honored him as Teacher of the Month for October 2006.

"The kids love him because of his dialogue with them," says Beverly Matthias, Wesley's mother. "He actively engages them in his lectures with jokes and discussion. They learn in a fun way."

Student Shane Brannigan agrees that Allen makes learning fun. "You never know what you're going to expect," said Brannigan. "He jokes a lot with the students, but if you're not working hard he makes sure he keeps on you."

As an educator, Allen knows his content material. He earned both a Bach-



FSEMS Social Studies teacher George Allen and student Allison Carr discuss her research on medieval castles, while student Kristen Jacobs (foreground) researches the crusades.

elor of Arts and Master of Arts in history from Pepperdine University, and earned 50 additional credits from Boise State and Northwest Nazarene University. He uses technology, multimedia, hands-on projects, current events, and more to actively engage his students.

He's also fluent in Spanish. Often, Allen asks questions in Spanish and discusses the answer in both English and Spanish. The results are twofold: the native Spanish speakers feel engaged and empowered, and the English-speaking students are curious to know and learn what's being said.

Allen also intuitively plays off his material and his audience — like any good stand-up — gaining laughs and correct answers as he goes.

While grateful for the nomination and the acknowledgment from the radio station, Allen takes the accolades in stride.

The real applause goes to the students who work hard and make his job enjoyable, he says. He's also appreciative of the district's supportive nature of different teaching styles.

"History is supposed to be a great story. It's not about memorizing dates and times," said Allen. "The district allows a certain amount of creativity in teaching lessons, which is great."

Principal Robert Fraser says Allen's approach of using his natural wit to establish a comfortable learning environment for students — and combining that with a good



Allen speaks in Spanish and English during lessons, which adds to the dynamic nature of his class. Pictured (left to right) are: Benjamin Lopez Almanza, Emmanuel Quintana Vergara, and Neli Ayllon Castaneda.

use of materials and technology — are both effective and appealing to students and parents.

"Mr. Allen is one of our many fine educators at Engle who goes the extra mile to make learning both interesting and informative," said Fraser.

"We have an obligation to make sure our students learn the standards and the skills they need to be competitive," he said, "but we are also fortunate that we can take advantage of teachers' different strengths in order to enhance the educational experience."