

Potomac News 1/20/92



By Steve Davis-Potomac News

New Dominion teacher Charles Sweeney plans to take advantage of the school's location near the Connor House, Confederate headquarters during the Battle of First Manassas.

## Teacher at alternative school gives students historical view

By KIM ZUMMO  
of the Potomac News

In taking his six students to visit local Civil War sites, Charles Sweeney hopes his New Dominion School pupils will appreciate history and eventually come to regard the time they spend at the alternative school as a favorable experience.

Sweeney teaches a class of 15- and 16-year-olds — all of whom have spent time in court — at the school outside Manassas.

Some of the students have been transferred from Prince William County high schools because they could not function in regular classrooms. Others have been in juvenile detention facilities.

Sweeney's task is to "try to help the youngsters get back" to their high schools, he said.

"These kids, they're unique and they're smart," said Sweeney, 49. "They have different needs. They need a lot of individual attention. When you give it to them, they amaze you."

Sweeney's students spend the entire school day with him studying math, science, social

science, language arts and physical education.

The retired Marine colonel, a first-year teacher, takes a holistic approach to education.

His class recently finished Jack London's "The Call of the Wild." Reading the book was more than a lesson in literature. Sweeney was able to incorporate geography and math in the class's study.

Sweeney hopes to do the same this spring when the students study the role Manassas Junction played in the Civil War.

Using a \$300 grant from the Washington Post, Sweeney will purchase supplemental maps and textbooks and will take his class to the Manassas Museum and Manassas National Battlefield Park.

The students will not only get a

history lesson — they'll also learn about communication lines, geography and 19th-century culture.

"We would begin class by just going out and sitting behind the building," Sweeney said. "Then we can have a little talk about what's changed and what hasn't changed" since the Civil War.

New Dominion School was built adjacent to the Connor House overlooking a railroad line. The Connor House served as headquarters of Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston during part of the Battle of First Manassas in 1861.

Sweeney wants the five boys and one girl in his class to gain an appreciation for the ground the school was built on. "take pride that they're part of history."