

Martie Semmer
(1994–95)

What do *DENVER '95: EXPLORING NEW FRONTIERS* and CCFLT's political involvement have in common? During the 1994–95 school year, this conference and CCFLT's step into the community-at-large have shaped CCFLT's roles in the professional and political arenas. Prior to this conference, CCFLT already was known nationally as a strong group of foreign language professionals; nevertheless, our ability to successfully host a joint conference of this magnitude only strengthened our professional reputation among foreign language teachers. The previous year, CCFLT had worked with legislators on the passages of HB 94–1207 that added foreign languages to HB 93–1313, the Standards-Based Education and Assessments Act. After this success, CCFLT believed that we could once again focus exclusively on serving Colorado foreign language teachers. Wrong!!! The 1994–95 school year would necessitate that CCFLT as an ongoing function would have to take on the mammoth additional responsibility of becoming politically involved.

DENVER '95: EXPLORING NEW FRONTIERS a.k.a. The '95 Joint Conference with CSC, SWCOLT, PNCFL and CCFLT was not just a conference, it was an historical event for foreign language educators that will be remembered for a long time to come. At nearly every professional foreign language meeting or conference that I have attended since **The '95 Joint Conference**, this conference is mentioned. Planning for this conference had started years before I had a clue I would be involved. Serious preparations for this conference began in August 1993, with a meeting at Dodie Guntren's house. Current and previous CCFLT leaders were invited to attend. It was at this meeting the diamond-shaped logo was born and *The Colorado Song* would become our song and dance promo. Kathleen Cook, Assistant Program Chair, would later author the conference theme: *Exploring New Frontiers*.

To begin my year as CCFLT President, I scheduled the Board Retreat in Glenwood Springs. Our team-building activity was a raft trip on the Colorado River through Glenwood Canyon, which my husband Paul helped to organize. It was such a memorable, fun trip; every board member had contributed to make this trip a great experience for all. At the end of this fantastic raft trip, I knew that CCFLT had the best group of foreign language professionals (the 1994–95 CCFLT Board, plus the 150 additional chairs and committee members representing 900+ CCFLT members) to pull off a successful joint conference! A tremendous amount of creativity, effort, teamwork, and mega-hours went into the conference. CCFLT had accomplished the major task of hosting one outstanding foreign language conference!

The "conference memory" that I will never forget was truly a result of the above-mentioned creativity, effort and teamwork! After celebrating a successful conference at the Joint Boards Dinner at the Brown Palace on Saturday night and receiving a Poupon U banner from America's Mustard College, Paul, Ted, and Lisa Singer (my brother and his wife provided the musical entertainment for the conference) and I decided to go out for a drink before returning to the Marriott. When Paul and I were ready to get into bed about 2:00 a.m., I turned on the lights and there was confetti all over the bed, with a bottle of non-alcoholic champagne and a can of chocolate whipped cream! Once Paul and I had cleaned up the bed, we climbed in only to notice that the bed had been short-sheeted! A thorough interrogation of my husband brought to light that he had given his room key to my most trustworthy colleagues: the Assistant Local Co-Chairs, Toni Theisen and Marie-Jo Hoffman, and the Hospitality/Off-Site Entertainment Co-Chairs, Dodie Guntren, Lucy Garcia and Janine Erickson!

As conference preparations were in full swing and we were in the busiest phase of conference planning, two bills were introduced in the 1995 Legislative Session that would have destroyed the gains that foreign languages had earned the previous year. One bill would have made the "first priority content areas" mandatory and the "second priority content areas" optional. After meeting with the sponsor of this bill and testifying before the House Education Committee, I had contributed significantly to the "Pulled Indefinitely" status of the bill. The other negative bill would have provided for optional adoption of standards by local districts, but mandatory testing that would have had nothing to do with the standards. Even though this bill passed the House Education Committee by a narrow margin, it was defeated on the House Floor. (Representative Bryan Sullivant called me during the conference to inform me of the bill's defeat!)

Once the Denver '95 conference was history, I realized more than ever that CCFLT members are foreign language teachers who believe in and thrive on professional growth opportunities. In a speech at this conference CCFLT Luncheon, Dr. Susan Schafer had mentioned a thought that she and I had previously discussed: the importance of getting together with other Colorado professional organizations that shared similar beliefs and goals. I was able to arrange a meeting with representatives from Colorado Association for Bilingual Education (CABE), Colorado Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (Co-TESOL), Colorado Language Arts Society (CLAS), and myself representing CCFLT. We agreed that we needed to provide a conference that would pool the talents and professionalism of our respective organizations. Janine Erickson has carried the torch and is creating another "joint conference" for September 15, 1997. CCFLT again remains in the forefront in serving foreign language teachers!