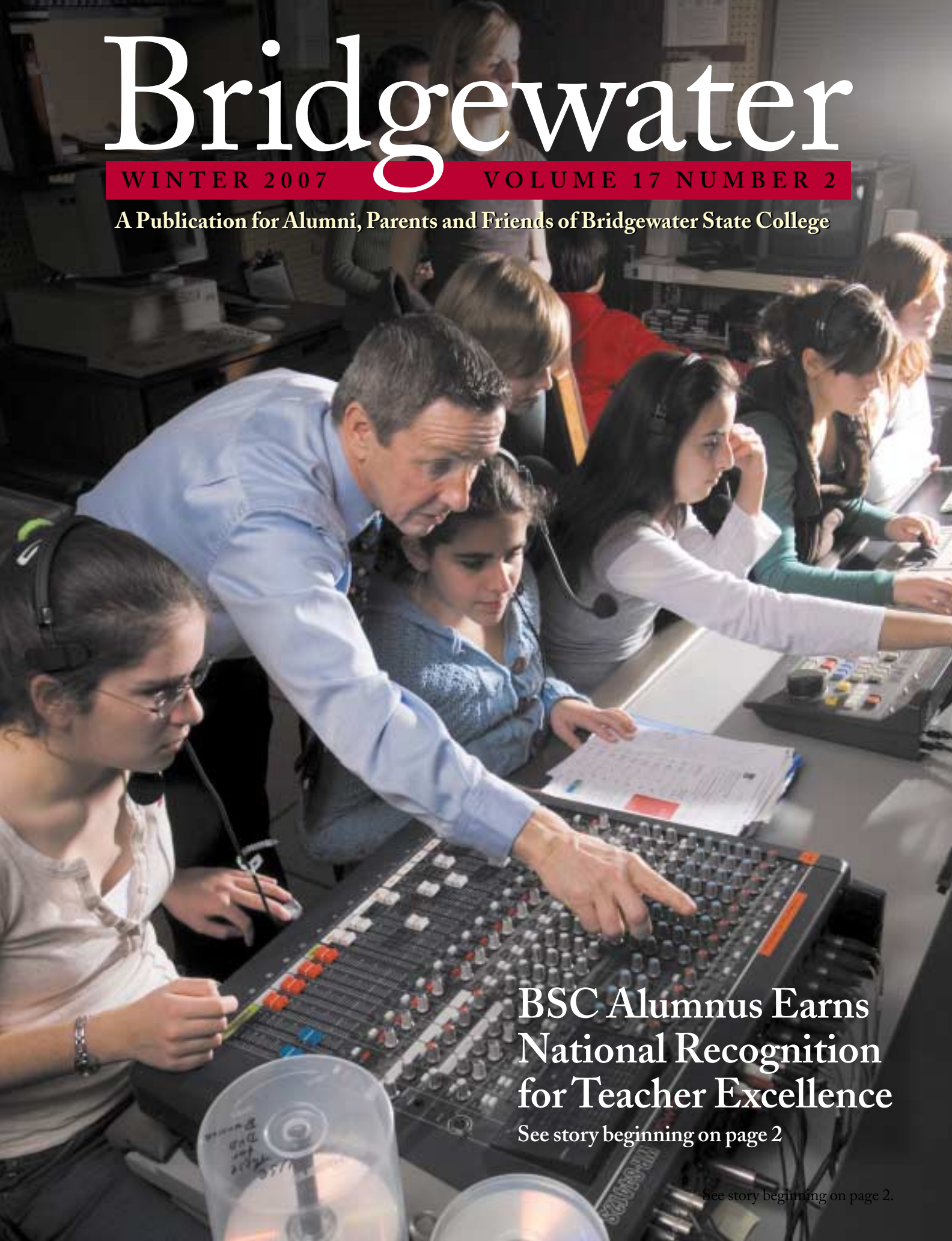
Bridgewater

WINTER 2007 VOLUME 17 NUMBER 2

A Publication for Alumni, Parents and Friends of Bridgewater State College



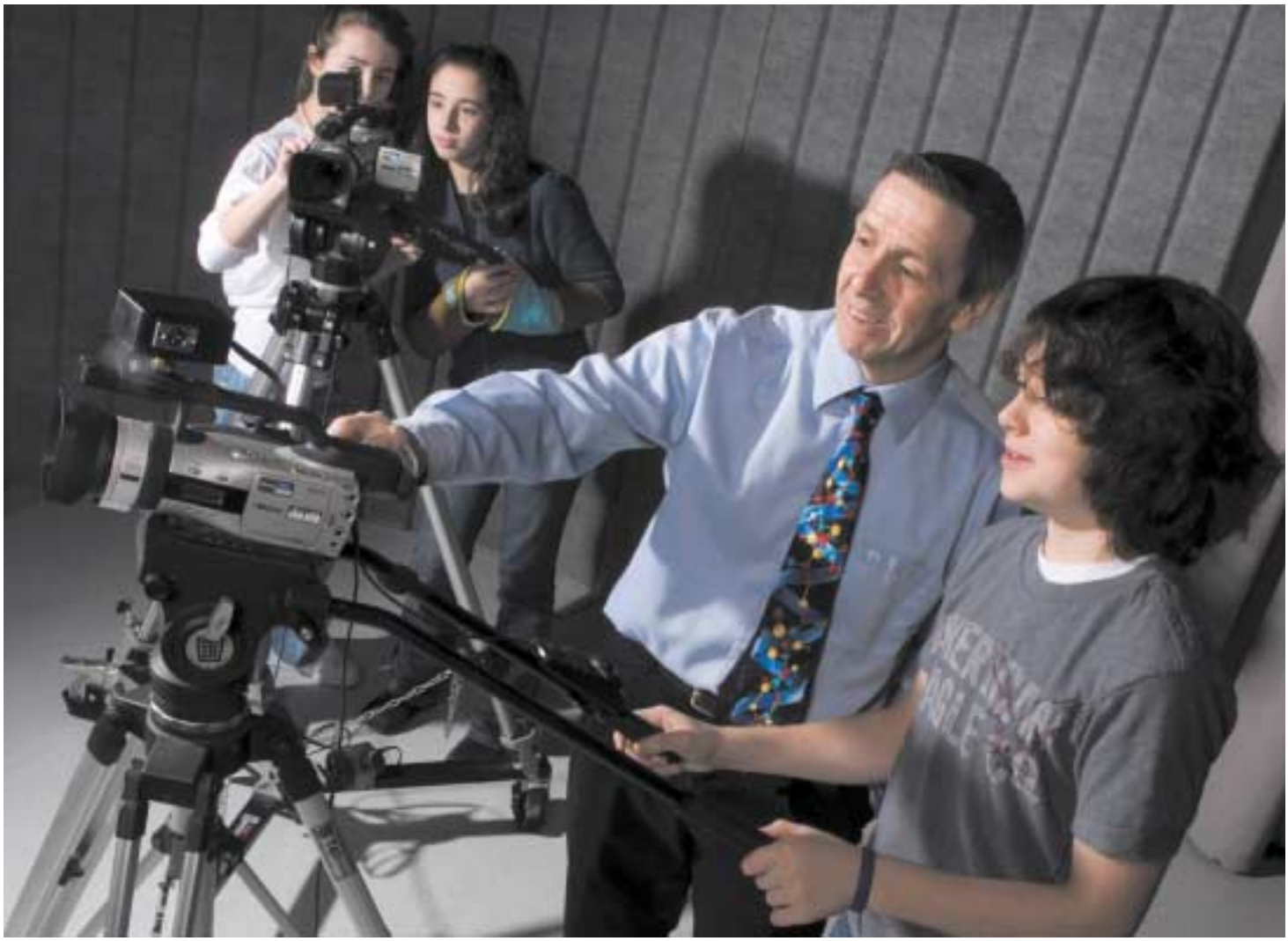
BSC Alumnus Earns National Recognition for Teacher Excellence

See story beginning on page 2

See story beginning on page 2.

All-American Teacher

Warren Phillips, '75, MAT '88, MEd '02, tapped for USA Today *All-USA Teaching Team.*



Warren Phillips works with H.O.W.L. (Helping Others While Learning) students, Tyler Green, Libby Brigida and Holly Duddy, as they adjust cameras in preparation of guest speaker television interview at Plymouth Community Intermediate School.

