

## NOTES FROM A FUTURE LEADERS FELLOW

Leadership, collegiality, and friendship are the keywords that define my experience in the AATF Future Leaders Fellows Program, which met just prior to the 2015 *Congrès* in Saguenay, Quebec. As one of nine participants nominated and accepted in the program, I spent the conference week immersed in the strong network of AATF leadership at the national, regional, and chapter levels.

My journey to the Fellows Program was unconventional, having only been a member of my Chicago area chapter for two years. In many ways, however, my professional career has evolved with the AATF. I first joined the AATF while in graduate school, and, at that time, my understanding of the organization was primarily from a research perspective, not yet aware of the association's other

and foremost, as Future Leaders we listened—to each other, to commission heads, and to AATF officers. We learned from each other, supported each other, brainstormed, and problem solved. Practices that one chapter may take for granted, such as strong, active membership, may be a significant issue for another chapter. As Fellows, we learned about the AATF's strong legacy, current challenges, and goals for the future. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, we learned how to lead. As our program leader Janel Lafond-Paquin ♣ showed us through her own example, leadership is about people and building relationships, trust, and following through. Flexibility was also Janel's keyword, reminding us of the need for leaders with strong organizational skills who also have the adapt-

As Future Leader Fellows, we came from a variety of backgrounds and were as diverse in geographical regions as we were in experience and expertise. This diversity reflects well today's AATF, an inclusive professional organization that is applicable for any teacher of French, regardless of level, experience, or geographic zone. Even though as Fellows, we now find ourselves spread out throughout the country, our conversations with each other and with the AATF have continued, locally, regionally and nationally.

My work with the AATF has shaped the focus and direction of my service, teaching, and research. As a Future Leader and in the spirit of true collaboration and mutual exchange, I would like to provide as much to the Association as it has provided to me. As an educator,

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vast resources. In 2012, shortly after having obtained my Ph.D. and accepted a lectureship at a small private college, I attended my first AATF convention in Chicago as an observer; in many ways, the experience at the convention shaped my teaching practices and methodology in the year that followed. While at the convention, I felt empowered by the strong network of peers and their expertise in their subjects of specialization and came away from Chicago with a new sense of the direction that my newly-created courses would take. In 2013, I accepted a tenure-track position directing the French program at a Chicago area liberal arts college where I was immediately welcomed into the local AATF chapter during their fall program. I was subsequently elected to the Chapter's Executive Council where for the past year I have served on the Program Committee and Editorial Committee for the chapter newsletter; I am also actively involved with advocacy and promotion as well as the chapter's *Concours Oral* (hosted at my institution), the High School Immersion Day, and have presented and moderated sessions at AATF conventions. It was with the strong support of my chapter that I was accepted into the Future Leaders program in Saguenay.

Many of my colleagues have asked me about the experience. How did we spend our week? Was it useful? Did the experience meet my expectations? First

ability to learn from others. Part of the Fellows program was also spent networking with AATF officers. Leadership, as we learned, also takes the form of mentoring colleagues and creating occasions for informal collaboration through social and cultural events.

Finally, as Future Leaders we were provided with the opportunity to give back to the AATF, designing individual projects to take back to our chapters. Our projects were to be modest in nature, thereby being feasible, yet destined to make a difference and reaching as many French teachers as possible. In project selection, many of us saw the importance of social networking as a means of increasing the AATF's visibility in our regions. My own project involves promoting the continued study of French in higher education through both programming specifically for college students, such as an Immersion Day, but also the creation of material for high school teachers to help them better promote French study at the college level. How can middle school and high school teachers help us as college faculty? Shortly after returning to Chicago, I met with our chapter president Martha Behlow ♣, and in an intense work session, we drafted several new initiatives: a video promotion contest, informational material for teachers and parents, and a fall program for members with workshops designed to show off Saguenay.

I have come to understand the importance of strong relationships between K-12 and higher education in the active promotion and advocacy of French. The AATF is an important force for creating a community of French speakers whose bonds through networks of friendship bolster the morale of those who inspire the future of French in North America. Inspiring and strengthening the capacities and qualities of AATF Future Leaders not only strengthens the organization, but also strengthens individual French programs, thereby, step by step, securing the future of French in North America.

Rebecca E. Léal  
Chicago/Northern Illinois Chapter  
Elmhurst College  
[rebecca.lead@elmhurst.edu]