

# Leadership Retreat

by Linda De La Ysla, T-C '94  
delaysla@towson.edu

Thirty two heads are better than one.

I survey my T-C colleagues and friends sitting around the large, square conference table at our annual Leadership Retreat. Lunch is over and we have brought steaming cups of coffee and large chocolate chip cookies to our seats, in order to start the “business” portion of the afternoon. I lean over to Barbara and whisper: “This is the best retreat ever! Look at all these T-Cs!”

She smiles and nods. Over the preceding weeks as the RSVP’s had poured in, we were ecstatic: the largest number ever, 35 T-Cs, stated their intention to participate. Now, teachers as “veteran” as Kathy Jenkins (National Capital Writing Project '82) and as “new” as Kathy Gadziala, Eleanor Hartmann, Amy Miller, Charles Pugh, Sonja Sansone, Jeff Vandivere, and Tina Watts (STI 2003) sit side by side to address the business at hand. And that business was none other than listening to each other’s ideas and concerns, looking ahead to jointly plan Writing Project programs and initiatives, and as importantly, re-connecting with friends. What better way to spend a gray, frigid January afternoon?

Inside that room, however, the heat is turned up high as the afternoon progresses: after Barbara and I give a brief MWP

“state of the union,” T-Cs Linda Wharton ('91) and Emma Spencer (Philadelphia Writing Project, '98) offer up a descriptive protocol to evaluate student writing. With Del Arnold ('97) as the “presenting teacher,” the protocol provides T-Cs with a different way to look at our students’ writing. This descriptive, as opposed to evaluative, protocol has grown out of a National Writing Project initiative called LetsWork – both Linda and Emma attended the LetsWork institute at UC Berkeley last summer.

After a brief break, we reconvene to map out the remaining hour and a half. Interest groups form around major MWP programs: the Student Writers’ Workshop (specifically, a reluctant writers’ group); the Summer Teacher Institute (three sites are planned for summer, 2004: at Towson, in Southern Maryland, and a new site in Frederick County); a group that wants to plan a “Writing Marathon” which several T-Cs had taken part in at the NWP Annual Meeting last November in San Francisco;



Linda De La Ysla

*(continued on next page)*

# Leadership Retreat

*(continued)*

staff development needs in the public schools; the New Teacher Initiative grant; and teacher inquiry.

In addition, T-Cs fill out applications to participate in the MWP's second annual Professional Writing Retreat in mid-April.

Since the Leadership Retreat, the T-Cs are still cooking: the Writing Marathon happened on Saturday, April 3; the SWW Reluctant Writers' group has met and started to map out policy; the staff development group conferences in cyberspace and has moved forward with the hiring of two Staff Development Consultants Rose McNeill ('92) and Madeleine Synnott ('94); and the NTI teachers finalized plans for an all-day meeting at the end of February and discussed their final weekend retreat in June.

When the meeting is finally over, all the cookies eaten, and hugs exchanged, Barbara and I linger in a room still buzzing with the energy of 32 people. We look at each other: "Whew!" we say, and then, "Wow!"

*Wow indeed.* T-Cs are the Maryland Writing Project: T-Cs like you who give so generously of your time, intelligence, creativity, and compassion. What better work can there be, than this?

Note: Attendees at the meeting, in order of seniority, were Kathy Jenkins ('82); Leslie Goetsch ('84); Barbara Bass ('88); Joe Bellino ('89); Stephanie Leddy ('90); Terry Mobley and Linda Wharton ('91); Sarah Snyder ('93); Bonnie Hain ('94), Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project); Linda De La Ysla ('94); John Barber and Meredith Perkins ('95); Lisa Kellert ('96); Del Arnold and Cheryl North-Coleman ('97); Susy Sayre and Barbara Steele ('98); Diane Curry ('99); Beth Edelman and Becky Straub ('00); Angela Ross ('01); Jennifer Goulston and Susan Helldorfer ('02); Eleanor Hartmann, Kathy Gadziala, Amy Miller, Charles



*Linda Wharton (standing), Jennifer Goulston, and Meredith Perkins working on a project at the retreat.*

Pugh, Sonja Sansone, Jeff Vandivere, Tina Watts ('03). Other special guests were Karen Cochran of Frederick County and Ryley Arnold, son of Del.