

Campus Art History Teacher Makes Most of Her Talents

by Liz Russo

Connie Kirker is more than just an art history teacher at Penn State University, Delaware County Campus; she is a very energetic person and is always on the move. In addition to her job here at PSU Delco, Kirker teaches junior and senior graduate students at Temple and Tyler Universities. She said, "I couldn't have a better job; the flexibility is great. I can teach all three art subjects at Penn State.

While she was growing up, she helped her parents with a program called Head Start for underprivileged kids to teach them how to paint. She said, "My parents always looked around and asked, 'what can I learn from this?'"

Before enrolling for college, she worked in an art museum in Cincinnati. After that, she attended Syracuse University.

After her senior year she traveled to Europe. Among many other interesting sights, she saw people "hanging out" in Florence. "I thought, 'Why are they hanging out?', they should be seeing or doing something", Kirker said. That is when she decided to write *Art History for the Travel in Europe*;

When she returned to Syracuse University, she was fascinated by a professor who taught African Art.

Kirker said, "Many people still ask me, 'You learned African Art at Syracuse?', there wasn't supposed

to be an African Art course in that college."

With her interest in art building more and more, she decided to enroll in a Japanese Art course.

After visiting Japan and Africa to do research papers, she returned home and received an Art History degree from Syracuse.

Once she graduated, she moved to Delaware to pursue her career. There, she taught Japanese and African art at Patton, an exclusive, private school where the DuPont family had attended.

Kirker's interests exceed studying the arts; she is concerned about our world. She feels the world is not as controversial as it was in the Sixties; although is glad that our generation is beginning to be more passionate about our environment. She stated, "It's good for the students to be involved."

She is currently teaching a Japanese Art course here at Penn State. "I want to teach what nobody else knows. It's something that might happen once in a lifetime." She feels she has reached her goal if her students think her class is interesting and out of the ordinary... "there is more variety involved for students in the arts."

Once, she thought about being a business executive. She realized she was too active to sit behind a desk operating a computer. "I would not want to be a corporate executive for IBM. I'm not sure you always know



Connie Kirker poses with one of her African masks.

Photo by: Diana Miceri

what to do. Many people tell me they want to be a lawyer or marine biologist, but they had never met a lawyer or gone under the ocean. You have to contact the person in the field you're interested in or try something. You don't know what it will be like; you have to experience it first."

Kirker is very artistically talented and handy with crafts. She makes little girls' dresses and wicker baskets that match. In addition, she makes children's furniture. Her son's bed has been made into a yellow submarine.

While she was in England, she went to an expensive furniture shop, "The Dragon", which made furniture for Prince William. They asked her to design their furniture, but she declined the offer. About her versatile, artistic talents, she says,

"One of these days, I'm going to be rich."

In her spare time, she makes two-foot high Victorian Santa Clauses. So far, she has made 200 of them. She states, "I don't like to stand around waiting for someone to come buy them. I sell them to stores instead." The profits helped her go to Turkey last summer.

As for future projects, she's starting a new African Art program next Spring semester. "My goal is to make people care about the culture and not just about the starving children."p

At present, she lives with her husband whom she met at Syracuse University. She has two beautiful children: Lindsey, 6 and Scott, 7. She states, "I have very healthy children, I'm a healthy person."

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