

News

Trip to Singapore opens educator's eyes

Teacher spends some time learning there

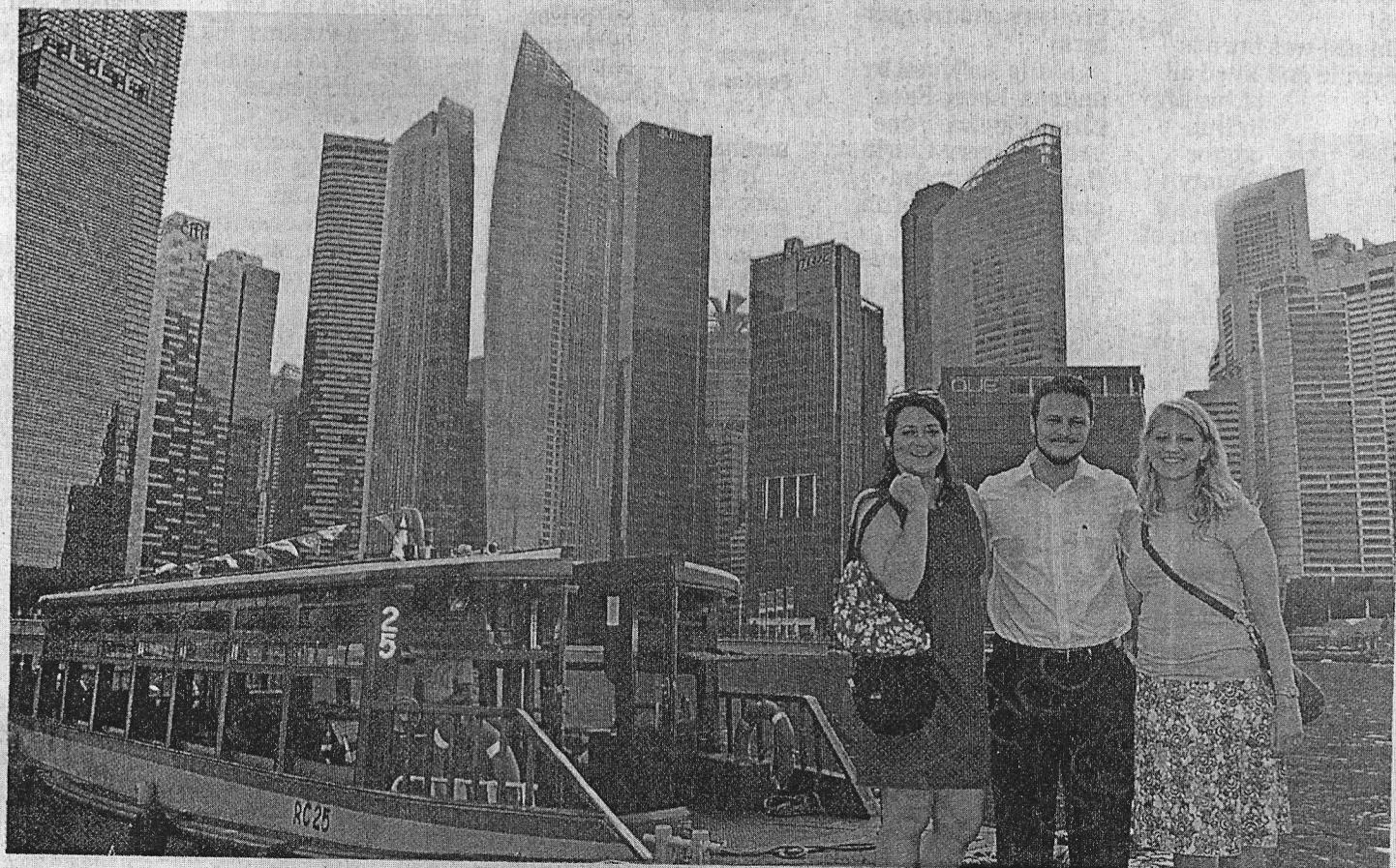
BRITTANY KRASUTSKY
AND MEBANE RASH
SPECIAL TO THE BLACK MOUNTAIN NEWS

(Editor's note: Brittany Krasutsky, a science teacher at Owen Middle School, was among 11 middle school and high school educators from North Carolina who went to Singapore in July to learn some "best practices" for teaching science and mathematics. Mebane Rash is CEO of EducationNC.)

Singapore is a relatively young nation, having established its independence in 1965. Once a small fishing village, it is today a bustling multicultural and cosmopolitan city-state that commands a strong presence in the world with its free trade economy and highly efficient workforce.

From the beginning, Singapore's leadership recognized that education would be crucial to its cultural and economic success as a nation. Thus, Singapore's leaders implemented an innovative education system to build on one of its greatest resources – its people. The system has further evolved as the needs of the nation have grown.

Today, only 50 years later, Singapore's students consistently rank near the top in international comparisons of



Brittany Krasutsky learns about the history of Singapore's financial district with fellow Burroughs Wellcome Scholars Dustin Nichols and Stephanie Evans.

professional development and part-

the group toured the iDA labs.

"For most of us here, teaching is

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performance in mathematics, science, and literacy. Singapore was rated the best performing education system, with an excellent teaching force, in a 2008 McKinsey and Company study, "How the World's Best Performing School Systems Came Out on Top."

Singapore traditionally draws teacher education students from the top 10 percent of the secondary school graduating classes. Additionally, Singapore has created a sophisticated approach to identifying and training future educational leaders. These qualities and more make Singapore an ideal place to explore "best practices" in education.

The Center for International Understanding, a public service program of the University of North Carolina, leads the trip to Singapore. Since 1995, the center has sent more than 900 teachers and administrators abroad to over 15 different countries through its

nership programs.

The center has found that increasing teacher knowledge about the world helps increase teacher confidence and competence in providing students with the skills to navigate successfully through a globalized and interconnected world.

The trip was sponsored by the Burroughs Wellcome Fund (BWF) Scholars Program, in partnership with the University of North Carolina system and four UNC universities, including UNC Asheville. The program's goal is to better prepare new science and mathematics teachers for N.C.'s public school classrooms. Go Global NC and EducationNC lead the trip.

Adrian Lim, the director of the education sector of the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, spoke to the Burroughs Wellcome Scholars regarding trends in education before

"It's very important to have an educator perspective when implementing technology," said Lim, who had been in education for 18 years as a science and math teacher and principal.

IDA is working with Singapore schools as they transition from "server-based" learning to "makers space" learning. They are currently testing technology-enabled toys - robots and modular circuit stickers, for instance - and not screen-time devices like iPads. Students are also learning programming and sequencing, which ties into all work skills needed in today's market.

Because of the country's commitment to the development of human capital, teachers are respected and teaching is a respected career in Singapore. Only about 40 percent of students go on to a university, and of those, teachers are groomed from the top 30 percent.

what we have wanted to do since we were young," Woodlands Secondary School principal Tan Ke-Xin said. Teachers are treated as professionals, with office space in the school separate and apart from the classroom.

We have yet to process all this trip has given to us, from trying new foods like grilled stingray, navigating foreign airports and transportation to discovering a new thought process in ourselves for how change is possible in our education system.

Here in America, we have a need for good science and math teachers, while language arts, social studies and arts positions are difficult to come by. It's the exact opposite in Singapore. Seems like there is a great opportunity for learning and partnering between their country and ours.