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Local teachers trace history of mill

BY AMELIA HARPER
Staff Writer

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Two Twin Counties teachers have been selected to develop lesson plans about the Rocky Mount Mills community, and they are asking local residents to share their memories and pictures for their undertaking.

Renny Taylor, who teaches history at Nash Central High School, and Elijah Kane, who teaches state history at W.A. Patillo Middle School, are working together on a project called "History Unfiltered: Exploring the Southern Textile Industry in Rocky Mount, N.C."

The project is part of a collaboration between the Community Histories Workshop and Carolina K-12, a program of UNC-Chapel Hill's Carolina Public Humanities that works to extend the resources of the University to K-12 educators. It can be used by other teachers to connect local history with larger historical themes such as the Civil War, the Industrial Revolution and civil rights.

"UNC-Chapel Hill is thrilled to partner with Renny and Elijah throughout this exciting historical preservation initiative," said Christie Norris, director for K-12 outreach for Carolina K-12. "They represent the best of what public school teachers, when filled with such passion and creativity for bringing history to life, give to the classroom. Their work, along with the final oral histories, artifacts and coordinating resources, will be housed here once complete and will be accessible to teachers throughout Nash and Edgecombe counties, as well as the remainder of the state and nation."

Norris said the organization will be reaching out to other area teachers this summer to share the resources Taylor and Kane are working on.

"We'll also be hosting a free day of professional development for Nash-Rocky Mount and Edgecombe teachers to be held in Rocky Mount this summer. There, teachers will learn more about the history of the mill and explore the materials developed," Norris said.

Kane said he and Taylor were selected because they bring different perspectives to the project.



Nash Central High School history teacher Renny Taylor, left, talks about the Rocky Mount Mills project with W.A. Patillo Middle School history teacher Eli Kane on Friday at Rocky Mount Mills. The project is a part of the Community Histories Workshop.

“Renny is looking at this from the perspective of a high school teacher of American history and of an advanced placement history teacher, while I am looking at this from the perspective of a middle school teacher who focuses on the history of North Carolina,” Kane said.

Taylor and Kane had never met before they were selected for the project, but the two have been collaborating for about a month on the project, which should be completed by the end of the spring semester.

“This is really a cool idea,” Taylor said. “We will be finding ways to make the Rocky Mount Mills a reference point for teachers as they discuss issues like how the Civil War affected the Rocky Mount Mills and how the Great Depression affected the mill community. It will help make history locally relevant. Rocky Mount Mills is on a lot of student’s minds right now because of all the activity that is happening now, so they are more interested in the topic.”

Taylor and Kane have access to the research, interviews and archives at UNC-Chapel Hill as they work on the project, but they are looking for more local color.

“There are people living in the Twin Counties who worked at the Rocky Mount Mills or had parents or grandparents who worked there. We are trying to gather more local stories about the mill and the village. We also need photographs — especially ones from before 1900,” Taylor said.

To share information and pictures about Rocky Mount Mills, email Taylor at rhtaylor@nrms.k12.nc.us or Kane at ekane@ecps.us.

For more information about the project, go to <http://communityhistories.org/rocky-mount-mills-project>.