

# PROMOTION IN MOTION

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## WHO SAYS WE CAN'T DO IT?

Lance Armstrong, coming back from cancer, defied naysayers and skeptics. He went on to accomplish a seemingly impossible feat: seven straight *Tour de France* victories. His inspirational, motivational video, "Who Says We Can't Do It?" could easily be the slogan of a team of French teachers in northeastern Ohio who accomplished their own small miracle.

French enrollment at Wadsworth High School had dropped to an all-time low in the late 1990s with only three sections of French at this Division I school. However, in the last eight years, Wadsworth City Schools has experienced a rebirth of its French program. Enrollment at the high school has quadrupled and there are currently two full-time French teachers. Advanced-level French classes have grown from one combined level III / IV class to three level III classes and a full level IV class in the last six years. In fact, this year there are as many sections of French III as Spanish III and more students enrolled in French IV than in Spanish IV! French Club currently has more than 110 enthusiastic members.

The change began with a new middle school exploratory teacher, Kathy Lewton, who became the salesperson and cheerleader for the French program. Next came the addition of Melissa Eaton, a first-year teacher at the high school with a ready smile and a gentle way with students. These two enthusiastic, energetic Francophiles awakened the beginning students to the fun and importance of studying the French language and the far-reaching Francophone culture in our world. With their encouragement, students began saying "Pourquoi pas?" to continuing their study of French. There was continuous growth in the program.

Finally, after having taught Spanish for many years in the district, Gretchen Petrie was able to return to teaching advanced French, creating her own curriculum for the upper levels instead of relying on antiquated textbooks. Mme Petrie hooks her students with high-interest thematic units packed with the cultural and visual appeal that today's students get excited about.

Level III students love the adventures of *Astérix* the proud, feisty Gaul, and his side-kicks. They enjoy reading authentic comic strip excerpts and watching a video to support and enhance what they have studied. Her unit on *Les Misérables* uncovers Hugo's classic tale of love and redemption.

These three teachers have become a team, each with her strengths and specialties. All three have studied and/or worked in France so culture is a strong underlying basis of the French program at Wadsworth.

For example, Kathy presents a toilet flushing series to her middle school students, complete with sketches, photos, and anecdotes. Gretchen teaches students how to rent an apartment in France based on her actual experience helping her daughter set up housekeeping in Montpellier. The French Club makes an annual trip to a local cooking school to prepare a French meal. Here the hungry audience is standing room only! *La Saint Nicolas* is always well attended as the students look forward to Melissa's storytelling and anecdotes from her recent year in Nancy. Educational student trips to France are scheduled on alternate years and offer a variety of regions to visit. Some students have the good fortune to travel to France twice during their high school careers.

Gretchen and Kathy have written articles and editorials for the Ohio Foreign Language Association newsletter *The Cardinal* and the local newspaper advocating language study and highlighting both "The World Speaks French" and "Discover Languages" campaigns as well as student activities. Kathy is a frequent presenter at local, state, and regional conferences. Her interest is in brain-compatible teaching strategies in the world language classroom.

In the last two years the team has branched out by starting a tri-county French teacher support group. Besides offering an opportunity to practice language skills together, fellow members offer support and network with one another to connect to special events and resources that ultimately enhance student learning and enthusiasm for their French studies. What a way to re-energize while learning! They have viewed French films, eaten in French restaurants, prepared meals and picnics *à la française*, enjoyed special exhibits at art museums, and shared meals with teachers visiting from France.

All three teachers love young adults, love teaching, and love their language. They continue to advocate for French, for language study in general, and for what's best for students.

For more information contact Gretchen [gpetrie@wadsworth.k12.oh.us], Melissa [meaton@wadsworth.k12.oh.us], or Kathy [klewton@wadsworth.k12.oh.us].

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