

Sul Ross archaeologists help seventh-graders GEAR UP for the future

SPECIAL TO THE
ODESSA AMERICAN

ALPINE Project archaeologists William "Andy" Cloud and John Seebach recently joined other professionals during a career-night presentation at Kokernot Lodge.

More than 30 seventh-grade students from Pecos and Balmorhea shuffled from table to table, where various professionals from a lawyer to an information-technology specialist discussed their careers. They answered questions about the education and moments of revelation that turned an early interest into a lifetime avocation. Another group from Fort Stockton, Imperial, and Sanderson came through the previous week for the same activity.

The students are part of Project ReACH (Realizing and Attaining Collegiate Heights), an enterprising program administered by Sul Ross State University.

Funded through the federal GEAR UP initiative (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), the program will receive \$3.2 million in federal funding over the course of six years to assist 665 seventh grade students through their high school graduation. ReACH provides early college preparation and scholarships to participating students from low-income school districts.

The grant funds programing, tutoring, incentives, workshops, and on-campus activities, such as the career roundtable, to enable students to grow accustomed to a college environment. As an added incentive, Sul Ross will award \$25,000 to participating ReACH graduates who enroll at the university in 2011.

GEAR UP and ReACH funds aid students from 14 West Texas school districts: Alpine, Balmorhea, Buena Vista, Fort Stockton,



William 'Andy' Cloud and John Seebach, back, with ReACH participants from Pecos and Balmorhea. Cloud and Seebach discussed archaeology as a career and the importance of higher education with students visiting Sul Ross State University.

ERIN CARO/CENTER FOR BIG BEND STUDIES

Grandfalls, Marathon, Marfa, Pecos, Presidio, Sanderson, Sierra Blanca, Terlingua, Valentine, and Van Horn (Culberson County).

Cloud and Seebach asked each group, "Do you know what an archaeologist does?" With few exceptions, most students thought that they dug up dinosaurs.

The pair corrected this common misconception, explaining that they really study past human cultures through artifacts, deposits, and features.

They used the question as a springboard to discuss details of their often hands-on jobs and the importance of education for entering a field such as archaeology.

"First, you're a scientist," Seebach said. "You ask questions about the past, and then you do field work.

Archaeology employs an arsenal of specially-trained scientists to do soil, plant, and radio-carbon analyses."

Both stressed that it was

crucial in any career to have good mastery of language and communication skills.

"Even if you're a scientist, with the necessity of publishing your results, you can't neglect English, writing and basic grammar," said Seebach.

After the introduction, interests turned to that which most interested the young students; how did Cloud and Seebach decide to become archaeologists? Each described seeing archaeological sites in Texas at a young age — about that of the students eagerly listening around the table — and how they were inspired to learn more.

"I was in Pecos when I decided I wanted to become an archaeologist. I was 11 years old. I climbed up in a rock shelter in the Guadalupe Mountains, and I was fascinated," Cloud said.

"I tried to relate my story, tried to connect with them, being from Pecos. We weren't necessarily trying to push

them toward archaeology, we were just explaining what we did and the importance of education in realizing their dreams," said Cloud.

Before each talk concluded and a new group of students approached the table, the presenters gave their closing advice.

Cloud concluded one group's session, saying, "You want to be happy in whatever it is you decide to do. You'll be more likely to be happy if your career interests you, which means you should pick something to study and do because it fascinates you. Don't be afraid to follow your dreams."

As the ReACH program assists these students for the next five years, the hope is that this message encourages their aspirations and makes their futures bright with possibility.

For more information, contact Erin Caro, (432) 837-8834. CBBS staff with ReACH students.