

# Underneath the Spanish Sun

Fairfax student spends month working at archaeological dig in Europe.

BY DEREK B. JOHNSON  
THE CONNECTION

Other than a week-long trip to England, Fairfax resident Hillary Brockmeier had never been out of the country before. An aspiring archaeologist and Northern Virginia Community College student, she wanted to get real world experience in her future profession but didn't know where to look. So she did what most students of her generation would do when they need to find something: she Googled it.

"I found out about the program online. I decided to do a Google search for archaeological digs," said Brockmeier. "I wanted to give myself an experience and something to do during the summer."

The program she's speaking of is ArchaeoSpain, a non-profit archaeological organization which gives students 18 and older the opportunity to travel abroad and work at dig sites of various ancient cities throughout Spain. Started in 2002, program director Mike Elkin said their goals are educational as well as cultural.

"The idea was to create a non-profit outfit that could help students from outside Spain to gain fieldwork experience and learn about Spanish culture and history," said Elkin.

For Brockmeier and 14 other students from around the world, that's exactly what they got. Between Aug. 3 and Sept. 5, they spent most of their days under the hot sun,

using dental picks and paint brushes to gently scrape away layers of Spanish dirt, stopping only for lunch or an occasional trip to the sprinklers in a nearby field to cool down. Beneath their feet lay scores of bodies that haven't seen the light of day in nearly 2,500 years.

**PINTIA, THE** ancient Iron Age necropolis from the fifth century B.C. provided each student an opportunity to uncover the remains and personal artifacts of the Celtic warriors buried there. Elkin said each student is given an informational packet and an orientation to prepare them for their onsite work.

"[Our program] must prepare everyone not only for how the dig works but for adapting to the Spanish lifestyle and life on the dig, which differs greatly from

your average day in the United States," he said.

"Life on the dig," as Elkin puts it, consists of waking up at 6:45 a.m. to make it to the site by 7:30 a.m. From there, the students meet up with the main archaeologists at the approximately half mile area with students from the nearby University of Valladolid who oversee work at Pintia.

At 11:30 a.m. the students break for lunch, followed by more work before the Spanish siesta kicked in, shutting down the site and most of the nearby village of Pedilla de Duero. Around 5 p.m., the students would head to the lab to analyze artifacts taken from the dig site at their labs or at-

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Along with the urn containing their ashes, warriors at Pintia usually had a range items such as pottery, weapons, and even food and drink buried to assist them in the afterlife.

tend workshops and lectures on Spanish culture and history.

"I loved it and I would do it again in a heartbeat," said Brockmeier. "We were working just about every single day. I should have been very sore and very tired. But, I was having such a good time, it didn't matter."

**THE ARTIFACTS** that the students uncovered ranged from pieces of pottery, weapons, clay boxes or bones with carvings on them. Ana Isabel Garrido, an archaeologist at Pintia, said the site was originally discovered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The bodies of the warriors were cremated, meaning most burial sites had a funeral urn containing the warrior's ashes along with a variety of items that were meant to assist him in the afterlife, such as food. Traces of chicken and pig bones as well as wine were found alongside the some urns. Each student was re-

sponsible for mapping and cataloguing his or her findings after a discovery. Garrido said that in addition to the pottery and weapons, workers found personal adornments like brooches, earrings, belts and even fibulas among the graves.

"The importance of the find resides more in the context and in the information that object gives than in the item itself," she said.

Elkin said the selection process is based on the maximum number of beds available at the site and that the idea wasn't to base the criteria for selection at a level that would drive away interested parties.

"We don't make the students jump through many hoops. As long as they express a decided interest in joining the crew and they understand the challenges involved, we will sign them up," said Elkin. "We make sure everyone knows what to expect beforehand so if the students are game, so are we."

## Fatsis Relates First-Hand Experience Playing in NFL

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caliber kicker. Through a random Internet search, Fatsis stumbles upon Paul Woodside, who currently serves as the West Springfield football team's kicking coach and works with a Springfield-based business, 4<sup>th</sup> Down Sports, which specializes in the training of kickers and punters.

In addition to attending a few of Woodside's kicking camps, often sharing the same holder and snapper as eighth- and ninth-graders, Fatsis endured his own training individual camp. Woodside put Fatsis through a rigorous training schedule but also made quite an impression on the soon-to-be NFL player.

"Paul was the first guy I called, and I just knew that he was my guy," Fatsis said. "He was enthusiastic. He got it. He didn't say, 'What are you crazy, you're trying to play in

the NFL?' He completely understood what I wanted to do, and I could feel that excitement on the other end of the phone."

"This is something that he asked for because he said, 'If I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it right,'" Woodside said. "Here's somebody who is obviously well-schooled, well-traveled, well-everything, and then he's going to listen to a kicking coach. I think that's the exact reason why the book is such a success because he's such a success."

At the library, Fatsis read several passages from the book, including sections about how the idea to join the Broncos came about, his first practice and subsequent initiation to the Broncos and his private conversations with Denver coach Mike Shanahan.

**FOLLOWING HIS HOUR-LONG TALK,** Fatsis fielded questions from a mixed audience, consisting of several families and

"When you peel back the layers, there's a lot that's hidden."

— Stefan Fatsis

middle-aged men still looking for more goopy details of how the NFL really works.

"We like to have different types of programs, so that we appeal to a wide range of people in the community," said Katie Strotman, programming coordinator for the library. "A lot of our library programs can get a lot of women to come but not as many men, so I'm always looking for something that will drive some men into the library as well."

Despite all of the stereotypes, Fatsis discovered that NFL players were actually real

people. Most contracts aren't as lucrative as those chronicled by the media and the players actually have personalities, goals and ambitions.

**THROUGHOUT HIS** experience with the Broncos, Fatsis kicks. He doesn't shy away from drills to scribble notes and observe. Through soreness and pain, Fatsis truly thrusts himself into the life of a professional football player.

"The goal was to get these guys to open up and be honest about what it feels like to play in the NFL," Fatsis said. "It's a hard game mentally, intellectually, emotionally and physically. It's also about the culture of this business, which is run by insecurity, paranoia, and these guys are treated badly by coaches."

"The reality is for many of them it is a tremendous, tremendous grind."