

# Reach of the NWP Professional Writing Retreat Grows

It's becoming a familiar story: A local site or site network conducts a professional writing retreat based on the National Writing Project Writing Retreat model. The national retreat, the model for which has emerged over the last three summers at gatherings held near Santa Fe, New Mexico, provides a template for local work. Of course, there are differences. At the latest local retreat, for instance, it was not Santa Fe chile peppers that nourished the writers, rather it was Louisiana shrimp po-boys. Regardless of the trappings and setting of any given retreat, however, the critical core of the event remains the same: writing

This particular retreat, sponsored by the Louisiana Writing Project State Network, unfolded between October 19 and 21, 2001, at the Blythewood Plantation House in Amite, Louisiana. Blythewood, a turn-of-the-century home, is a place of welcoming verandas, high ceilings, and eight bedrooms large enough to allow writers from the various Louisiana writing project sites plenty of space for creative pacing. Part of the charm of Blythewood is that it is a little ragged around the edges. "It's sort of *Gone with the Wind* meets *The Shining*," said one participant.

But there was nothing ragged about the work done that weekend. It was an intense session. Folks arrived on Friday evening and left on Sunday morning, which cut a whole day off the Santa Fe model. But

despite the telescoped time frame, the writers produced the beginnings of an impressive body of work that they'll continue to work on in the weeks and months ahead. Their various pieces included everything from a manifesto for principals to act as teacher leaders, to a meditation on "essaying."

The weekend's events were orchestrated by Richard Louth, director of the Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project, and Kathleen O'Shaughnessy, co-director of the National Writing Project of Acadiana. Louth and O'Shaughnessy, who had served as a facilitator and writing coach at Santa Fe, led the writers through the mix: sharing of topics, lots of time for writing, regular response-group meetings, check-ins to report progress, and a final and inevitably inspiring read-around. Art Peterson, a senior editor with NWP, was on hand to offer support and advice.

Earlier in 2001, the Louisiana Writing Project State Network published an anthology of best practices, *Composing Students Composing*. This book has been a popular item in Louisiana schools. Richard Louth says, "We are hoping to get another best-practices anthology out of the Blythewood workshop." If the work that was generated at this retreat is any indication of the final product, the new anthology could very well be subtitled *Even Better Practice*.