

For immediate release
News from the University of Southern Indiana

USI adult learner to receive state award

A University of Southern Indiana student who once was told she would thrive in full-time teaching since she liked her substitute teaching position is getting a state award from the Indiana Council for the Social Studies.

Elizabeth Rennels of Evansville is receiving the Outstanding Future Social Studies Educator Award Friday, March 17 in Indianapolis. The award is given to a preservice teacher who exemplifies excellence in social studies teaching.

Rennels was part of a two-person team who created an integrated unit on Colonial Times. Part of the fourth-grade lesson plan includes a colonial fair with games and crafts. The students are introduced to calligraphy, paper silhouettes, and occupations of that era. In addition, each student creates a life-size poster of an historic figure from colonial America and presents facts about the person. The students select from white European men, native Americans, African Americans, and women of Colonial Times to show the diversity of the era.

Rennels also is working on a project with staff of Historic New Harmony to develop curriculum materials to be used by school groups when they tour the historic town.

Of New Harmony, Rennels said, "What a gem we have close by." She wants school children to have an enduring knowledge about a local place.

She said she owes her love of teaching to her mother who was a teacher. She said that her mother told her that often it is the student who you originally thought you'd like the least, becomes one you like the most. Rennels added, "I feel it is my duty to appreciate each child among the variety of children in the classroom."

Dr. Joyce Hamon, associate professor of education at USI, is advisor and mentor to Rennels, and she nominated Rennels because she had seen her work in a social studies methods class. In the nomination, Dr. Hamon wrote that Rennels makes history come to life for children, and she will inspire her future students to become active citizens in the community.

Rennels will graduate this May. She has a 4.0 grade point average. She and her husband have four children. She worked for a local pharmaceutical company before she took a substitute teaching position when her young son started school.