ACTFL Executive Director Bret Lovejoy celebrates the Year of Languages with Mia Landrum’s third grade students at Waynewood Elementary School in Alexandria, Virginia, by reading them a story about the United Nations.

Students from the National Spanish Honor Society of Carter Riverside High School in Fort Worth, Texas, show their Year of Languages colors for the Fort Worth Livestock Exposition and Rodeo. They are joined by Carrie Harrington, Foreign Language Supervisor for Fort Worth Schools and member of the Year of Languages Working Committee.

Kathy Olson and her students from St. Paul Academy and Summit School participate in a rally at the Minnesota State Capitol in celebration of the Year of Languages. This effort helped to alert the state legislature about the importance of “starting early and staying long” in language education programs.

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McDougal Littell is dedicated to providing the educational solutions that help teachers and students succeed. Each of our World Languages programs offers teachers a wide variety of educational tools. In addition, we offer consultant support to help customize our programs to your school. Just call us at 800-323-5435 to arrange for special consultant support. A McDougal Littell representative will be glad to answer your questions and provide the information and resources needed.

You can also email questions to:
In the domain of language education, 2005 will long be remembered as a landmark for us all. The United States Senate and House of Representatives both declared 2005 The Year of Languages. This initiative has been spearheaded and guided by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). 2005: The Year of Languages® has become one of ACTFL’s most important and memorable initiatives. The purpose of this endeavor has been to focus America’s attention on the academic, social, and economic benefits of studying other languages and cultures. The initiative has also sought to positively influence K-16 language programs nationwide. The overarching goal of 2005: The Year of Languages® has been to advance the concept that every American should develop proficiency not only in English, but also in other languages as well.

What is 2005: The Year of Languages?

The Year of Languages has been an opportunity for us as language educators and as a society to celebrate, educate and communicate the power of language learning. ACTFL and its members and member organizations have been working diligently to encourage the public that it is important to have a strong knowledge of not only English, but also of other languages and their cultures. How have we gone about celebrating, educating, and communicating the power of language learning?
Celebrate
Our communities and schools already had a number of pre-existing events that highlight the multicultural fabric of our society. The goal has been to take those existing events and combine them with publicity regarding The Year of Languages. Also, some states and communities have created new events in honor of The Year of Languages that have focused on the importance of language learning. On The Year of Languages Web site, www.yearoflanguages.org, the monthly ACTFL sponsored events are described in the “Monthly Events” section. Other national, regional, state, and local events are shared at the “Bulletin Board” section of the Web site. Finally, a number of the events are highlighted in the “Picture of the Week” section.

Educate
Through local and national events as well as a coordinated media campaign, a goal has been to educate students, parents, and the public in general about the benefits gained from studying and learning other languages. The research conducted in the recent past reports more and more compelling benefits of learning other languages. What our research also shows us is that we must begin language learning early and continue with a long, articulated sequence. Language learning should begin at the preschool age and continue through college and beyond. Our mission during The Year of Languages has been to transmit this message in an effective way to the general public.

Communicate
ACTFL’s goal has been to communicate the importance of language learning through a variety of media. ACTFL created a series of public service announcements that have appeared nationwide on television as well as in newspapers and on the radio. Also, a large number of articles written on language learning topics have appeared in newspapers across the country. Additionally, members of ACTFL have participated on National Public Radio shows across the country extolling the virtues of and need to learn languages in addition to English. Yet another means of communicating our message has been through local and state Year of Languages proclamations issued by government officials. Another popular means of communicating the importance of language learning have been “Language Pop Quizzes” that have occurred throughout the country. These language “ambushes” have had students and teachers stop people on the street and ask “What time is it?” in a wide variety of world languages. The results of the pop quiz are less important than the media coverage of the event. At the ACTFL 2004 convention in Chicago, the pop quiz on the downtown streets appeared on the nightly news and in the local newspapers. Other locales in the United States had similar coverage as well, again, raising the awareness of the need of world language learning in our country. The Year of Languages has encouraged everyone with a stake in the future of language and culture programs to step up and speak up on behalf of language learning.

How Was the Initiative Created?
2005: The Year of Languages® was modeled on the highly successful European Union Year of Languages that took place in 2001. The initiative has had a Working Committee co-chaired by Martha Abbott and Christine Brown, as well as an Honorary Committee comprising well-known American and international members. The members of these committees can be found at www.yearoflanguages.org.

