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# Zee Poerio

A passion for education and the classics guides an elementary-school teacher's promotion of numismatics.

**I** BELIEVE IN sharing the wealth," says Zee Poerio, a 3rd-grade teacher at St. Louise de Marillac School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. And this recent coin convert has made amazing strides toward her goal in a short time.

Winner of the 2004 Ancient Coins for Education (ACE) Harlan J. Berk Teacher Excellence Award, and invited to serve on the ACE board of directors and as ACE liaison for the Ancient Coin Collectors Guild Educational and Youth Task Force, the enthusiastic educator views numismatics as a wonderful teaching tool. "I am especially interested in the connections of 'Coins with Classics,'" she explains. "I enjoy showing students the influence of ancient coins on the coinage of today. I love the fact that coins can be used to teach art, history, language, mythology, math, creative writing and problem-solving skills. When you learn about the language, history, culture and art of ancient civilizations, it helps you to better understand your own."

Poerio considers herself a born collector of everything from puppets to vintage hats and hatpins. Currently, she's focusing on ancient coins. "I particularly like the Roman pieces," she notes. "I'm Italian and feel a kinship with them."

She received her first coin—an 1897 silver dollar—from her Uncle Rocco on the day she was baptized. Her father started a small collection of miscellaneous pieces and a proof set from her birth year. They sat in a drawer until about two years ago, when her interest in numismatics was ignited. "I learned there was a shortage of Latin teachers, so I decided to introduce the language in class," she explains. "I found ACE on an Internet search when I was looking for Latin inscriptions on coins . . . and, as they say, the rest is history."

The numismatic community's willingness to help has been overwhelming, Poerio notes. "The 'Ancient

Coin Museum' I was able to start with the help of ACE, the ANA, dealer Harlan J. Berk and numismatists across the country has really impacted me," she says. "The project has grown from a small display on the top of the desk in my classroom to a traveling exhibit, and it's become a model for five other 'museums' in the country. I could not have done this without help from ACE. English author Thomas Fuller's 17th-century maxim, 'If you have knowledge, let others light their candles at it,' applies here, and I'm grateful for the shared illumination."

Poerio's certification in art and interest in the classics (she's vice chair of the Excellence through Classics Board of the American Classical League) makes her a perfect ambassador for numismatics. She makes an event assembled on a shoestring look like

it had million-dollar funding, comments ACE Director Souza Scaife, also on the ACE board, adds, "Zee is incredibly imaginative and has boundless energy. She's exploding with ideas for a children's book about ancient coins and hopes to coordinate more opportunities for teachers to learn about the subject."

Poerio is one of those teachers whose own passion

takes a project far beyond its original concept. She lives what she teaches, and her students are fortunate for it, concludes Scaife. She's shown her "Ancient Coin Museum" exhibit locally and at educational seminars in Virginia and Ohio, and will take it to New Mexico this summer.

Through dedicated outreach like Poerio's, knowledge and love of numismatics will flourish and spread. She likes to quote famous Roman writer Cicero, "*Quod donum majus reipublicae offerre possumus, quam adulescentes docere et instruere?*" ("What greater and better gift can we offer the republic than to teach and to instruct our youth?").

—Cathy L. Clark