By Maura King Scully

In 2006, Warren Phillips made Bridgewater State College history. A 32-year veteran science teacher in the Plymouth public middle schools, Mr. Phillips became the first BSC educator to be named to the coveted *USA Today* All-USA Teaching Team. One of only 20 nationally so honored, he received a trophy and $2,500 for his school. He was also profiled in *USA Today* in January.

The ninth annual All-USA Teacher Team members were selected from a nationally nominated pool of kindergarten through grade 12 teachers. In a two-step judging process, education professionals considered how well nominees defined and met their students' needs and, most importantly, the impact they've had on student learning.

And there's no doubt that Mr. Phillips has had *big* impact. "Warren is one of the most remarkable science educators I've ever known," said Nicola Micozzi Jr., '71, Plymouth public schools science coordinator and Mr. Phillips' supervisor for the past 27 years. "He wins the hearts and minds of his students, engaging all their senses, pulling every trick in the book to get them to stretch and apply their knowledge in different settings. There's no doubt the science program in the Plymouth public schools would not be what it is today without Warren Phillips."

Secret of Success

"Work hard, work hard, work hard." It's a sign emblazoned on the wall in Mr. Phillips' classroom, meant to inspire his seventh graders. But it's also a fitting motto for the man himself.

Outside his work as a classroom teacher, Mr. Phillips advises the garden club, produces a student cable TV news show and coordinates a three-day outdoor education field trip each year for 700 plus students. In a quest to reinforce science concepts with young students, the accomplished amateur musician composed and produced three CDs: "Sing-A-Long Science," "Sing-A-Long Science: The Sequel" and "Sing-A-Long Science: The Second Sequel." He's also a contributing writer for the Prentice-Hall *Science Explorer* textbook series and NSTA's *Exemplary Science in Grades 5-8.*

Married for 31 years to his high-school sweetheart, Karen Friberg Phillips, '75, he's the father of two, successful children, Jeffrey and Kristin. He also plays in a band on Wednesday nights, a basketball league on Tuesday nights, is an avid gardener, rollerblades and plays soccer.

"I'm just one of those people who sets a goal and does it," said Mr. Phillips.

He credits his relentless determination in part to his stature. Growing up in Weymouth, he said, "I was the smallest guy in junior high. They used to line us up for gym by height, and I was always first. I think it drove me to be competitive."

Mr. Phillips commuted to Bridgewater State College, earning a BA in earth sciences while working full time. He chose earth sciences at the urging of some of his professors including Ira Furlong and Paul Blackford. "They just encouraged me and took me under their wing," he noted. "I was lucky."

When Mr. Phillips graduated in 1975, teaching jobs were hard to come by. In late August, Mr. Phillips spotted an ad for a middle school science teacher in Plymouth and applied. "They called, and I went in for what I thought was an interview," he recalled. "It was actually a tour – I already had the job. They had just built a new middle school – Plymouth Community Intermediate School (PCIS) – and hired 120 new teachers. It was two days before school started, and they were short one science teacher."

That happy accident of fate turned into a 30-year love affair between Mr. Phillips and PCIS. "Warren is one of the most enthusiastic teachers you could ever have," raved Mr. Micozzi. "He literally lives the job." Always looking to push the envelope, "he's mastered the profession. He's added to his skill set with two more Bridgewater degrees: an MAT in teaching physical sciences in 1988 and an MEd in instructional technology in 2002, and has brought that all back to bear on his classroom," noted Mr. Micozzi.

