David McAlpine, professor of Spanish and Second Language Education at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and ACTFL president-elect, was interviewed by KATV Channel 7, the statewide ABC television affiliate in Little Rock, AR, for a February 25 piece titled, “Benefits of Bilingual Babies.”

The item was hosted by two of the station’s correspondents, Christina Muñoz and Heather Crawford, both of whom are currently teaching their toddlers Spanish in addition to English. They note many proven benefits of being bilingual, including delaying the onset of Alzheimer’s.

Besides giving a personal look at how raising bilingual children was working for the families of Muñoz and Crawford, the piece presents an overall look at language learning. McAlpine is included as a language learning expert and educator and he makes several important points about the necessity of early language learning and the need for a greater commitment to language education by our school systems.

McAlpine says that these families are right to focus on teaching their children as young as possible. “It’s the right time,” he says. “It’s perfect to have the kids at age two because that is the time when their brains are like a sponge and they’ll take in anything you give them.”

While he notes that you can learn a language at any age, he also says that ideally it is best to start before the age of six.

“If you think about our school systems in the United States, they say, ‘Well, take your two years of required language in tenth grade when you’re 14 or 15 years old. Don’t even take it in your senior year right before you go off to college.’ So we have a system that is not built for making bilingual students,” says McAlpine.

He also points out that studies have shown speaking more than one language has proven benefits. “Research shows that they are not disadvantaged one bit, in fact these kids usually surpass on SAT scores compared to other kids.”

The piece addresses the fear some parents have that there can be a delay in first language acquisition among bilingual children, noting that—with the two toddlers highlighted—both had already caught up to their peers in terms of language skills. The two correspondents express their feelings that the benefits of raising bilingual babies strongly outweigh any potential negatives.

Check out the video on the KATV Channel 7 station by going to the link presented on the ACTFL website. Click on “See It in The Language Educator?” at www.actfl.org.

EDITOR’S NOTE: We are always excited to highlight different ways language educators have used the media to communicate the benefits of language learning to the greater public. Here, we share a number of occasions during February and March 2011 that ACTFL members, leaders, and supporters embraced their roles as language advocates—with great success!

ACTFL President-Elect Interviewed by ABC Affiliate

McAlpine spoke of the benefits of language learning on KATV Channel 7.
ACTFL Teacher of the Year Writes Op-Ed

2011 ACTFL National Language Teacher of the Year Clarissa Adams Fletcher was a guest columnist in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution on February 28, with an opinion piece appearing both in print and online. This op-ed column entitled, “Study a Language, Discover a World,” makes the case that future U.S. competitiveness depends on creating a globally competent workforce.

“Exactly what does that mean?” asks Adams Fletcher. “It means people who are open to and aware of a myriad of cultures. This also includes the study of at least one language in addition to English.”

She notes that the United States has had “a love-hate relationship with the study of languages” and that it is now time to seriously address this issue—at the national and state level. “If Georgia is serious about educating its youth for the 21st century, then we must heed the words of U.S. Sen. J. William Fulbright, who, 50 years ago, stated, ‘Our linguistic and cultural myopia is losing us friends, business and respect in the world.’”

In order to spur economic recovery and to attract international business in the state, “we must create an educational system that produces a workforce ready and able to face the challenges of this century,” says Adams Fletcher.

students may never study, live or work abroad, the need for people who can communicate in languages other than English continues to grow. Moreover, the demographics of the United States have changed, and to remain competitive, we must have students who are able to interact in a variety of situations.”

Read the full editorial online by going to the link presented on the ACTFL website. Click on “See It in The Language Educator?” at www.actfl.org.

Marathon Webcast Makes the News—and Perhaps the Record Books

For the second year in a row during Discover Languages Month, Nicole Naditz, French teacher at Bella Vista High School in Fair Oaks, CA, held a 24-hour marathon live webcast about the benefits of language study. Her students conducted live interviews with numerous dignitaries and featured other exciting programming beginning at 8:30 a.m. on Tuesday, February 22 and continuing until the next day. Among those interviewed were ACTFL National Language Teacher of the Year Clarissa Adams Fletcher, Dr. Ruby Rouse of the University of Phoenix Research Institute, Oscar Lanza and Fatima Rodriguez from the Kaiser Permanente Diversity Program Office, Nancy Rhodes of the Center for Applied Linguistics, and Mary Risner of the Network of Business Language Educators.

In addition to Bella Vista, pre-recorded footage and additional volunteers came from Natomas High School and Mira Loma High School. The webcast required four computers, three video cameras; a full ream of paper for the anchor scripts, interview questions and guides for the camera and computer operators; and a staff of about 30 student volunteers working on and off camera.

Naditz says the interview with Rouse was particularly interesting since she shared the results of a study done by her institute showing a discrepancy between the need for languages in business as perceived by the employers surveyed and the likelihood that employees are arriving with those language skills.

“The survey appeared in The Wall Street Journal in January, and the results show that world languages are a career skill that is in high demand by employers and the demand for language proficiency is expected to increase,” says Naditz. “Less encouraging were the results

Students conduct interviews and take part in the technical production of the webcast.
of the employee survey, which showed that employees are not likely to arrive with those skills, nor do they intend to learn . . . even if more money is offered in their salaries!”

Naditz believes that a challenge for language advocates is to get the word out regarding what employers want and need, and to help change the employee mindset about learning languages to increase their effectiveness in their jobs.

All videos from the webcast can be viewed by going to the link presented on the ACTFL website. Click on “See It in The Language Educator?” at www.actfl.org. Naditz says there were also some good comments on the “wallwisher” website made for the event. The prompt was “Where have languages taken you?” and most of the comments were added during the webcast.

