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Featured Researcher | Michael Birdwell

TITLE

History Professor Wins Prestigious Research Award

INVESTIGATOR

PI: Michael Birdwell



FUNDING

Caplenor Faculty Research Award

PROJECT SUMMARY

"I am thankful that my peers found my ongoing research worthy of recognition," Birdwell said. "As someone in the humanities, competing against researchers in engineering and science, it is doubly fulfilling. The award is a validation of my commitment to research and publishing."

Birdwell started as an adjunct instructor at Tennessee Tech in 1996. In addition to teaching several history courses, Birdwell specializes in research on the history of the Warner brothers of Warner Bros. Studio, the life and legacy of Sgt. Alvin C. York, World War I, the Upper Cumberland region of Tennessee and Kentucky, and general historic preservation and public history."

"From the beginning of his association with the TTU faculty, Dr. Birdwell's research endeavors attracted significant attention," said former Caplenor Award recipient George Webb, professor emeritus of history. "Although his international reputation was established early, he continued to recognize the value of local and regional history."

Since coming to Tennessee Tech, Birdwell has worked to provide students with hands-on applied history experience through his establishment of a public history course and internship program for Tennessee Tech history majors. He said his work with the program helped him earn the College of Arts and Sciences Innovative Teaching Award in 2014.

"Dr. Birdwell has always taken his teaching responsibilities seriously and has consistently integrated the results of his research into his classes," Webb said. "His classes not only provide his students with the most recent information available on various topics, but also show these students the importance of scholarly research to effective teaching."

He has written and edited four books, including the Tennessee Library Association's 2015 best book about Tennessee history, "People of the Upper Cumberland: Achievements and Contradictions." He has published multiple scholarly articles, bibliographies, filmographies and encyclopedia entries. Birdwell has appeared on more than 20 local and national television programs for interviews about his research. His most recent appearance was the documentary "Over There and Over Here: Tennesseans and the Great War," which was broadcast this spring. He is a regular reviewer for professional and media organizations.

Birdwell has been awarded multiple grants for history education and research. Of those, the most notable is a Teaching American History grant from the U.S. Department of Education that totaled \$941,000.

"This was certainly the largest grant ever received by anyone in the Tennessee Department of History," said Jeffery Roberts, Department of History chairman. "The benefits -- to Tennessee Tech, the History Department and, most importantly, to elementary and high school teachers -- have been extensive."

He has spoken at 27 special invitation lectures, given 45 conference presentations and was co-recipient of the 2015 Outstanding Teaching Award for Tennessee Tech in addition to many other awards and honors. He worked internationally to conduct battlefield archaeology near Chatel-Chehery, France, where his team discovered more than 10,000 World War I era artifacts. Of his lectures, Birdwell says he is proudest of "'Include Me Out': Hollywood and the Holocaust," which he presented at Yad Vashem, the International Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem.

Birdwell serves as chairman of three statewide agencies, Tennessee Great War Commission, the Tennessee State Review Board for the National Register of Historic Places, and the Tennessee Preservation Trust. He is also the archivist and curator of the papers for Sgt. Alvin C. York.

The award was established in memory of Charles Donald Caplenor, former associate vice president for research and dean of instructional development. It recognizes outstanding research accomplishments by Tennessee Tech faculty.

Birdwell received his bachelor's and master's degrees from Tennessee Tech University and his doctorate from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

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