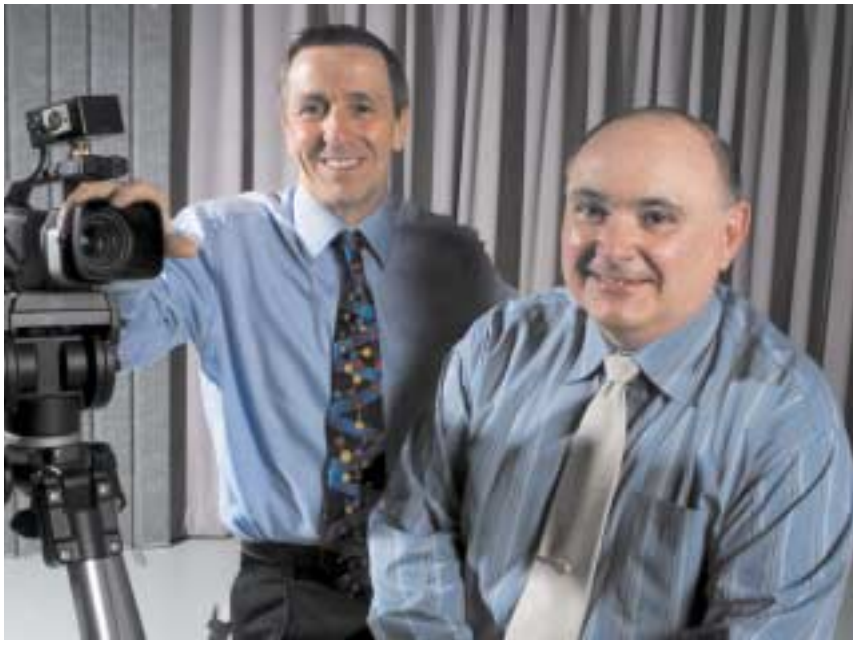
"Warren is one of the most remarkable science educators I've ever known… He wins the hearts and minds of his students, engaging all their senses, pulling every trick in the book to get them to stretch and apply their knowledge in different settings."

Nicola Micozzi Jr., '71, Plymouth public schools science coordinator

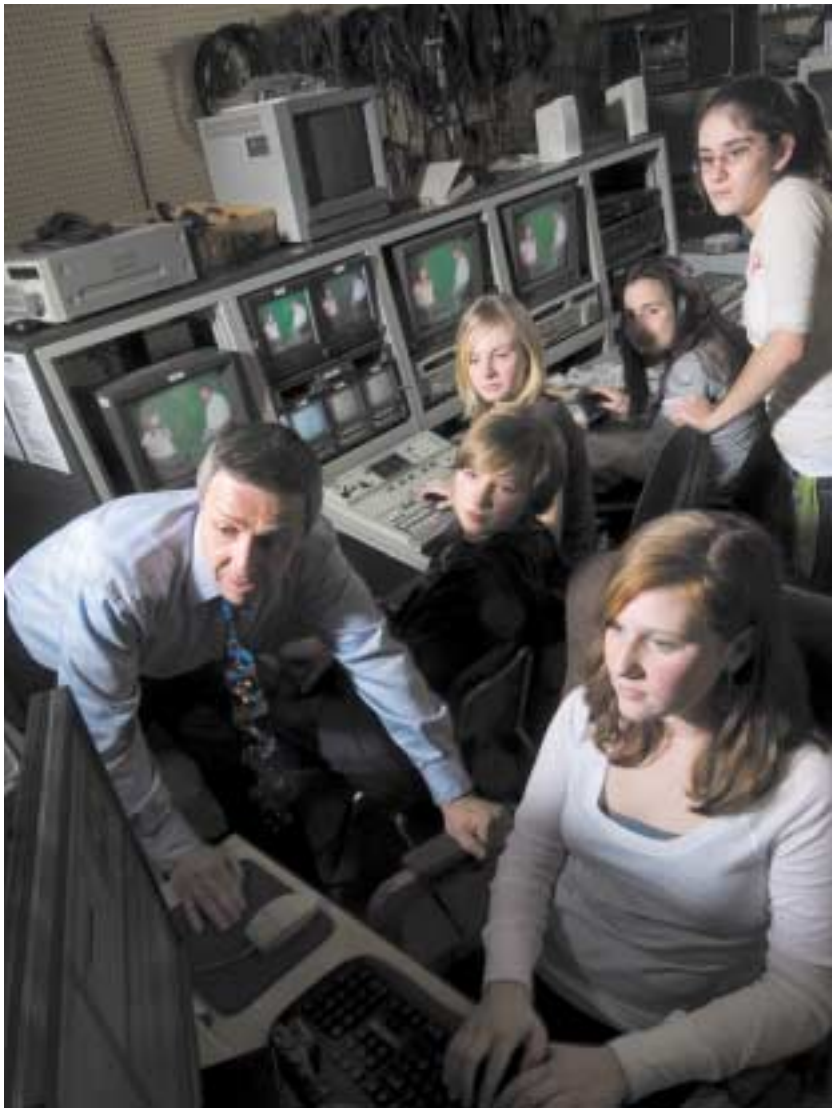
Along the way, Mr. Phillips has also become a nationally recognized educator, tapped regularly for his expertise. He served on the advisory board of Docutek, a Web portal for school-parent-teacher communication; he's a teacher-leader for the Massachusetts Department of Education Partnership Advancing the Learning of Mathematics and Science (PALMS); a certified teacher-trainer for the JASON Project, a program designed to inspire life-long passion for science, math and technology through real-world scientific discovery; and in 2000 passed the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) test. He's written curriculum for Northeastern University's Project SEED (Science Education through Experiments and Demonstrations), an enhancement program for sixth–tenth grade science teachers, as well as the Plymouth public schools online science curriculum. He also serves as science Web master for the Plymouth public schools.

