

## Coventry High School's Ruscito named state history teacher of the year



Shori Ruscito, a teacher at Coventry High School, was named the 2019 Rhode Island History Teacher of the Year.

COVENTRY — Shori Ruscito's love for history runs deep. The countless stories and colorful characters of the past have contributed to a passion for the subject that she's striven to instill in others.

For Ruscito, a teacher at Coventry High School who earlier this month was announced as the 2019 Rhode Island History Teacher of the Year, the hope is that students leave her classroom with an appreciation for times gone by.

Presented annually since 2004 by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History to one teacher from each state plus the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense schools and each U.S. territory, the history teacher of the year award was established to recognize the importance of history education.

"I'm so honored," said Ruscito, who was chosen for the award by a committee organized by the Rhode Island Historical Society. "Gilder Lehrman is very prestigious, and to be recognized for teaching history is a privilege."

A 2008 graduate of Coventry High School, Ruscito's fascination with history was founded early on.

"I grew up in a family that really liked history," Ruscito said, as she recalled family trips to various historical sites.

Beyond familial influence, though, Ruscito's interest in history was honed during her time as a student at Coventry High School — specifically, in the classroom of Lisa Johansen, who herself earned the state history teacher of the year designation in 2012.

"I left not just loving history, but I really grew to have a passion for history," Ruscito said. "I left the class wanting to know more and to go out and research on my own."

To Ruscito, the importance of history education is twofold.

First, she said, learning about history prepares students to become good citizens and teaches them the ins-and-outs of current events and government participation. And second, it can help students acquire a range of skills to benefit them later on.

"They're skills that transfer to English, they help with reading," she said. "We're reading primary sources and we're writing arguments, so it also helps with problem solving and critical thinking."

Ruscito earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Rhode Island in 2012 and began working at Coventry High School shortly thereafter. And despite her career being young, Brooke Macomber, principal of Coventry High School, said she counts Ruscito among "the most seasoned teachers in our school."

Macomber lauded Ruscito for her ability to simultaneously motivate students and make them feel comfortable, as well as for her use of both primary and secondary sources to ensure "a constant focus on promoting higher order thinking skills."

"As a result, she has been very successful in preparing students to become good readers, writers, thinkers and problem solvers," Macomber added. "Her ability to push students while also providing them with support and structure is truly remarkable."

In addition to teaching courses in pre-advanced placement American history and American government, Ruscito recently developed a course that focuses on Rhode Island's past.

"Rhode Island has such an interesting history," Ruscito said, adding that her students have particularly enjoyed their field trips to the Newport mansions.

"Some of them don't realize we have so much history right in our backyard," she continued.

It's important that people understand their roots, added Ruscito, who herself is especially interested in local colonial history.

"Knowing where you come from helps you know yourself better and take pride in where you're from," she continued. "There are just so many different stories that kids can connect to right here in Rhode Island."

Ruscito strives to keep her students engaged in what they're learning. One of her tactics for ensuring their interest, she said, is to provide them with opportunities to study the things they care about.

"We recently did a project where they could research a topic of their choice," Ruscito said.

While some students studied the blizzard of '78 or the industrial revolution, others looked into the Station nightclub fire or Providence's The Celebrity Club.

"It really allowed them to explore and research the history that they liked," Ruscito said, "and by doing that, I feel like kids can get a real attachment to it and that love that I have for history."

As the state's history teacher of the year, Ruscito will be given a \$1,000 honorarium, and Coventry High School will receive a core archive of American history books and other educational materials. Ruscito is also now in the running to be named the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History's national history teacher of the year.

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