

Tim Keller coaches dedicated 'Raton Roar' crew

By Sherry Goodyear — For the Comet | Posted: Saturday, May 9, 2015 12:00 am

RATON – When Tim Keller’s Journalism class at Raton High School began in the Fall of 2014, he started out with 10 students. The class was to be an elective at the end of the day, and he was told that maybe his group could eventually, “put out a monthly newsletter and run copies off for students on the ditto machine”, but Keller had much loftier aspirations for his journalism class. He wanted to put the articles online. Keller knew about a freshman, Noah Schoonover, who was well-versed in writing HTML code. Keller recruited Schoonover to be web master for the class. Once that was done, Keller began instructing his students in the art of journalism – something he knows well from his own experience as a freelance reporter.



Tim Keller (right) and the crew of the Raton Roar (left to right): Noah Schoonover, Kate Little, Editor; and Caylene Romero.

For the first several weeks of the class, Keller instructed his students about the basics of story-telling, reporting, photography, and journalism. He viewed himself as more of a facilitator than a teacher, giving the students freedom to leave class and seek out stories. The rules of the class were simple: Each student had to write one story a week and he or she was guaranteed a “100 percent” grade for that week.

At first the stories rolled in, and students seemed happy to see their work in print, but over time, students became less productive and less engaged. Finally after several weeks of lackluster motivation, Keller gathered all of his students together and asked what had happened; why the stories were no longer pouring in? The answer was simple: It was too hard: Too hard to find stories. Too hard to do interviews. Too hard to take pictures. Too hard to write the stories once all of the trouble of gathering information was done.

Despite Keller’s words of wisdom to the class that, “The newspaper business doesn’t judge you by how hard you work but rather on how much you produce,” Keller let those who were no longer interested drop the class, and once all was said and done, he was left with three: Schoonover, webmaster; Kate Little, editor; and Caylene Romero, reporter. When asked why he stayed, Schoonover replied, “Who else was going to do it? Whoever heard of a newspaper ran by only two people?” Little’s reply to the same question was a little more basic, “I like writing,” and Romero said, “Unlike the others, I love going out there and finding a story.”

The goals of the class remain the same as when it started – each student writes one story a week for a grade of 100 percent. A helpful tool in the process is a program called DropBox which allows folders to be set up and accessed by a variety of people. All articles are initially put in Little’s box. She reads and corrects all the errors she finds and then passes the articles off to Keller for an additional read. Once the piece passes Keller’s scrutiny, it is sent to Schoonover for conversion into HTML code and posting on the newspaper’s website aptly called The Raton Roar.

“He is so proud of himself when he finds a mistake we miss,” Little says of Schoonover, who blushes slightly and adds, “The good news is I can fix the mistakes in the code even if they get by us at first.” Much of the work for the newspaper is done during class but, like all classes, there can be homework. Little estimates she spends an additional hour a week working on the newspaper outside of school while Romero estimates she spends five or six additional hours a week working on the paper. Schoonover says that in the early stages when he was creating the website, he spent numerous hours a day working on the project but now, using templates he created, the time he spends has narrowed to about a half hour a day.

One of the best aspects of the class is that The Raton Roar has an internship program worked out with The Raton Comet. With this arrangement, the Comet can print any article appearing in the Roar that it likes, free of charge. This agreement has led to Kate Little becoming a paid contributor to the Comet.

The Raton Roar publishes pretty much anything the students want to publish including articles, puzzles and short stories. Junior Forrest McConnell, who is doing an Independent study Creative Writing course, is supposed to produce one story a month as part of his course work. His most recent contribution is a short story called, “Mr. Cox and the Time Machine.”

Considering all the work these three intrepid students have done to get The Raton Roar up to its current standard, one can’t help but wonder what is in store for the newspaper. Both Little and Romero are high school seniors and will graduate in a little over a month. Keller is planning to retire after this school year. That leaves freshman Schoonover who says, “Since the schools are consolidating and seventh and eighth graders will be coming up to the high school, we are hoping to recruit some of them to the paper. I would like to find someone who wants to learn to write code and help do my part of it which would help take some of the burden off of me. Also, the school has requisitioned for Adobe Dreamweaver and to pay for the website hosting. Since the beginning my dad has been paying for that [webhosting].”

Whatever is in store for these three enterprising young people, there is no doubt that they have left their mark on Raton schools with a mighty Roar. To view The Raton Roar please visit: <http://ratonroar.com/>.