

Constance Saltonstall Foundation for the Arts Hosts Teacher Retreat



During the recent President's Week vacation from school, five creatively-inclined Ithaca teachers had the rare opportunity to spend their break in residence at the Saltonstall Arts Colony. This program, now in its second year, provided each teacher-artist with a private apartment, studio space, vegetarian dinners, peaceful surroundings and long, uninterrupted hours to devote themselves to their arts, all at no cost to the teachers. Some funding was provided by the school district's Fine Arts Booster Group, an affiliate of Ithaca Public Education Initiative.

Lesley Williamson, director of the Saltonstall Foundation, was inspired to create the teacher retreat project by similar program at a Florida arts colony. "I thought, 'what a great idea! We should do this in Ithaca,'" says Williamson. "This is a very mission-specific way for us to support a group of local artists and writers who don't often get the chance to *be* artists and writers. I want Saltonstall to be a resource for the community, and so many people don't know anything about us. I thought this was a great way to develop relationships with a community of local teachers who might really benefit from what we have to offer."

This year's participants, chosen by lottery, were:

Caitlin Chan, Boynton
Shawn Goodman, IHS
Matthew Holl, IHS
Jon Raimon, LACS
Matthew Soucy, IHS

Writers dominated this year's retreat. Ithaca native and longtime teacher Jon Raimon says: "Those days at Saltonstall allowed me to meander through my writing until I found a path that mattered and to breathe for a spell. It was also great to share delicious meals and good conversations with fellow teachers, writers and artists. Teachers don't often get to chat with each other, especially about our craft, so this was great."

Visual artist Caitlin Chan, who is in her first year teaching at Boynton and Dewitt Middle Schools, says that she "had an absolutely magical time wandering on the paths, painting, and working with textiles. The space is very peaceful and refreshing. It is great to be able to focus and set my own pace."

Shawn Goodman, whose third Young Adult book is under contract with Random House, says that, to him, "The idea of five days of uninterrupted time was almost incomprehensible. What would I work on? How would it feel to be able to write and think and sleep and then write even more? There are the expected words, like renewal, and reflection. Depth and clarity of thinking. The Teacher's Retreat provided for all of those things."

