

1958 GRAD RECEIVES AWARD

# Expert on Afghanistan honored by St. Francis

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Thomas Gouttierre urged a group of students from his alma mater, St. Francis de Sales High School, to develop a capacity for critical reasoning and analysis as it relates to understanding international events — particularly the conflict in Afghanistan.

That was one of several points about the country that the Maumee native emphasized during his classroom visits yesterday.

Mr. Gouttierre — a 1958 graduate of St. Francis and 1962 graduate of Bowling Green State University — is regarded as one of America's foremost authorities on Afghanistan, recognition he has gained

during 35 years of helping to educate people in Afghanistan.

He first moved to the country in 1965 as a volunteer for the U.S. Peace Corps.

"When I lived there, it was a wonderful place," he said, commenting on the hospitality of the people, the cultural richness, and the beauty of the landscape.

"Their mountains start where ours stop," he added.

Afghanistan's highest mountain peak towers nearly 23,000 feet above sea level.

Mr. Gouttierre lived and worked in the country for 10 years in the 1960s and '70s serving as a Fulbright fellow and executive director of the Fulbright Foundation, in addition to the Peace Corps. He also coached the Afghan national basketball



Thomas Gouttierre, a graduate of St. Francis de Sales High School, encourages students to gain a better understanding of international events in places such as Afghanistan. He has helped educate the people in Afghanistan for many years.

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team, posting a record of 165-6 during his tenure.

His passion for the country grew into academic study and he currently serves as the dean of international studies and programs, and the director of the Center for Afghanistan studies at the University of Nebraska.

He was in the area this week to receive

the St. Francis de Sales High School hall of fame's Golden Knight Award at a ceremony last night.

It's an award given biennially to graduates who have been successful in their careers or made significant impact on the community at large.

## Honored

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Mr. Gouttierre also agreed to speak to a few classes during his trip here.

In one class of world history students, he encouraged them to look beyond the news about conflict in the country to get a more complete picture of the situation.

"This country, at one time, was the richest in the transformation of ideas," he said of the

tribal society. "They are proud of their culture."

But years of civil war and an invasion by the Soviet Union led to a decline in carrying on that history and tradition. That is something that is commonly passed down to generations verbally, given the low literacy rate in the country.

It's estimated that just more than 28 percent of the Afghan population older than 15 can read and write, according to the World Fact Book distributed by the Central Intelligence Agency. And nearly 30 years of conflict

in the country have kept many Afghans from getting an education.

"I thought it was an honor having him speak to us. It gives us an understanding from his perspective," said Keith Hoody, 17, a junior at the school. "I paid more attention while he was speaking than I do in a regular class."

Mr. Gouttierre introduced the students to some words, as well as a song and a poem in Persian, an Indo-European language spoken in that part of the world. He even pointed out

a few English words that derive from the language, such as cummerbund, pajama, and khaki.

"I was surprised he was teaching us another language," Young Hoody said.

In an interview after speaking to a class, Mr. Gouttierre said that while there is much focus on the average Joes of this country — such as the now well-known Samuel "Joe the Plumber" Wurzelbacher of Springfield Township — the one "Joe" that is most important to the long-term security of the nation is the average "Joe" or "Yusef" Afghan.

Yusef is the naming equivalent to Joseph in the Qur'an, the holy scriptures of Islam.

He explained that many Afghans look favorably on are U.S. presence to help rebuild their country. But because of the widespread poverty and weak economy, the average Afghan — who is struggling financially — is most susceptible to extremist influence, which puts more focus on the afterlife than life on Earth.

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