

LA CONVENTION FRANÇAISE—NEBRASKA

Creighton Prep High School in Omaha was host to a hugely successful *Convention française*, the state-wide French convention, on Saturday, March 29, 2014. The program was chaired by Omaha-Creighton Prep French teacher, Katy Salzman and Mitzi Friedman, Omaha-Westside High School (retired). It was attended by over 400 French students from 20 different middle schools and high schools in Omaha and Lincoln.

With the theme of “Le Français autour du monde,” this year’s convention offered competitive events in cuisine, dance video, drama, drawing and painting, instrumental music, photography, poetry recitation, projects, a quiz bowl, and vocal music. Students competing in the dance, drama, and music categories submitted a video of their performance in advance for judging. Cuisine entries were judged by a panel of French teacher “foodies,” including a local *restaurateur français*. *Une galerie* showcased the visual arts entries.

In addition to these pre-registered competitive events, during five 40-minute sessions, students took part in activities of their choosing. There was something for everyone: giant flyswatter games, spelling bees, cultural trivia rounds, Jenga games, and “mosh pit” games (all with French prompts.) In addition, participants had the opportunity to learn “street French” from a college-aged native speaker, practice singing diction with a *chanteuse*, play mini-volleyball and *pétanque*, run a waiter’s race, create drawings or bracelets, speak extemporaneously with a native speaker, compete in eating *mousse au chocolat* (blind-folded!), or try their speed on an obstacle course whose final *étape* was a giant inflatable.

As at past conventions, the food offerings were *un grand succès*. Breakfast and lunch selections were available for purchase at a buffet. In line with the “Autour du monde” theme, students could pick from a diverse Francophone menu that included croissants and *chocolat chaud* for breakfast and jambalaya, *poutine*, and couscous for lunch. Croissant sandwiches *au jambon/fromage* were on hand for the less adventuresome. Dessert choices included *éclairs*, *madeleines*, or *petits moelleux au chocolat à la glace*. Especially popular was *un bar tahitien de Gauguin* (complete with a limbo area!) that sold tropical beverages and ices throughout the morning. There was also a “photo op” stop at a Parisian café scene and students could shop at a boutique for souvenirs and *bonbons*. New this year was a Twitter

feed made visible on a large screen and students enjoyed posting their photos and comments throughout the event.

Upon arrival, each student received *un billet d’avion* with a schedule and a building map. To regulate participation in the most popular events, students needed to show *une carte d’embarquement* which they received from their teacher during morning registration. Lunch times were assigned by school during three of the five sessions to help balance the numbers at *le buffet*. To encourage students to participate in as many venues as possible, students earned a visa stamp in their *billet* for the activities they attended. For every three visas, he or she could enter a drawing for terrific door prizes. The event was capped off by an awards ceremony featuring the winning video submissions and the distribution of ribbons and prizes. A music/dance performance by a choir from Burundi was a culminating treat.

Started some 50 years ago, the French Convention relies upon the cooperation and contribution of attending teachers and parent and student volunteers. It was also made possible due to the generous support of the *Alliance française d’Omaha*, a Small Grant from the AATF, and the sponsorship of the Nebraska AATF Chapter.

La Convention française provided students the opportunity to compete and have fun while celebrating their study of French. Participants wished the day would have lasted longer and on Monday bragged to their classmates how amazing it was! While such programs require a tremendous amount of planning and organization, the payoff is immense. Wonderful memories energize students and teachers alike and everyone looks forward to continue the tradition in 2016

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