

## AUBERGE DE JEUNESSE -- PRESS RELEASE

The Nebraska Chapter of the American Association of Teachers of French sponsored a unique immersion experience, *L'Auberge de Jeunesse*, over the weekend of February 26 & 27. Eighty-three students, 10 teachers and 4 volunteers from the Omaha-Lincoln area participated in the twenty-four hour event held at Camp Carol Joy Holling in Ashland, NE. During the entire twenty-four hours students were encouraged to speak French exclusively.

Organized by Omaha teachers Cris Fishback, Ralston HS and Mitzi Delman, Westside HS, the event was team-competitive in nature with the production of a music-inspired video created by each team as the ultimate competition.

Ten teams were created in advance using teacher feedback about their students' creative strengths and language abilities. The result was an even playing field and since teams were not formed by school-affiliation, participants had an opportunity to make new friends from across the state.

Teachers were pleased with how quickly the teams formed "camarderie." A sense of team identity emerged from the very start, as teammates worked together to design and create a team flag. This flag was judged later that day for team points and then used in *Capter le Drapeau* (Capture the Flag) Sunday morning.

The teams competed in two high-energy, fast-paced blocks or *tournois*, one on Saturday afternoon and another that evening. Each *tournoi* lasted over two hours, with teams competing in a round-robin in fun game activities, all requiring the use of French. Points were earned in such challenges as *Le Cri des Mots* (an adaptation of the popular board game, Outburst), *Charades*, a giant *Flyswatter Game*, *Dessine un monstre*, (Draw a Monster-blindfolded!) and *Les Bretzels des Mots* (Body Boggle with a French twist!).

Teams also met during two one-hour sessions to develop and rehearse their video concept, which was filmed and judged Saturday evening. The top point-earning videos were announced and viewed during closing ceremonies late Sunday morning, along with a slideshow highlighting the weekend, before prizes were awarded to the winning team.

To further motivate students to speak French throughout the weekend, personal points could be earned whenever a student was "caught" using the language. These personal points, called *bons points*, were redeemed for prizes.

French-inspired menus planned cooperatively by event organizers and the camp chef were served. Participants feasted on generous portions of cassoulet, croque-monsieur or coq-au-vin. The French patisseries, croissants and authentic baguettes baked on-site were a real treat! Adding to the ambiance of the evening meal were four *tables françaises*, where only French was spoken.

Evaluations submitted by students and teachers alike were glowing with many students reporting that this had been the most fun they had ever had at a school-sponsored event. Without exception, teachers reported that students returned to class on Monday enthusiastic about the experience and about French. Some students told stories of how they found themselves speaking French impulsively to their family members, friends and even pets upon their return home Sunday afternoon! All expressed regret at how quickly the program flew and said that they would absolutely attend a future Auberge if they had the chance.

Special thanks are extended to the participating NAATF teachers: Kara Heminger, Lincoln and Amanda Holbrook, Ann Johnson, Nikki McDonald, Sarah Percival, Michael Recker, Rebecca Rhoads, Katy Salzman of Omaha and all the students for their hard work and "esprit de corps" during the Auberge. This is the fifth time that such a program has been offered to students in Nebraska. For more information contact Cris Fishback: [cris\\_fishback@ralstonschools.org](mailto:cris_fishback@ralstonschools.org) or Mitzi Delman: [mdelman@westside66.org](mailto:mdelman@westside66.org)