An Entrepreneur at Heart

Though he's a consummate educator, the true secret of Mr. Phillips' success, said Mr. Micozzi, is that "he's really an entrepreneur." In the late 1990s when the



Warren Phillips and Nicola Micozzi Jr., '71, Plymouth public schools science coordinator



Grants received at Plymouth Community Intermediate School have allowed television production to convert to a digital format. Here, Mr. Phillips works with his students, from front, Riley Stefano, Nick O'Sadcia, Shannon Raeke, Hannah Conley and Ashley Gallagher, on Adobe Premier to produce graphics for their next show.

Massachusetts economy spiraled into recession, school budgets were stretched thin. There were barely funds for basic instruction, never mind the kind of forward-thinking teaching Mr. Phillips had in mind. An empty television studio at PCIS had sparked his creative juices: It had been left – full of equipment – when Aldephia Cable moved off school property, and Mr. Phillips envisioned producing a *Bill Nye the Science Guy* type of show with his students. He became a man on a mission, taking courses on TV production and applying for grants to upgrade the studio's outdated equipment.

"Video-editing software is very expensive. It retails around $5,000 to $6,000," he explained. Even with educational discounts, "You could spend $50,000 and not be extravagant."

In searching around for funding, Mr. Phillips discovered a number of awards for outstanding teachers that came with cash prizes. "Let's see if we can't win some of these," Mr. Micozzi remembers Mr. Phillips saying. So Mr. Phillips started applying, and the honors began piling in. He was selected as a finalist for the Massachusetts Presidential Award in 2001, 2002 and 2003. In 2002, he was chosen as Teacher of the Year in *Time For Kids*/Chevrolet Teaching Excellence Award, winning a Chevy Malibu and $2,000 for his classroom. He won the Massachusetts Software and Internet Council's Above and Beyond Award in 2002 and 2003, and in 2003 was a semi-finalist in Technology and Learning's Ed Tech Leader of the Year. In 2004, Mr. Phillips was selected for a DisneyHand Teaching Award, honoring creativity in teaching. Among the 39 DisneyHand teachers, he was singled out as Middle School Teacher of the Year. In 2006, in addition to the *USA Today* award, Mr. Phillips was also named Massachusetts Science Teacher of the Year for Plymouth County and has won a Presidential Volunteer Service Award.

"Everything he's gotten from these awards, he's dumped right back into the school to benefit the children of Plymouth," said Mr. Micozzi.

H.O.W.L.ing Success

In 2005, after 30 years of teaching seventh grade science, Mr. Phillips took on a new challenge: launching Helping Others While Learning (H.O.W.L.). "It started because my principal asked if I'd be interested in starting a gifted and talented program. I told him I didn't believe in gifted and talented programs, and if I had my way, I'd turn those programs into service-learning courses so that kids who excelled could give back to the school and help others," he recounted. "Two days later, my principal came back and said, 'We want you to do it.' Now I have H.O.W.L. at two schools – PCIS and at Plymouth South Middle School. But I like to try new things. I love a challenge."

And H.O.W.L. is just that. Mr. Phillips puts students through their paces, working on projects that advance their learning and serve the community. Students develop PowerPoint presentations for teachers on specific units – like a Jeopardy-style PowerPoint to teach the American Revolution or the finer points of grammar. H.O.W.L.ers collaborate on projects with developmentally disabled students in the Plymouth Life Skills program, helping them grow plants this year to sell for a fundraiser, for example. "H.O.W.L. students used Excel to actually graph the

growth of the plants," he said. They also started a paper-recycling program in the Plymouth middle schools.

