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Guide to making history come alive

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By Silvio Laccetti

In mid-June, the National Assessment of Educational Progress 2010 report card for American history studies was released. Once again, the results were dismal. American history is the worst subject for our nation's schoolchildren as tested in grades four, eight and 12.

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Their performance has been poor ever since the first NAEP survey in 1994, perhaps confirming the adage that "the more things change, the more they remain the same."

According to published summaries, the majority of all tested students fell below the category of basic proficiency.

Those who score high enough just to be proficient — by no means exceptional — are 20 percent of fourth-graders, 17 percent of eighth-graders and 12 percent of 12th-graders. The older our students become, it appears, the more their knowledge of American history vanishes.

It will take millions of hours of teachers' time and policy-makers' meetings to come up with a "Remember America!" curriculum. But history can be learned and appreciated by many extracurricular means.

The Georgia Historical Society, a 172-year-old private institution, offers a wide range of history-related programming to the public. According to its president and CEO, W. Todd Groce, the society has a major commitment in teacher

training and receives grants from various federal agencies, including the National Endowment for the Humanities.

One of its signature programs is the Georgia History Festival, held annually in Savannah to commemorate the founding of the Georgia colony in 1733. The event draws schoolchildren statewide. Of special interest is its family-friendly kickoff event, in which presentations are geared to youth, parents and grandparents on noted individuals. Next year's event will highlight the contributions of Georgia's Juliette Gordon Low, founder of the Girl Scouts.

The society also manages the historic marker program for Georgia, which now seeks to cover the full story of Georgia history, as more African-American history will be noted. There are more than 2,600 markers statewide, placing Georgia third in the nation for this category.

Recently, the society announced that on Aug. 1, it will inaugurate the daily program "Today in Georgia History." Almost \$1 million has been obtained from the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation for this effort, and the society has partnered with Georgia Public Broadcasting to beam the event statewide.

Individuals also can take initiative in preparation for the Fourth of July and lasting through the warm months.



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If grandparents or other family members are looking to spend quality time with young children, why not consider taking some voyages of historical discovery in local neighborhoods?

More than sharing family legacies through oral history projects, a grandparent can be an adventurer and explorer, the Christopher Columbus leading his or her young crew on journeys of discovery.

An innovative nonprofit effort online — **The Historical Marker Database** — offers a wonderful opportunity for captains and crews to search, discover and learn. Grandparents take grandchildren on a local tour to discover markers, monuments, structures and places that denote a person, event, organization or other special feature that has a back story. Once discovered, captain and crew may register their finds with a national computer database.

“History is out there, open, for free. Just go outside,” says HMDB Publisher J.J. Prats, who works with volunteer editors who check and catalog all submissions.

Georgia has almost 2,600 entries, with room for many more.

Opportunity abounds for both youth and elders to master new skills and build on old ones: digital photography, writing, historical research and computer skills (for which additional in-family help might be sought). In the process, everyone learns together as history comes alive.

This year, grandparents' day is Sept. 11, a day our nation will mark with special 10th anniversary ceremonies.

If grandparents and grandchildren have spent quality time in discovering American history, this special day can be full of meaning. Explore a little. Learn a lot this summer.

Silvio Laccetti has taught history in college and has been a longtime professor at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, N.J.

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Luckovich: Pope tweets



Editorial cartoonist Mike Luckovich gives his take on local news, politics, sports and celebrities.

They lost 128 pounds



Marietta couple Susan Stewart and Glenn C. Campbell began a diet and exercise plan together last October.

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