

CÉLÉBRONS LE FRANÇAIS

The Tennessee AATF Chapter is grateful for the funds provided by the AATF Small Grants program which allowed us to co-sponsor an event titled "Célébrons le français." In 2004, "Célébrons le français" was held for the first time on a trial basis at St. Agnes Academy in Memphis to honor high school students in the Memphis area who had distinguished themselves in a variety of competitions throughout the school year. The tremendous success of this first attempt led to the decision to have "Célébrons le français" become an annual event. This is a unique opportunity to make visible the achievements of area high schools students who are studying French and to have their accomplishments acknowledged in a public manner. We also take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank those French teachers whose students have participated in the events celebrated.

Once again, the 2005 event was sponsored by the Tennessee Chapter in coordination with the *Alliance française de Memphis*. In particular, this event served as the venue for announcing the Memphis-area winners in the *Grand Concours*. The event offered the opportunity to have an awards ceremony at least on a local basis for the contest winners (an endeavor made difficult in our chapter due the size of the state). In addition, winners from the University of Memphis Foreign Language Fair, held just prior to this event, were invited to be acknowledged and to perform for the audience. Finally, the local winners of the *Alliance française Concours national* were announced as well. This year's event attracted more than 250 students, teachers, and (perhaps most importantly) parents to the auditorium at St. Agnes Academy and was followed by a reception.

The event began with the top three winners from each of the University of Memphis Language Fair French competitions performing (poetry recitation, original poetry writing, drama, solo, and group music). We also had winners in crafts, posters, projects, and greeting cards bring their winning entries for display after the event, so that attendees could view them during the reception. Participation is optional on the part of students, but we encourage the teachers to in turn encourage their students to participate, and more than half do.

This was followed by the announcement of the local winners of the *Grand Concours*. To make this more interesting, teachers were told beforehand only the names of the students who had placed at least top 10 in the state but not exactly where they had placed. When their names were an-

nounced, the students came on stage to receive a prize bag, which contained their National French Contest certificates, prizes, and donated items such as brochures and magazines. Most of the students who had been invited were able to attend, with many of them bringing their parents.

Following this, we announced the local winners of the *Alliance française Concours national* (top six in each high school division) for which the Memphis chapter buys the prizes. Fortunately, all the winners were able to attend this year, and we were also able to announce that one of the local students had placed third nationally in his division.

Finally, all of the teachers whose students competed in any of the competitions were called upon to come to the stage to be recognized. We also gave them a prize bag (which included their National French Contest results if they had students in the *Concours*).

Although we undoubtedly would have held this event even without the Small Grants award, this award allowed us to make the event more special by holding a reception afterwards and by purchasing gifts for the students, both of which would have been difficult otherwise. Expenses for the event included copying a program handed out to attendees, prize bags and small gifts, and refreshments for the reception. The *Alliance française* was able to pay for the prizes for their *Concours national* students, and most of the prizes for the National French Contest winners were obtained through funds from the Tennessee chapter's NFC account. The French consulate in Atlanta also donated several boxes of books, pens, mouse pads, videos, CDs, among other small prizes. We were also very fortunate and honored this year that Aurélien Lépine-Kouas, *Attaché culturel adjoint* in Atlanta, made a special trip to Memphis just to attend the event and give some words of welcome to the audience.

We have no doubt that this event will continue to be a popular tradition in Memphis. The teachers are grateful for this and say that their students and the latter's parents are as well. I have had calls from parents thanking me for organizing the event. This is particularly rewarding, as we all know that parents usually call only when there is a problem! Once again, thank you to the AATF for helping to make this event such a great success.

Will Thompson
The University of Memphis
[wjthmpsn@memphis.edu]