

News

Archives  
News Links

Resources for Media

Events Calendar

Baylor In the News

Publications

Baylor Graphic Standards

Contact Us

Baylor > Marketing and Communications > News

## Senior Lecturer in German Is Named Teacher of the Year by Texas Foreign Language Association

March 25, 2010

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When Rita Abercrombie, a senior lecturer at Baylor University, teaches German, she likes to add extras -- coffee, a German recipe or two and even a German version of Scrabble -- to the basics of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary.

Abercrombie, dubbed "Frau Abercrombie" by her students, hosts a weekly Kaffeestunde (coffee hour) in the German Lounge of Old Main, where students sip java and chat informally in German.

Her approach of blending the practical with the academic is working. Abercrombie, a native of Buchen in Germany's Odenwald Region, has been named German Teacher of the Year by the Texas Foreign Language Association, which has more than 1,500 members. She will receive the award Saturday in Arlington at the association's spring conference.

"She's really good," said Colton Wright, a senior journalism major from Euless, one of Abercrombie's former students. "She's totally energetic. She's one of those teachers you want to work hard for, and it's easy to learn with her."

The Texas Foreign Language Association consists of individuals who teach foreign languages within Texas at junior high schools, high schools and universities. The Teacher of the Year Award, determined by a committee of past teachers of the year, is based on school involvement, participation in professional organizations, club sponsorship and contributions to curriculum and professional development.

An individual's nomination must be done by a "nominator," such as a colleague, with supporting letters from an administrator, a student and a parent. Nominees also must write letters about their goals and teaching philosophy.

Billie Hulke, a lecturer of Spanish at Baylor and a former president of the Texas Foreign Language Association, nominated Abercrombie for the award. Hulke's office is near Abercrombie's in Draper Hall, and she has observed Abercrombie at work.

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Abercrombie is "a guide on the side rather than a sage on stage," Hulke wrote in her nomination letter. "She presents her students with new information and concepts and then steps aside to allow them opportunities to take risks in communicative, authentic activities to develop their proficiency skills, while constantly serving as a guide . . .

"Rita is one of the most cheerful, inspiring, enthusiastic, compassionate and dedicated individuals I know."

In addition to the coffee hour, Abercrombie once a year hosts a Klub Deutsch (German Club) cooking event for students at her home. They choose a menu, shop for the ingredients, prepare the meal using German recipes -- and have dinner conversation in German.

"Students want to understand a lot of (German) dialogue from the movies and the old TV shows," Abercrombie said. "The sounds are often like commands -- sometimes hard to do, because they aren't used to using their mouth to make such sounds in English. They're proud to be able to say it correctly."

Abercrombie, who first visited the United States in 1964, said she decided then that "this is the country for me." But she retains her philosophy that learning other languages is important "for opening the world and broadening the horizon.

"Of course I am an advocate for German and see the benefits for research in science, philosophy and religion, partnerships and business within the European Union, to name a few," she said. "I am happy that our 'Baylor' name will be mentioned (at the conference), since many of the teachers present will encourage students to study at our university."

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