



Fox Chapel Area High School students get to know “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood” producer Margy Whitmer (center) on the set of the show, which is housed at the Senator John Heinz History Center. From left to right are former University of Pittsburgh intern Jessica Morris; students Anushka Vis, Ryan Kenyon, Santiago de la Torre, Jean Daniher, Lance Wilhelm, and Adina Munin; and teacher Ryan Devlin.

FCAHS STUDENTS RELEASE ‘MISTER ROGERS’ DOCUMENTARY

What began in April 2019 as a voluntary book study of Maxwell King’s “The Good Neighbor: The Life and Work of Fred Rogers,” became a 70-minute documentary on the life of a remarkable man, produced entirely by Fox Chapel Area High School students.

Students in teacher Ryan Devlin’s digital media production course have released their documentary, “Our Assignment from Fred Rogers.” The documentary, which took more than a year to make, includes interviews from many people who were close with Mister Rogers, including his widow, Joanne, as well as “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood” producers Hedda Sharapan and Margy Whitmer. Also included in the documentary are interviews with Mr. King, who was Mister Rogers’ biographer, and David Newell, who played Mr. McFeely on the long-running children’s television show. Three of the interviews were filmed in front of the



David Newell, who played Mr. McFeely on “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood,” speaks about his experiences working on the long-running children’s television show.

original Neighborhood of Make-Believe set pieces displayed at the Senator John Heinz History Center.

Originally, once the students had completed a few interviews, they

planned to release them, but an unexpected telephone call from Mrs. Rogers changed the direction of the entire project. When she heard about it from her plumber, she called one of the Fox Chapel Area High School

students in the group and invited them to her home in Pittsburgh for a truly memorable interview, according to Mr. Devlin.

The students involved were 2019 graduates Adina Munin (producer) and Santiago de la Torre, seniors Jean Daniher (producer) and Ryan Kenyon, and juniors Anushka Vis and Lance Wilhelm (director). Additionally, Jessica Morris, a then-college student intern at Fox Chapel Area High School who is now a math teacher at Dorseyville Middle School, was also involved with the production.

According to Lance, one of the most inspiring things he learned while working on the documentary was the importance of taking time to really listen to others and to make interactions with people special, which is just what Mr. Rogers would have wanted.

“Fred Rogers made a constant effort to be the kind and caring individual that everyone who watched his program knew him to be, which is the most inspiring aspect of his life that I had the opportunity to observe in working on this project,” he says. “The idea that anyone can strive to be the best version of themselves in how they interact with others is one of the more hopeful messages that is touched on in the lessons of Fred Rogers.”



Producer Jean Daniher spends a moment with Joanne Rogers, Mister Rogers' widow.

Lance also learned that making a documentary takes a great deal of time and effort, but that is what is necessary to create a compelling and meaningful program for the audience. He also commented that working on the project opened his eyes to exactly how genuine Mister Rogers truly was.

“One of the most remarkable things about Fred Rogers is that when he was on his program, he wasn't playing a character. Fred Rogers was exactly the person who he was on television. That aspect of honesty in his life shows what

a truly caring and loving person he strived to be.”

According to Mr. Devlin, “Our Assignment from Fred Rogers” was inspired by a quote from Mister Rogers that reads, “Try your best to make goodness attractive. That's one of the toughest assignments you'll ever be given.”

The full-length documentary is available to watch on the Swift Fox Media YouTube channel, which can be found online at <https://youtu.be/0ijzTmatpdM>.



Students interview Maxwell King, Mister Rogers' biographer.