

PROMOTION IN MOTION

PROMOTING THE AATF AT THE STATE LEVEL

Let's be realistic! Not all French teachers belong to the AATF. Although many may have clicked on our Web site and know that we exist, they may not realize what we can offer them because they have never seen us "in action!" In these stressful times where teachers may face declining enrollments, program cuts, school boards nixing travel abroad, and non-reimbursed professional expenses, membership drives could fall flat. *Le Grand Concours*, National French Week, annual conventions, and summer scholarships may be selling points, but they are not trump cards. Nonmembers have to be recruited on a one-on-one basis where they actually can experience and appreciate the benefits of joining the AATF.

Collaboration is the word for the future! "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!" Seven years ago I began to coordinate a French immersion weekend for our state association (MaFLA). During the orientation, I casually asked how many of the participants were AATF members and found that over three-quarters were not. In fact, many had never heard of our organization. The next year, I asked our local AATF Chapter (Eastern Massachusetts) to contribute several hundred dollars to sponsor the entertainment for that same weekend. Beforehand, I had cleared this sponsorship with the MaFLA Board. In return for our sponsorship, I asked that the AATF be able to hand out membership and promotional materials, show the film *Le Français m'ouvre le monde*, and hold a brief informational session. Sponsorship brings with it certain quid pro quo conditions. Just look through the program of past national, regional, or state conferences, and you will see how many exhibitors are given sessions. Should they sponsor a breakfast in the exhibit hall or an evening event, watch where their booths are located. You certainly won't find them hidden in the back!

Since that time our Eastern Massachusetts Chapter has expanded its sponsorship to include a full-day pre-conference immersion and a two-day "French Strand" at our annual state convention. If it's French, it's AATF! Once upon a time we were given a session held concurrently with other language associations at a time when attendance was notably low. Even though the AATF session was open to nonmembers and we brought in speakers and gave out posters, we rarely saw new faces. In fact, often the die-hard AATF members were no-shows, preferring to fill up their shopping bags at the exhibit hall.

Now, we have no competition! Any teacher who goes to a French session at our state convention will find us working the rooms, distributing our materials. And, since many of the presenters are chapter officers, former AATF scholarship winners, or Commission members, they are anxious to talk about the AATF.

This year we are bringing over a pre-conference presenter from Paris (cost \$500) and a *chanteur* from Dunkerque for an AATF double session and several concerts throughout the state during National French Week (cost \$750). Our local chapter dues are an additional \$3.00 per member and with approximately 370 members, we are spending only \$150 from our treasury for this sponsorship. We also invite the French Cultural Service and all the other French associations in the area to present sessions.

In the past several years, the French Strand has taken on a life of its own and become almost like a mini-AATF convention. And the cost is minimal for our chapter. Here are a few pointers to help you get started:

- Be sure to have at least one AATF Representative on the Board of Directors of your state association;
- If your chapter is not charging additional dues, begin immediately;
- Contact the Program Chair of your state convention and offer to put together a French strand;

- Look through the program of recent national conferences and make a list of French presenters who live in your state. Check to make sure that they are AATF members. Contact them and ask them to present a session in the strand. They have already prepared it for AATF or ACTFL so you are not asking them to start from scratch;
- Drum up some raffle prizes or offer two free memberships (cost \$100) or one free registration to next year's annual convention.
- Order as many AATF membership cards and promotional freebies as possible from National Headquarters.
- Give an AATF session which includes National French Week and Small Grants and scholarship opportunities. Money talks!
- Schedule a swap shop for one session on the K-8 and 9-12 levels. Free handouts for Monday morning are always a hit.
- Advertise in your chapter and state newsletters and on-line.
- We may not have the members, but we have the know-how and the spirit! Make your next state convention an AATF happening!

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