

Trip to Florence ... 'priceless'

Harding University public relations major Abby Kellett learns insightful professional lessons in Florence

By Elizabeth Davies

ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

While college students from across the country were flocking to spring break hot spots like Cancun and Fort Lauderdale, Loves Park's Abby Kellett had a different destination in mind.

The 21-year-old Harlem High School grad spent her spring break in Florence, Italy, reporting and photographing the sights and happenings around that world-renowned city. She was in Florence as one of 22 students from her college, Harding University in Searcy, Ark., to document the experience of students studying abroad.

For Kellett, a junior public relations major, the chance to put her academic lessons to work in the real world was exciting. She worked under the guidance of feature film director Jay Russell, who is known for directing "The Water Horse," "Ladder 49" and "Tuck Everlasting." He served as a mentor for the students as they told the stories of local residents and the city itself.

"In Florence, we would get up early, grab our gear, head out and cover a story a day on whatever we thought was interesting enough to publish through Harding's website," Kellett said. "We told the stories through multimedia outlets instead of just writing long feature stories, which made it much more challenging."

A highlight of the trip was meeting Italian chef Claudio Silvestri and the head of public relations for Italy's national soccer team.

"Getting to sit down with them and discuss the tricks of the trade was a priceless experience that I know I will never forget," she said.

For Kellett, who hopes one day to work in special events, the trip was a culmination of the work she loves to do.

"I live to find outlets for my creativeness, and (public relations) offers the opportunity to write, design, plan, photograph, research and do everything that I've always loved," she said. "At the end of the day, I want to be a professional communicator and all it entails."



PHOTO PROVIDED

Abby Kellett of Loves Park poses with Mario, the owner of Cafe Mario, in Scandicci, Italy. Kellett was in Italy as part of a study-abroad program through Harding University over spring break. **More photos from Kellett's trip on Page 10C**

In an e-mail interview, Kellett spoke about her experience and how she'll use it moving forward:

Question: Why did you want to go to Florence? What did you hope to learn there?

Answer: I had the life-changing experience of studying abroad in Harding's Florence program in the fall semester of '08 and had been dreaming of returning ever since I left. To me, it's the most beautiful city in the world, and learning to tell the stories of the events taking place in Italy is such a rare and exciting opportunity. I really looked forward to having the chance to do actual reporting on subjects I'm passionate about with tight deadlines.

Q: What did you enjoy most about the trip?

A: The feeling of being

About Abby Kellett

Age: 21

City: Loves Park

Family: Parents, Jim and Darla Kellett; brother, Keenan, 18.

Hobbies: Writing, editing and doing public relations for The Link, a college website, and The Bison, the college newspaper, along with freelance

photography and design.

On the Web

To read Kellett's stories from Florence, visit thelink.harding.edu, click on "World" at the top and scroll down the left side for her entries.

chosen out of so many of my talented peers made me want to produce even better work than I had before the trip. Working alongside the dean of the college of communications, my professors and adviser was kind of surreal, and being able to see the re-

sult of that in my portfolio is definitely my favorite part of the trip.

Q: What did you learn there, that you expect you will use in your future career?

A: I learned what is interesting to people. I became acutely aware of what makes

a good story and what makes it drag, and I attained a really firm grasp on the cliché "a picture is worth a thousand words," because it's so true. There are some scenes or emotions or events that are too breathtaking for words, which is something I'm not sure I understood before this trip.

Q: What were you surprised to learn?

A: A new perspective; I view everything differently. When I look around, I feel like I see things through photo frames, and when I listen to people tell me their stories I mentally note what aspects are worth retelling. Maybe that makes me somewhat of a nerd, but the trip really inspired me and brought out a creative side of myself I never knew existed.