Digging in at Dickinson
Greek shares passion for archaeology

By FORD TURNER
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That day two summers ago at the Acropolis in Greece, Dickinson College professor and archaeologist Leon Fitts realized he'd made a valuable find. Not in the 2,300-year-old ruin, but in a 23-year-old man.

He was Christoffis Maggidis, an up-and-coming Greek archaeologist with Ivy League credentials. He volunteered to show Fitts Dickinson students around, and he spoke with startling passion and knowledge of the historical treasures of his homeland.

"Watching him in action got Fitts thinking. "By the time he finished... I was already convinced I wanted this young man here," said Fitts, an archaeologist and chairman of Dickinson's Classical Studies Department.

Now, Maggidis is teaching at Dickinson and transforming the school's archaeology program.

Once a minor field of study, it has become an interdisciplinary major. Dickinson has supplied the first undergraduates ever to dig at the famous Greek excavation at Mycenae, where Maggidis assists the director.

The college is developing an archaeology lab and an online database on Mycenae. It has trained archaeology students with an indoors, simulated excavation pit — it novel approach in college circles.

"This gives us one of the leading programs in archaeology in America at the undergraduate level," said Neil Weissman.

As college dean, he interviewed Maggidis the year before he came to Carlisle.

"He was just head and shoulders above the others... There is no question that his familiarity with Greece, his history, his involvement with the academic community there, and his position at Mycenae were major pluses," Weissman said.

Maggidis grew up 300 miles north of Mycenae. His parents worked for the Greek government revenue agency.

It was in third grade, during a field trip to Macedonia, that the archaeology bug bit him.

"We saw the excavation ongoing. I was fascinated. At that point, I said I was going to be an archaeologist. At that point, it was a straight line. I never wanted to be anything else," he said.

At 17, he was the youngest archaeologist invited on a major Bronze Age dig at Archaes and Crete. At 30, he became the youngest member of the Greek Archaeology Society. His studies took him from the University of Athens to the University of Pennsylvania to Brown University to Harvard University.

Maggidis has since spent years investigating artifacts from the Espoion Tomos near Mycenae and making maps for a Harvard professor in the2nd Century BC. He is now working on an ancient Greek cemetery near Thessalonika.

"It was a challenge and a thrill," Weissman said. "We are extremely knowledgeable about everything he teaches. To combine that with passion for what he teaches, it is a great combination in a professor," she said.

Much of Maggidis' work at Dickinson has been made possible by a $1 million plus donation made by the family of a 1973 graduate. Maggidis is the first person to hold the position named for that graduate, the Christopher L. Roberts Chair in Archaeology.

Fitts said he knew the money was coming when he met Maggidis that day at the Acropolis two summers ago. "It was a confluence of the stars," he said. "...Christoffis just sort of fit like a hand in a glove."

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HISTORY: He gets students to dig it

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Actually a wall-sized container of mock ruins and artifacts buried in dirt, the so-called SFB was a big success. "It was very helpful for knowing what to do," Maggidis said.

Maggidis' teaching left a lasting impression.

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