

Who teaches the teachers?

Swedesboro company makes history come alive in nation's classrooms

Sometimes even teachers need to be taught.

When that's the case, a company in Gloucester County comes to the rescue. The American Institute for History Education (AIHE) is helping school districts across the United States ensure that their history and social studies teachers are on top of their game, and equipped with the right tools to help their students better understand and embrace our country's roots.

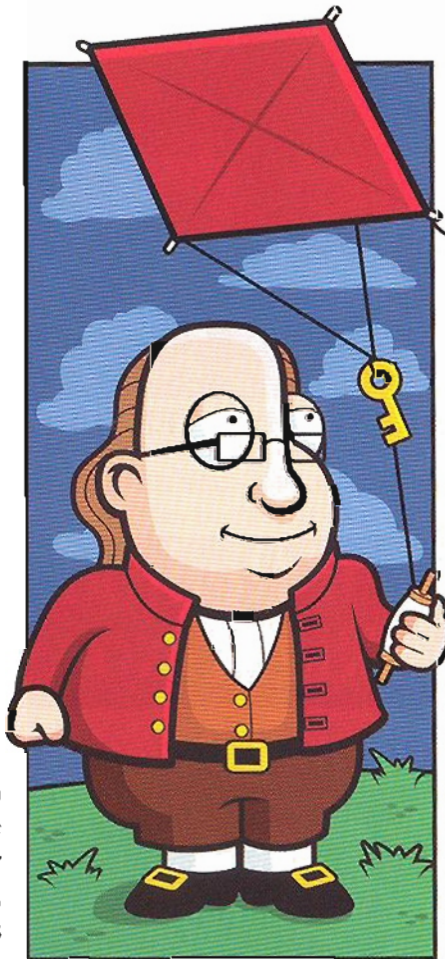
Nestled in a Victorian-style house on Kings Highway in Swedesboro, AIHE is comprised of lifelong educators, school administrators and authors whose only goal is to ensure a high standard in history education. Their methods are working: according to a recent audit, teachers' knowledge of history content rose 21 percent in 20 surveyed school districts after working with AIHE.

So what is it about this unassuming company that makes it a powerhouse in continuing professional education?

It's called the Liberty Fellowship, a program AIHE instituted in order to take advantage of the federal government's Teaching American History (TAH) Grant. The TAH Grant opens every fall, and awards up to \$2 million to school districts that partner with entities that have content expertise, such as institutions of higher education, non-profit history or humanities organizations, and libraries and museums.

Under the fellowship, teachers attend sessions with historians and master teachers, and even visit historically significant places. For example, groups of educators in the Philadelphia area may tour Independence Hall or the battlefield at Gettysburg. The result is a better grasp of – and enthusiasm for – their subject, which of course gets passed on to their students.

It's been demonstrated throughout the country that the TAH Grant, together with AIHE professional development in the form of the Liberty Fellowship, can make a measurable difference in the level of history education," says Kevin T. Brady, Ph.D., president of AIHE. "Our continued mission is to help districts apply for the TAH Grant



and then work with them to achieve noteworthy results."

AIHE has become so expert in applying for the grant, it currently partners on and administers over 60 TAH Grants across the country, 22 of which are in New Jersey. AIHE provides the grant-writing service for free.

The company also offers multimedia teaching tools for history and social studies teachers. Its core product, CICERO: History Beyond the Textbook, is a "virtual toolbox" that includes short video clips, interactive maps, period literature and songs, and "interviews" with actors portraying historical figures like William Penn, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and George S. Patton. Philadelphia's most famous citizen, Ben Franklin (aka Ralph Archbold), is in its stable of actors, who also make personal appearances in front of both students and teachers.

More than 260 school districts nationally are gaining benefits from CICERO, including Delsea Regional in Gloucester County and Millville in Cumberland County. Amy Gehringer, a teacher at Millville's Lakeside Middle School, takes advantage of interactive maps, illustrated time-

lines and song lyrics.

"That's what grabs the kids in middle school," Gehringer says. "We read diaries and do role-playing so the students can see history from different points of view. It humanizes history."

"We can put everything at their fingertips," adds Chris Bradshaw, AIHE's vice president of CICERO Systems. "There are PowerPoints, maps, activities, videos and primary source documents – anything and everything to make their job of teaching more effective."

When the staff of AIHE isn't busy applying for grants or instructing teachers, they're often writing and editing academic works.

Dr. Yohuru Williams, the company's vice president for history education, is one of the country's leading authorities on African American history in the United States and the Civil Rights Movement.

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Abraham Lincoln (local actor Christian Johnson) makes history with John Ogbin and Jaclyn Smith, AIHE grant program participants

Laureen Hungo, instructional design and curriculum editor for AIHE, has authored a series of children's books on historical figures, including *George Washington's Journal*. The rest of the company's staff directory reads like a *Who's Who Among American History Scholars*.

AIHE also sponsors history-themed events at schools in the region, including Civil War encampments and concerts featuring *American Stories Through Song*, a "history" band fronted by former Ted Nugent and Billy Idol drummer Steve Missal.

And each spring, AIHE sponsors the Capitol Forum, which brings together more than 60 New Jersey high school students and state legislators and policymakers to debate issues of concern to today's youth. The event takes place in the State House in Trenton, and this year included Assemblyman Louis Greenwald (D-Camden) and Edward Turzanski, Senior Fellow of the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

The company is also an active player on TeacherTube (www.teachertube.com), the YouTube for educators. As keepers of the web site's American History station (AIHE.TV), AIHE serves up dozens of its short-subject videos for educators and students free of charge. Popular subjects these days include the Transcontinental Railroad, Ben Franklin and trench warfare.

For Kevin Brady, education has been a lifelong passion. Following a career as a history teacher and adjunct professor in Philadelphia and South Jersey, then as a consultant to school districts and institutes of higher education, Brady founded AIHE in order to provide other history teachers with high-quality professional development programs rich in historical content.

"Good education begins with good teachers, which is why AIHE strives to boost teacher performance," says Brady, who lives in Woolwich Township and earned his Master's and Ph.D. in History at Temple University.

"History is so much more than words on a printed page...it's something that can be seen, touched, and walked through," he said. "The more of those visceral experiences we can bring to students, the better."

For more information on the American Institute for History Education, visit www.AIHE.info. •