A cornerstone of H.O.W.L. is a weekly news program students produce for the school community. They do everything – run the camera and the lights, write the copy and do the on-camera reporting. It makes for an incredible learning experience. "You'd be amazed at what they do," said Mr. Phillips. "They have the energy and time to really delve into some of these video-editing software programs, and they're not afraid to make mistakes."

Mr. Phillips characterizes H.O.W.L as " 'purposeful learning.' It's very unique. I don't know anyone else doing it in the seventh grade quite the way we are. It's been very successful."

Words of Wisdom

After more than three decades in the classroom, Mr. Phillips reports that he's still continually challenged by his work. "I tell student teachers and young teachers. 'This job isn't easy. It's the hardest thing you'll ever do.' I've been doing it for 31 years, and it's still hard," he said.

Part of the challenge comes from the ever-changing educational environment. "Today's teachers have much greater responsibility, with harder and longer days," he observed. "Student loads are increasing. It used to be that you had 80 to 85 kids each year; now you can have up to 145." Mr. Phillips also sees "a lot more unstable homes – that's a big thing to overcome," and noted that today's "parents question what you're doing more. Growing up, my word against the teachers' word would not have held up. More often now, parents question you, fighting for their kids even when they're stretching the truth."

On the positive side, "teaching is better now," he pointed out. "Teachers know strategies for brain-based and style-based learning." And at the core, kids haven't changed. "They were teenagers then, and they're teenagers now. They're naturally curious and enthusiastic."

How has he survived for 32 years in middle school, widely considered the most difficult ages to teach? "I think in large part, you make your own environment," Mr. Phillips said. "You need to figure out what you need to make yourself happy, and then do it." Besides, Mr. Phillips confessed, "I wouldn't want to teach any other grade level. The most influence you can have on a kid's life is in these years. In seventh grade, they're just starting to form goals, looking for role models – though they won't tell you that. It's a very important stage. You can really see the effects of what you're doing."

Every day, in fact, Mr. Phillips looks around and can see those effects, even beyond the current crop of youngsters in his classroom. "My current vice principal? I had him as a student," he noted. "I also taught five of the current teachers at the middle school level. The other day, I received an e-mail from a former student who told me he became a science teacher because of me. What better motivation is there than that?" ■

Maura King Scully is a freelance writer from Walpole specializing in higher education.

Mr. Phillips' "Sing-A-Long Science" CD series

Singing Science

They say necessity is the mother of invention. In Warren Phillips' case, necessity gave birth to his wildly popular CDs, "Sing-A-Long Science." In the late 1990s, "I was trying to teach the kids the first 30 elements on the periodic table and was discouraged when most of them flunked the test," he explained. "Driving home, I had a brainstorm that I could set it to music and teach it that way. When I got home, I wrote 'The Element Song,' came back in and taught it to them over two days. When I retested them, they all got As. That's when I knew I was on to something."

That initial success led to a 31-song, three-CD set that's become an international hit, with thousands of copies sold to school systems throughout the United States and as far away as Brazil, China and New Zealand. "I just got an order today for 100 for a school system in Louisiana," Mr. Phillips noted.

For more on "Sing-A-Long Science," or to listen to a sample, visit www.wphillips.com.

The Volcano Song

(sung to the tune of "She'll be Comin' 'Round the Mountain")

Refrain:
Before the earth creates a vol-ca-no
The heat that's in the magma down below
Expands the rock which makes the pressure
'till the magma finds a fissure
and the lava will erupt and start to flow.

If the pressure down below is really high
Then the lava will shoot way up in the sky
Making pumice full of bubbles
Forming cinder cones with troubles
'cause the living things below are going to die.

If the pressure down below is really low
Then the lava that emerges comes out slow.
The volcano it will yield
Is what geologists call "shield"
And it's kinda flat when it begins to grow.

Now the continents are moving not too swift
But it's what they're calling "continental drift"
When the plates begin colliding
One of them begins subsiding
And the friction heats up magma where
they lift.

Refrain

Words by Warren Phillips