

ORA General Meeting April 18, 2008

Ozark Regional Alliance met in Monett for their regular bi-monthly meeting. The location was moved to Grant's restaurant due to a fire at Happy House.

GUEST SPEAKER

Guest speaker Jake Sherwood from the Monett school district shared with the group about his experiences in South America and the observations he made about the culture, beliefs and values of the people he interacted with.

He also shared about Monett schools' English Language Learning program. He talked about trends in Monett enrollment and an increasing diversity in the student body. He shared the district's commitment to providing a quality education to each student.

- The district has increased their interpreters list by 300% and their PAC (Parent Advisory Council) attendance by 600%.
- They have scheduled and organized more than 400 parent-teacher conferences this school year.
- They are using ELLIS (English language learning) computer software in the schools.
- They offer Spanish classes to adults at the Career Center (SWACC).
- They have developed guidelines for their English Language Learning program, individual learning plan templates and a system to track student progress.
- They are involved in project SPEAK (out of MSSU, Joplin) which trains teachers to be ELL certified at no cost. It is a 1 ½ year program, one day a week. Teachers must be actively teaching. There are 25 openings per semester.

They are also looking for volunteers to help start an ELLIS program for adults, which involves being there, turning on computers and problem solving if anything arrives. Students learn on their own by interacting with the computer software.

Jake will be leaving at the end of this school year and will be replaced by Daphne Hensley in fall of 2008.

ROUNDTABLE

Gladys Nichols from the IRS also provided information on the [Volunteer Income Tax Assistance \(VITA\) program](#). This grant-funded program encourages local communities to use federal funds to help low-income people in the underserved and hard-to-reach areas complete their income tax returns. Applicants for the grant must be a non-profit (under IRC501), or a state or local government agency, or a coalition with one lead organization that meets one of the first two criteria. The agency must also comply with Civil rights reporting requirements, be able to file returns electronically and document matching funds dollar-for-dollar. In addition, the grant receiver must complete 35 tax returns. There is \$8 million available in the grant program. For more information, visit www.grants.gov or www.irs.gov.

Gladys also talked about the IRS' economic stimulus payments and who is eligible. She emphasized that in order to qualify for the payment, a return must be filed by October 15, 2008.

NOTE: Gladys has since left the IRS and her replacement is Mary Solomon.

UMOS representative Christian DeMasi talked about the [services \(Spanish version\)](#) they offer to eligible migrant families at no cost. The family must get its primary income from agriculture work, must be at or below the federal poverty level and must have moved within the last 24 months in search of agricultural work. Children age 6 weeks to 5.11 years are eligible for free child care, transportation, health services, school readiness, nutritious meals and services required for special needs. They also have monthly parent meetings during the harvest season. They are expanding into the Bootheel.

Pauline Gage mentioned that the Lawrence County Sheriff's Office must now have a written plan on how to deal with cultural diversity. This is tied to federal grant money.

Laura Piña stated that she will be glad to come to a business and share information with employees and/or clients on the Hispanic culture. She covers the entire southwest Missouri area, and the presentation can be made at no cost to the host agency.

Lori Mangan introduced herself with the Springfield-Greene County Library District. She works in early literacy with low-literacy and Spanish speaking audiences.