

# Arkansas Geographica

Newsletter of the Arkansas Geographic Alliance Spring 2009



## Inside this Issue:

- Coordinator's Column

## Coordinator's Column

This *Newsletter* will be shorter than previous issues. The intent of this *Newsletter* is to provide 1) an overview of Alliance activities since January 1, 2009, 2) a glimpse into the future, and 3) other important items.

### Alliance Activities

In February of each year, the National Geographic Society hosts the annual meeting of Alliance coordinators. Normally these meetings are two days long, but because of pending changes in the direction of the Alliance Network, NGS asked us to come for three days. The first evening Daniel Edelson, Vice President for Education and Children's Programs at NGS, presented his vision (more below) of geography education for the next 15 years. He stated that it was the goal of the Alliance Network to achieve an 80% geographic literacy rate by 2025 among high school graduates. The next two days were devoted to discussions regarding elements of what has come to be called Geo-literacy 2025. Geo-literacy 2025 includes a major emphasis on an education reform movement that will place geography in its rightful place in the K – 12 curricula (more below).

On April 2, 2009, the Arkansas Geographic Alliance Executive Board and the Teacher Consultant Board of Advisors held their spring meeting. At this meeting, the essential elements of the Geo-literacy 2025 plan was presented and discussed. They also reviewed the Alliance budget. It was noted that because of the pending change related to Geo-literacy 2025, less money from NGS would be available to the Alliance. It was recommended that some activities scheduled for 2009 be cancelled in order to ensure the Alliance had sufficient funds to operate in 2010. Events cancelled were a Teacher Consultant Fall Retreat and the Fall Conference of the Alliance. Money that has gone to support travel to the National Conference on Geography Education was also withdrawn. Additionally, there will be no support for Geography Action and no funds for the support of MyWonderfulWorld.org will be available.

The annual State Geographic Bee was held on the campus of the University of Central Arkansas in Conway on April 3, 2009. Julie Hill is the local coordinator of that event. She was assisted by Jeff Allender who made arrangements at UCA. Many other teachers helped prepare bags for each of the 100 student participants. They also moderated, scored, and timed the preliminary rounds. While the preliminary rounds were underway, LeAnn Sears conducted a workshop for parents and Susan Jeffries conducted a workshop for teachers. The Final and Championship rounds were as exciting as usual.

The Spring Conference of the Alliance was held at UCA on April 4, 2009. About 35 people attended. Sherry Tipps-Holder gave a presentation on her funded experience in Saudi Arabia. Dr. John Dixon, geography professor at the University of Arkansas, gave a presentation on climate. And, Dr. Jeff Allender, geography professor at UCA, gave a presentation on China. The luncheon speaker was Dr. Michael Yoder, geography professor at UCA.



## Arkansas Geographic Alliance

University of Central Arkansas  
201 Donaghey Avenue  
301 Irby Hall  
Conway, Arkansas 72035

Phone: 501-450-5636  
Fax: 501-852-2926

E-mail: [brooksg@uca.edu](mailto:brooksg@uca.edu)  
Web: <http://www.arkansasgeographicalliance.com>

## The Future

On June 1 – 2, 2009, a workshop focusing on the Ouachita Mountains will be held at the lodge at Lake DeGray. This two-day workshop has been organized by Dr. Paul Nagel, Alliance Coordinator for the State of Louisiana. Teachers from Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and Louisiana will attend. The first day will be devoted to presentations about the weather, climate, and landforms of the Ouachitas Mountains whereas the second day will consist of a field trip along Highway 7 from Caddo Valley to Russellville. Paula Lawrence and Martha Stroud will present lesson plans to the participants attending this workshop.

Dr. Jeff Allender and the two Missouri Geographic Alliance coordinators have been planning a 10-day Ozark Plateau Institute. This institute will run from June 21 through July 1, 2009. As the name implies, the focus will be on the landforms, economics, and history of the Ozark Plateau region. Twenty teachers, ten from Arkansas and ten from Missouri, will begin the institute in Springfield, Missouri, travel for six days in the central portion of the Ozark Plateau, then return to Springfield to conclude the institute. Participants will each develop three lesson plans that will be printed and made available to teachers in Arkansas and Missouri. The lesson plans will also be placed on the Arkansas Geographic Alliance's website.

On June 29, 2009, Jeanie Hagler will conduct a one-day workshop at the Dawson Educational Coop in Arkadelphia.

## More on Geo-literacy 2025

As was noted above, Geo-literacy 2025 has the goal of achieving an 80% geographic literacy rate among all graduating high school seniors by 2025. That literacy rate will be achieved in three phases. Phase I will begin in late 2009 or early 2010. Elements of Phase I include establishing a climate for reform and building the capacity to support reform. The capacity to support reform will include training in strategic planning and fundraising. Workshops and courses by experts will be conducted for an Alliance Leadership team. Once prepared, the Alliance Leadership Team will begin to create a climate for reform. This will be a difficult challenge in that Arkansas has been moving away from supporting geography education. Turning that around will be very difficult, but not impossible. Once the capacity for reform and climate for reform have been achieved, Phase II will begin. In Phase I, a strategic plan

reform. Phase II will be devoted to obtaining resources to implement the reform. This will require the Alliance Leadership Team to become fundraisers. Funds will be sought from the NGS Education Foundation, U.S. Department of Education funds under the Teacher Geography is Fundamental Act, the Arkansas Department of Education, and other funding agencies, such as the Walton Family Foundation. Phase III will be the time when the reform is implemented in Arkansas. After the climate and capacity for reform have been achieved and funds have been obtained, the reform will occur. If successful, this means that geography will return to K – 12 classrooms as stand-alone courses. This will place American geography education on par with other countries and will ensure that graduating high school students will be geographically literate.

Under the new Geo-literacy 2025 initiative, for the next two or three years, activities of the Arkansas Geographic Alliance will be limited to preparing for this educational reform plan. That means for the most part, the Alliance will not conduct workshops or institutes. Depending on available funds, we may try to hold fall and spring conferences. More about Geo-literacy 2025 will be forthcoming as we get more instructions and information from the National Geographic Society.

## The Teaching Geography is Fundamental Act

For the third consecutive year, The Teaching Geography is Fundamental Act (TGIF) has been introduced on the floor of the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House. You may remember that under No Child Left Behind, which contained nine core subjects, geography was the only core subject not to be allocated any funds. TGIF is legislation that will provide funds for geography education. House Bill #1240 currently has 78 co-sponsors including Mike Ross, Vic Snyder, and John Boozman. Marion Berry has not yet become a co-sponsor. Senate Bill #749 currently has 13 co-sponsors. Neither Blanche Lincoln nor Mark Pryor have become co-sponsors. Please contact Congressman Berry and Senators Lincoln and Pryor and ask them to support this important legislation. Contact both their state and federal offices. Faxes and e-mails are preferred because letters frequently do not get delivered.

## Upcoming Conferences



### **The National Council for Geographic Education**

The 2009 NCGE conference is in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on September 24 – 27.



The annual conference of the Southwest Division of the Association of American Geographers will be held at the Wyndham Riverfront Hotel in North Little Rock on October 29 – 31, 2009. Plans are underway to create sessions for K – 12 teachers. This will be an excellent opportunity to rub shoulders with professional geographers and participate in field trips.

### **Arkansas Curriculum Conference (ACC 2009)**

The annual Arkansas Curriculum Conference will be held in Little Rock on November 5 – 6, 2009.