

25 years of Spanish immersion at LTCC



Paella making with Tere Tibbetts, right, is a favorite during ISSI. Photo/Provided

By Kathryn Reed

Don't be surprised to hear more Spanish than English at Lake Tahoe Community College this week. Monday begins the 25th year of ISSI – Intensive Spanish Summer Institute.

What started with 150 students in three levels of grammar courses has evolved into 16 levels from low beginning to high superior. Hundreds of people show up for the weeklong course; some are locals, some travel to South Lake Tahoe just for this instruction.

While fun is part of the day, the whole goal is to get people talking Spanish. Some take the classes to help at work, others

want to use it while traveling. The reasons to participate are numerous.

“What I like best about ISSI is the commitment of the teachers and the camaraderie of the students. I’m excited about going back for a third year in a row because I know I will increase my vocabulary and comprehension,” Rhoda Shaponik told *Lake Tahoe News*.

A big reason for this South Lake Tahoe resident to learn Spanish is that she has spent part of the last few winters in Mexico.

“The locals really appreciate me trying to speak Spanish,” Shaponik said. “My goal in retirement is to speak Spanish fluently.”

Shaponik is part of the 40 percent of attendees who are returnees.

ISSI was the brainchild of Sue O’Connor who was the bilingual coordinator at Lake Tahoe Unified School District. She needed more Spanish language training for the teachers. With the backing of LTCC Spanish faculty member Diane Rosner ISSI was born.

Today ISSI is run by O’Connor and Maxine Alper, with the help of countless instructors and others.

“Throughout the years, based on observations, feedback and student evaluations, we have added in mini-courses at lunchtime, at 3:30pm and various evening events. We also collaborate with the Community Education program to offer other events,” Alper told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The day starts with grammar at 8am for all students. Another dose of grammar comes in the afternoon. Mixed in each day are various breakout sessions that range from learning various cooking specialties, to working on pronouncing words, to

history, to culture. There are about 100 choices.

“Students really love the small group conversation classes. Some of the students tell us that this is the first time they have spoken with a native speaker,” O’Connor told *LTN*. “Students like the atmosphere with all the decorations. They tell us they especially love how the Commons is modeled after a traditional plaza, the hub of the Spanish-speaking community where everyone passes through daily.”

Various Spanish-speaking cultures are featured – from Mexico to Spain to Costa Rica and more.

Some of the offerings are repeated each year, some are new to keep things fresh.

“Most of our ideas come from the student evaluations and from instructors who have an interest, expertise or experience with a subject,” Alper said. “We also come up with some ideas by looking at what we ourselves find interesting.”

To keep going another 25 years the co-directors realize ISSI needs to be responsive to the changing needs of the students and the community. It’s like any education program, it has to adjust even if the language stays the same.

Organizers have had to adapt with California’s changes in regards to repeatability of classes.

“The classes are for college credit so repeatability is not allowed. However, we have added in new levels to allow students to take more classes,” O’Connor said. “In addition, the instructor at the highest level, high superior, writes new curriculum every year to allow these high-level students to continue taking classes.”

Each year new mini-courses and breakout sessions are added as well.

ISSI often sells out, so to speak, so when it’s time to sign

up for 2019, but sure to do so right away.