

DARLENE APPLIGATE LOVES TO DIG. IT DOESN'T MATTER IF IT'S DIGGING UP BONES, FRAGMENTS OF GLASS, OR SPEAR POINTS; A SHIVER OF EXCITEMENT PASSES THROUGH HER WHEN EVEN THE SMALLEST SHRED OF CERAMIC OR METAL IS UNCOVERED. "EVERY PIECE IS INFORMATION," DR. APPLIGATE, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY, SAID. "YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO TO EGYPT TO GET IT; THERE'S PLENTY TO DO HERE."

The majority of Applegate's archaeological work has been done in Western Kentucky. Three of her most recent projects included analyzing bones from Allen County, excavating artifacts near Hidden River Cave, and researching a pioneer family from Butler County. With several projects going on at any given time, Applegate's plate is always full, but having her students work with her on each project makes the work load lighter and the experience more valuable. "Every research project that I've worked on

since I've been here involves students," Applegate said. "My two reasons for doing so are both selfish and selfless. Selfish because the work gets done faster, and selfless because each project provides hands-on learning for the students."

Applegate shares her passion for archaeology with many of her students and tries to tailor class assignments and projects to what their interests are, and not just her own. One "hands-on" project with her students was at Hidden River Cave, where they excavated a site with historic and prehistoric components. They found concentrations of coal and slag indicating heating and black-smithing activities; historic bottle glass, window glass, dinner plates, marbles, ammunition, and coins indicating domestic and recreational activities; and spear points and chert flakes indicating hunting and stone tool manufacturing activities. The students set up a grid and each was responsible for one square of earth. They dug in

Can YOU Dig It?

BY BETH SEWELL



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five-centimeter increments, documenting and bagging their findings at each level. "It's so exciting to see them making those discoveries," Applegate said. "You hear a shout of 'I found one! I found one!' and everybody runs over to see — and it's a great feeling."

Applegate said the excitement continues in the lab when the artifacts are cleaned and analyzed. By measuring the thickness of a simple piece of window glass, a scientist can determine the period when a house was built. A fragment of a dinner plate can be traced by markings on the back. Each piece contributes to the bigger picture of what events took place in a particular area. And in the area of Hidden River Cave, tens of thousands of artifacts were found. "That's a very dense concentration so you can imagine how time-consuming it is to go back through it all," Applegate said.

While processing the data from Hidden River Cave, Applegate is also working with her students analyzing skeletal remains from a prehistoric burial site of Native Americans in Allen County. From the bones gathered at the site in the 1970s and 1980s, Applegate gave each



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student in her forensic anthropology class a bag and told them to treat it as evidence from a crime scene. The students were responsible for telling her everything they could about the contents of the bag, such as how many people's remains they had, gender, age, diseases, cause of death, and what type of mortuary preparation was used on the bodies. In addition, Applegate has directed two student independent studies using the collection. She realizes that to people outside of her archaeological bubble, sifting through bones and researching dead people might seem odd, but to Applegate, the assignment is her way to ensure a bright future in her students' experience with archaeology. "We have a lot of students who want to go on to graduate work in forensic anthropology," Applegate said. "Hands-on experience working with skeletal collections, before they apply to graduate school, will increase students' chances of getting in."

With her baccalaureate degree from Miami of Ohio and master's and doctoral degrees from Ohio State University, Applegate has experienced first-hand how important it is to be well educated before venturing out in the field.

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For a recent project in Butler County, Applegate was immersed in another realm of archaeology — this time in the form of historic rather than prehistoric archaeology. The setting was an abandoned graveyard Applegate saw one day while walking her dogs. It was old and run down, and she decided to turn it into both a learning and service project. Last summer she taught a course in graveyard archaeology, which involved students in cleaning the graveyard, using archaeological methods to locate buried gravestones, and researching the people buried there. They found that the graveyard was filled with members of the Kuykendall family, who were among the first settlers of Butler County, Kentucky. Using historical documents, they were able to see pictures and read letters these family members wrote years ago. "I've always been a prehistoric archaeologist, working with remains of people who died before writing was invented," Applegate said. "And now to do historic work and be able to put a picture and a name and even handwriting with a grave, it's amazing — I think I have the bug."

Her students also got "the bug" during their summer of research. Applegate said her students began to treat the Kuykendall family as an adopted family. Many members of the Kuykendall family, especially those who died in

non-census years, had little or no formal historical documentation of their lives. This made the students even more determined and excited when they were able to reclaim the lives of these people who, before the class came, weren't known to exist because their gravestones were buried. "A huge benefit of having students out there is that they can see the practical applications to what they're learning in archaeology," Applegate said. "And that is so important." Although the class is over, Applegate hasn't seen the last of the Kuykendall family. She identified six other family graveyards within a five-mile radius of this Kuykendall plot. She plans on researching those sites as well. In addition, she and her students are excavating at a Kuykendall farmstead this summer.

The workload Applegate carries will never get lighter because she said she feels like she's not contributing to history if she's just sitting around. Her current field projects combined with the vast amount of un-analyzed artifacts at the Rock House on Western's campus will certainly keep her busy for the next ten years. "I'll never run out of things to do," Applegate said. "There's so much out there and so much to learn and discover. It's amazing. It's just an endless excitement for me."

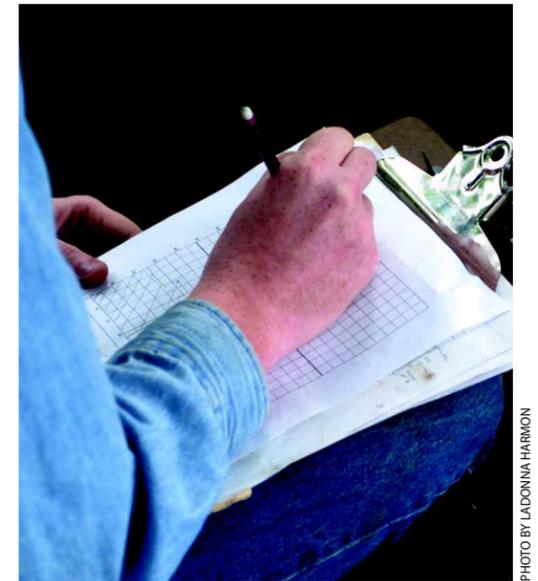


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