

Globe-trotting teacher honored

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Columbus corporate leaders and other local VIPs were on hand to honor Bexley Middle School teacher Natalie Mroz Thursday during the Columbus Council on World Affairs International awards ceremony at COSI.

The council recognized Mroz for her commitment to educating her students about other places and cultures, which Mroz tackled head on, taking her students on trips to far-away places. Mroz, a social-studies teacher, told the sold-out luncheon crowd that she became interested in international education when, as a child, she realized she could travel with books and her imagination.

The Columbus Council on World Affairs funds educational programs for teachers, students and professionals about international issues like the importance of China's economic power and climate change.

Mroz seemed relaxed and ready to address the well-heeled crowd while mingling at a small reception prior to the awards ceremony.

"It's very nice," she said about the award -- a glass globe with a golden map of the world covering it. "I'm excited."

More than 130 Bexley seventh-graders have traveled to the Costa Rican rain forest with Mroz since 1994; they live with a Costa Rican family and without the comforts of the suburbs. Three of her former students, Rachael Crane and Anna and Jesse Vogel, helped introduce Mroz at the luncheon. They went on the 10-day rain-forest excursion in summer 2005.

The three students said the "Bexley Rain Forest Ed-Venture" trip helped them understand that the rest of the world is very different from the one they experience in Bexley. The students ate what their host families ate and met their Costa Rican peers.



BY DAVID REA/THISWEEK
Natalie Mroz, a seventh-grade social-studies teacher at Bexley Middle School, stands with three of her students: Anna Vogel, Rachael Crane and Jesse Vogel. At right is presenter Patrick Terrien, president and CEO of the Columbus Council on World Affairs.

"People think where they live is the norm for the world, but it really isn't," Anna Vogel said.

Anna and Jesse, twins who celebrated their 13th birthdays in the jungle, said their host family treated them to a strange raisin cake they hadn't before seen. Crane said her host family attempted to make her a hamburger and french fries.

Aside from the Costa Rican's attempts to make the students feel at home, the seventh-graders were living in an untamed jungle, and their peers had to walk miles through the rain forest to make it to school, where only five pupils were present, they said.

Mroz also spearheaded other multicultural programs at the school, including an exchange program between Bexley students and students in Africa and Japan.

Dr. Anne Hyland, Bexley's director of curriculum and instruction, said the district actively encourages its teachers to work on multicultural education programs and holds after-school seminars to help teachers with the process.

She said it is important for students to experience different cultures and that traveling abroad changes their perspective on the world.

"You don't listen to world news the same way," she said.

Columbus-based research organization Battelle also was honored at the event as International Company of the year.

A teacher for 24 years, Mroz also taught in Columbus prior to moving to Bexley City Schools.

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