

Université York University à St. Georges de Beauce

Séjour de six semaines en été

By GARRY MARR

"The family is the basic social unit and that's where you learn a language."

The family setting affords students the ideal opportunity to learn French, says Louise Morrison, Director of York University's summer language immersion programme in St. Georges de Beauce, Quebec.

St. Georges, 130 kilometres from Quebec City, is an ideal location for the linguistic and cultural immersion of English speaking students. The town of 25,000 provides "a community feeling that you wouldn't get in a city," says Morrison. And unlike Quebec City, St. Georges has little contact with tourists and therefore little English is spoken.

York's French immersion programme is one of 26 that the Secre-

"I would be naive to think students spoke French 100 percent of the time," says Morrison, "but it is their loss if they don't speak French."

Morrison says she and past administrations have been careful in choosing families. "We try to choose families with children who are not too young." Families with children the same age as students are considered a good choice.

Contact with the family is an important element of the immersion programme. But in many instances the mother and father work, limiting contact between students and their



Chère York:

On savait qu'on était au Québec quand les stations de radio passaient des disques français et quand le restaurant Harvey avait un menu français.

C'est dimanche soir, les étudiants se sont présentés à leurs familles. On a expliqué pourquoi on est venu au Québec et on leur a raconté l'histoire de notre vie. Et puis, nos familles se sont présentées à leur tour.

"Nous sommes vos parents maintenant," ont-ils dit. A partir de ce moment-là nous avons de nouveaux parents — des parents québécois. Pour nous, ça allait être Papa Rock et Maman Hélène Veilleux. Mais peu après, nous les avons acceptés comme parents et ils nous ont acceptés comme des "brats".

Chaque matin c'était Maman qui nous a réveillés pour aller à l'école. Ses cépes avec le sirop d'érable, les biscuits aux carottes, et le café avec un peu de rye — nous étions prêts à aller au séminaire.

Pour une ville de 25,000 St. Georges était une ville très vivifiante. A St. Georges, les gens ne savent pas seulement parler le français, ils savent aussi faire la fête.

La chose la plus difficile était de dire au revoir, parce que nous avons dû quitter nos amis et aussi nos familles.

Mais on peut aussi dire à la prochaine!

Joe Culmone et Garry Marr

tary of State for Canada co-sponsors with provincial governments. Immersion programmes can be found from Newfoundland's Memorial University programme in St. Pierre et Miquelon to the University of British Columbia programme in Vancouver. Similar opportunities are open to French-speaking students who want to learn English.

Morrison took over the York programme in January, 1988. At that time the programme, which is funded by the Faculty of Arts and the Secretary of State, was having funding problems. Since then the difficulties have been resolved, guaranteeing an immersion programme at St. Georges for the summer of 1989.

The goal of the programme is to immerse students in a French environment. And while not all students are fully engulfed in the French atmosphere, most become a part of their French family environment.

"parents." York has also avoided choosing bilingual families, so that English won't be spoken. Participants are told to notify the course director if English is being spoken.

Families are reassessed each year, but Morrison says there have been few complaints.

"Most of the families have definitely been receptive to students," says Morrison. "They don't do it for the money [they get for housing students]."

Some of the families have been with the programme since its inception and these families usually house the greatest number of students; four is usually the limit, with the average family housing three students. For new families, two students are preferable.

Reaction from students — who came from as far west as British Columbia and as far east as Nova Scotia — was extremely positive. One key to the programme's success

is its integration of students from all over the country.

Of the 102 students at St. Georges in 1988, only 44 came from York.

Patricia Anderson, a second-year business student from the University of Prince Edward Island, said that although York's programme was not her first choice, she found it to be a "positive experience."

"The best part of the programme is the people you go to school with from across the country," said Anderson.

For Russell Bennett, York was his fourth immersion programme. The Edmonton resident had done previous programmes in Jonquière and Chicoutimi. Compared to others, he found York's to be "generally good."

"It's a worthwhile method of tea-

ching French," said Bennett. "You also learn about another culture that's different from your own."

Shalini Babbar, a first-year journalism student from Carleton, pointed to St. Georges' small population as a positive factor of the programme.

"The ambience of a little city is good; you learn more because they're open to questions," said Babbar. "I think I got very close to the town." The Torontonian found that the difference in culture didn't amount to much.

"Everybody likes to dance and drink beer and listen to the same music; there isn't much difference between our cultures," said Babbar.

For Vance Heaney, a fourth-year sociology student from the University of Saskatchewan, six weeks in St. Georges meant frequent contact with arrogant Torontonians.

"People from York think they're the best in the world, but the reality is that there is no difference between Toronto and us. They [Toronto] move faster," said Heaney. "The university crowds are similar. They act and dress the same."

The combination of learning French and meeting fellow Canadians makes immersion programmes attractive for university students. Government bursaries — 94 for 102 students at St. Georges — don't hurt either.

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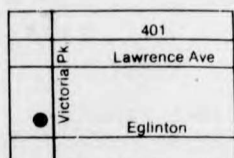
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