The event was covered by local CBS affiliate, KMAX 31 in Sacramento, on both Tuesday and Wednesday morning in a segment entitled “Going for a Record.” The record mentioned on TV is none other than a Guinness World Record for “longest, live, scripted webcast,”—a brand new category for which Naditz and her students have diligently prepared evidence in order to prove their eligibility. Eight individuals served as witnesses and documented the entire webcast event for Guinness World Records.

“The level of detail in their work was incredible!” notes Naditz. She said that the next step was to compile and submit all of the evidence to Guinness, including creating a “highlights” DVD from the video footage.

Not only was getting the local television coverage a great way to spread the word about the importance of language learning, but getting an official Guinness World Record for the webcast would be even better. Stay tuned to see if this effort makes it into the record books!

Video Podcast Contest Finalists and Winners Recognized

Students recognized in Suffolk County, NY, as podcast contest finalists.

The ACTFL National Student Video Podcast, now in its fourth year, has been a very successful event for language advocacy and this year was no exception. On p. 24 in “Inside ACTFL” we list and congratulate the 2011 winners of the contest at the elementary, middle school,
high school, and postsecondary levels. The podcasts are judged on the basis of content, creativity, execution, and effect. To view the winning student video podcasts for 2011, as well as the previous winners from the last three years, visit www.actflvideocontest.org.

A number of schools and districts also recognized the finalists and winners, thus further spreading our message at the local level. In one instance, the Board of Education and Suffolk County, NY, recognized three finalists from Half Hollow Hills High School West at their February 7 Board of Education Meeting. The photo was also placed on the school district’s website.

Pittsburgh Public Schools (PA) also congratulated Keri Cox, winner of the Elementary School category, on their website.

Check out links to these websites on the ACTFL website. Click on “See It in The Language Educator?” at www.actfl.org.

ACTFL Board Member Honored, Featured in Article

After being named Foreign Language Teacher of the Year by the South Carolina Foreign Language Teachers Association, Lynn Fulton-Archer of Rock Hill, SC, was featured in an article in The Herald Online entitled “Celebrated Rock Hill Teacher Advocates Bilingualism for All.”

Fulton-Archer, also a member of the ACTFL Board of Directors, responded to a number of questions about language learning. When asked, “Is there evidence that learning a foreign language directly affects student achievement?” she responded: “There is. There are decades of research, some of it conducted within the past few years, that document the benefits of learning a world language, particularly when learning another language starts at an early age. Students who learn another language develop creative inquiry and critical thinking skills, are better at solving complex problems, show improvement in the verbal and nonverbal skills that enhance overall performance, and perform as well as, or better than, their monolingual peers on standardized testing.”

Other questions asked were specifically about South Carolina—whether the state puts enough emphasis on foreign language instruction and how the state could improve this. Fulton-Archer suggested that South Carolina should consider having all students graduating from high school do so with a specific level of proficiency in both English and another language. “To accomplish this,” she said, “the state needs to support long sequences of world language instruction for every child that begin in elementary school and continue through 12th grade, assist schools with the implementation of immersion programs that allow students to gain proficiency more quickly by spending at least 50 percent of the school day learning content in a second language, and form strong partnerships with other states where world language learning has been deemed a priority.”

To read more of the article, find the link at the ACTFL website. Click on “See It in The Language Educator?” at www.actfl.org.

Language Supporter Makes the Case in The Huffington Post

Stacie Nevadomski Berdan, an author and expert in women’s careers, who has previously been featured in a Q&A interview in The Language Educator (August 2010), recently wrote a piece for The Huffington Post website where she asserted that proposed cuts to the Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) were a direct threat to the future of American children.

In “Stop the Madness! Call Your Members of Congress Today,” Berdan implored readers to contact members of the U.S. Congress to stop “cutting programs that help make our kids more competitive.”

Berdan noted that “the stakes for our children are high, and rising. Americans must fight for the need to keep foreign language in the budget as a critical component to our children's success. Knowledge and appreciation for another language and culture will help our children grow up ready for a complex and multi-cultural global economy. If we are to continue to prosper as a country, our children must become global citizens: open-minded, bilingual kids ready to see global interconnectedness as both opportunity and welcome challenge. Learning a second language is an integral part of this cross-cultural sophistication.”

To read more of the article, find the link at the ACTFL website. Click on “See It in The Language Educator?” at www.actfl.org. Also, learn more about the threats to FLAP grants in “Legislative Look” on p. 57.

Language Advocacy—It’s Everybody’s Business

It’s a point that bears repeating: It is up to each and every individual in the language education profession to serve as an advocate for language learning in their community and to become a spokesperson for the continuation and expansion of language programs.

Thinking that someone else will take care of spreading the message and that all you have to do is to focus on the classroom can result in administrators and legislators who do not understand the necessity of languages as a core subject, and it also can mean an apathetic general public without parents and community leaders willing to fight for language programs. The unfortunate result can be finding out one day that there is no longer a language classroom on which to focus!

This may be a harsh truth, but in these days of economic hardship and competing priorities, it is one that we must all face head-on.

Fortunately, being a language advocate does not have to be a difficult task. ACTFL offers many resources for language advocacy online that are easily accessible and immediately useful. Simply go to the ACTFL website at www.actfl.org and click on “Membership” → “Advocacy.”

Join us in spreading the word—and don’t forget to let ACTFL know about your advocacy and public relations triumphs! We want to keep everyone informed of all the great ideas and efforts out there.