

# ISU anthropology researchers make impact

In recent columns I have been discussing how faculty in research universities like Idaho State University are on a constant quest to discover and create new knowledge in their disciplines.

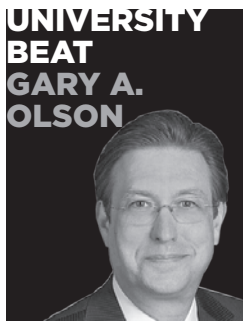
Take ISU's researchers in the department of anthropology. They are working worldwide to develop a better understanding of how other cultures work, and how we can learn from one another to develop a smarter, more culturally aware global society.

In the process, they are even making a difference in the communities where they work.

Deep in the jungles of Guatemala, for example, Richard Hansen, senior scientist in ISU's Institute for Mesoamerican Research, and his team of scientists and graduate students are discovering major archeological finds in the Mirador Basin, known by many scholars as the cradle of Mayan civilization.

This spring, researchers found a detailed series of panels made of carved and modeled lime plaster that lined a water collection system in El Mirador, one of the largest of all ancient Mayan cities in Mesoamerica.

The panels and water collection



tanks date to the Late Preclassic period, as early as 300 B.C. ISU student Joseph Craig Argyle has been investigating El Mirador's water collection systems under Hansen's direction and excavated the panels.

But discovery is not the only objective, nor is it the only accomplishment.

The project team is working with the Guatemalan government to help end the rampant deforestation, narcotics trafficking, poaching and looting in the area.

Many in both the government and private sector are taking note of the work in the Mirador Basin.

Because of his work in preserving the area, Hansen was named in 2008 the Environmentalist of the Year for Latin America by the Latin Trade Bravo Business Association, which is based in Miami.

Film star Mel Gibson also honored Hansen at the time, and has taken an active interest in the basin.

Far from El Mirador, anthropology faculty member Kate Reedy-Maschner is studying how gas and oil exploration off the Alaska Peninsula and Aleutian Islands could affect Alaska Native communities.

Reedy-Maschner and her team are working in the Aleut and Alutiiq villages of Port Heiden, Nelson La-

goon, False Pass and Akutan. They are studying the fishing and hunting needs of residents and what effects oil drilling could have on the communities.

Much closer to home, ISU language instructor Drusilla Gould and professor Chris Loether have created the nation's only Shoshoni language program. As many Native American languages struggle to survive, Gould is helping to keep her own native language alive, teaching it to others. Through the Shoshoni language program, Loether and Gould have created the first Shoshoni language dictionary and writing system.

They developed a curriculum now being used not only at ISU, but in elementary and secondary schools as well. Their work is helping keep an endangered language alive and serves as an example of how we might preserve other endangered languages.

With their work both in our communities and thousands of miles away, ISU students and faculty are bringing the world closer together and are demonstrating the positive impact that anthropological research is having, not only on our knowledge of other cultures but on our own cultures as well.

*Gary A. Olson is provost and vice president at Idaho State University.*