

A TREASURED PASSION

Butler retiree's pursuit of hobby leads to doctorate in archaeology

Ed Dlutowski shows Sarah Slater, left, and Nikki Bruner, right, how to scrape a thin layer of soil with a trowel in a patient search for artifacts.



By Kathleen Ganster

Although he has a doctorate in archaeology, Ed Dlutowski has never worked as an archaeologist.

"I never thought of it as a career," he said. "I guess because I grew up in a blue-collar area and everybody worked in industry."

Dlutowski, of the Meridian section of Butler, worked as a designer in the electrical engineering field for more than 30 years before retiring. But archaeology was always his hobby, and three years ago, he received a doctorate in archaeology from Bridgewater University.

"It is a distance-learning college, so I was able to receive credit for my field work and did a lot of my course work online," he said.

Dlutowski, 66, has done field work as a volunteer with Carnegie Museum of Natural History.

"I began volunteering when I was in my 30s. I've helped in many excavations with the Carnegie Museum. I've been to Peru for a dig and worked on many locally," he said.

During his 1979 trip to Peru, Dlutowski worked with staff from the Carnegie Museum excavating several sites.

"One was from 1500 B.C. and another from 2000 B.C.," he said. "We tried to answer the question: How did these early people develop such great civilizations?"

Even during casual conversation, Dlutowski's passion for archaeology is evident. "It is so exciting to think when you are excavating that no one before you has uncovered these things. No one has seen them for years, perhaps thousands of years," he said. "It is a treasure hunt of knowledge. You get hooked on it."

Whether digging locally or in a location as exotic as Peru, Dlutowski values any find.

"Everything you find is of interest. It all has meaning, the interpretation all has meaning," he said.

In addition to his excavating work, Dlutowski has been involved in the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology and serves as the staff archaeologist for the Butler County Historical Society.

He leads a junior archaeology program called Dirt Dragons for children 12 and older who are interested in archaeology.

"It is a true hands-on program. We go out in the field and excavate and they learn how to record their findings," he said. The youngsters use a lab at the Butler County Heritage Center. "We have a setup where there are tables with cleaning apparatus. We clean the artifacts and study them. Sometimes we are involved in the reconstruction of the artifacts and findings."

Dlutowski also teaches a summer program for children at Camp Lutherlyn in Connoquenessing Township and serves as a resource for other organizations.

"I answer questions about sites. For example, when there was a local [state Department of Transportation] project, I helped on the site survey," he said.

His wife, Ginger, has been involved with his hobby.

"She has been very supportive of my work and involvement," he said.

One of his teachers at the former Etna High school, Marietta Dietrich, sparked his interest in archaeology.

"She had a father who was a farmer in Butler. She lived in a place adjacent to the school but went to the farm in the summer months," he said. Dietrich brought back various objects that her father had found on his farm while plowing and doing other farm work.

"Sometimes they would be Indian artifacts, and we would talk about them. It just fascinated me. She would also bring in books," he said. "She opened the door for me of my lifelong love of the past."

Later, when Dlutowski moved to Butler, he contacted her. "We would discuss various subjects and I got to know her as a friend," he said.

Dlutowski was so moved by her influence in his life that he paid tribute to her in the booklet for Etna High School's Grand Reunion this month.

The Dirt Dragons meet from 1 to 3 p.m. every Sunday. Preregistration is requested. For more information, call the Butler County Heritage Center at 724-283-8116.

Kathleen Ganster is a freelance writer.