Accomplishments of the Initiative
The need for an ambitious effort to promote the value of language learning has been clear to ACTFL and our profession for a long time. Such learning offers social, cultural, academic and workplace benefits that serve students all their lives. It has been a goal to have American businesses and the federal government support this initiative because of their growing demand for multilingual employees at home and abroad. We know that the study of languages and literature endow language learners with cognitive, analytical, and communication skills that carry over into many other areas and will deliver valuable dividends to the businesses and organizations for which they work. The Year of Languages initiative marks the first step in laying the foundation for the future of world language education in the United States. To that end, the focus of The Year of Languages’ efforts has been in the following areas:

∑ Launching a media campaign with the goal of garnering sustained attention and public awareness for years to come
∑ Promoting and participating in the development of a national policy on foreign language education, one that raises the visibility
and importance of language learning
∑ Encouraging and supporting research on all aspects of language learning
∑ Establishing a national foundation for language education innovation, giving scholarships for those seeking to be language educators, and to provide a forum for sharing important programs and ideas
∑ Promoting and participating in curriculum change through collaboration between national, state, and local educators as well as with government leaders
∑ Building professional unity on national language issues, bringing together the various constituencies in language education, and encouraging collaborative advocacy

Promotional kits containing in-school special event suggestions, prototypes for proclamations for local governments to officially recognize the celebration, and sample press releases for local media promotion have been available on the www.yearoflanguages.org Web site. ACTFL has also offered a variety of items and brochures to distribute to students and parents promoting the value of language learning.

Monthly Foci

For each month of 2005: The Year of Languages®, there has been a designated theme that has helped to organize and coordinate the effort. These themes were meant to go along with already existing events that schools and communities have celebrated. All of these events highlight in the most positive of ways the joys of multiculturalism and multilingualism. Additionally, the themes were devised to assist us in initiating new events that would bring attention to language learning. The suggested monthly foci have been:

January  Language Policy
February  International Engagement
March    Connecting Languages to Other Areas
April    Higher Education
May      Language Advocacy
June     Adult Learning and Language Usage
July     Languages and Communities
August   Parents
September Heritage Languages
October  Early Language Learning
November Celebrating accomplishments & Looking Ahead

December  Culture
Each national monthly event took place in a different location across the country. For example, one of the 12 monthly ACTFL national events occurred in North Carolina in January. A National Language Policy Summit took place in Chapel Hill, North Carolina at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. As the 2005 kick-off event, it was groundbreaking for a number of reasons. First, the Summit resulted in a white paper that proposes a plan of action for our country in terms of language learning and education as well as ties with the business and government communities. You can read the paper at www.actfl.org.

Another reason to consider this event groundbreaking is the fact that this was ACTFL’s first foray into videoconferencing. Thirty-five participants were on site in Chapel Hill, while thousands participated worldwide. There were 53 remote video conference sites in the United States; most of the sites had multiple participants. Additionally, the video conference was broadcast (streamed) via the Internet. During the 1.5 day Summit, there were nearly 2,200 webcast requests. This inclusive means of program delivery holds great promise for our profession in the years to come.

Another notable event was ACTFL’s opening of NASDAQ on August 29, 2005. Along with the ceremonial ringing of the bell of our largest stock market was the thrill of seeing ACTFL’s public service announcement played on the seven-story Times Square electronic display tower. The response for the event has been phenomenal, giving ACTFL and our profession the positive exposure that we deserve.

Another benefit of 2005: The Year of Languages®

Also gratifying during The Year of Languages has been the evolution of the Teacher of the Year award, a new ACTFL award sponsored by a generous contribution from McDougal Littell. This award will recognize an outstanding K–12 world language educator. Each region submits a candidate whose dossier is then reviewed by a panel of expert world language educators. This award will bring additional awareness nationally to the wonderful work that is accomplished in our schools.
Next steps

One year is not enough time to raise American awareness. We have only begun our enormous task of making sure that our citizenry is competent in English along with other world languages. Hence, ACTFL will unveil at the ACTFL 2005 convention in Baltimore a sustained initiative, Discover Languages™. We all will benefit by the success of this public awareness campaign. ACTFL will look to us all to roll up our sleeves for this long term commitment to language learning. Even though we have much work to accomplish to realize our vision of languages for all, resonating is what the child at the end of ACTFL’s Public Service Announcement video says: “It isn’t hard!”

Conclusions

The beauty of 2005: The Year of Languages® is that there have been events taking place not only nationally but also locally all across the nation that have been bringing attention to the importance of learning languages and learning about their cultures. Many of these events have been a part of the fabric of schools and communities for years; others are special celebrations expressly for the 2005: The Year of Languages®. The richness of diversity and the exuberance of the organizers and participants have been heartwarming and rewarding.

An overarching goal of 2005: The Year of Languages® was to create a sustained effort that would carry well beyond the twelve months of the initiative. The initiative has been helping educators across the country to raise awareness with all sectors of the population regarding the importance of language learning in the United States.

The success and long-term impact of 2005: The Year of Languages® campaign will rely heavily on the continued support and involvement of local foreign language teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators. These educators are on the front lines and have ready access to the students, parents, and members of the broader community whom this effort is designed to reach.

There are also substantial benefits that await members of the broader community. All Americans can experience life-long learning not only through language study programs, but from interacting with the many diverse populations in our community whose backgrounds and cultures have roots throughout the world.

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