

Living

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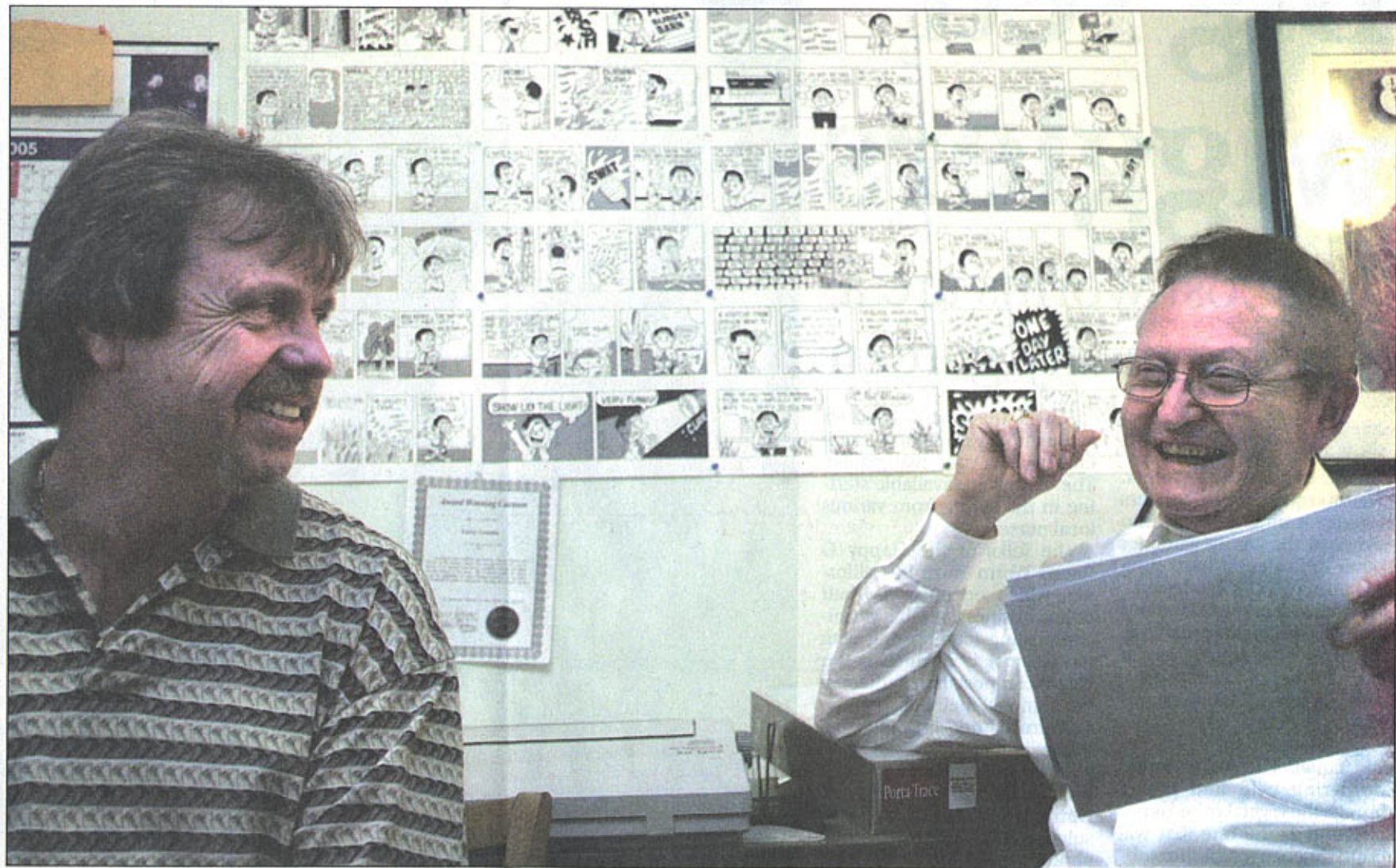
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JOHN GUSSENHOVEN/The Springfield News

Author Armand Gagnon is shown with illustrator Larry Geissler during a light moment while discussing the virtues of Gagnon's soon-to-be-published book on learning to speak Spanish.

The Spanish Sampler

LCC linguist teams with local cartoonist to break a language barrier

By **JANICE DRESSER**
The Springfield News

The linguist and the cartoonist met each other for the first time at Springfield Fred Meyer nearly two years ago.

Larry Geissler needed a ride to his west Springfield home. He was the cartoonist.

Armand Gagnon was the linguist.

"It was May 14, 2003, to be exact," said Gagnon.

A few days later, Gagnon told Geissler about the book he was writing. Geissler said he was available as an illustrator.

Gagnon's book now contains 48 black ink cartoons.

A linguist and a cartoonist might be envisioned as an ideal partnership for a first-grade reading book or a comic book to stimulate reading interest in children.

But their collaboration is aimed not at children, but at English-speaking adults who want to learn Spanish.

Gagnon, a part-time Spanish instructor at Lane Community College, began writing his as-yet unpublished book in 2000.

In his 21 years teaching Spanish, Gagnon said he has seen numerous grammatical obstacles English-speakers characteristically encounter.

Gagnon was confident he could write a better textbook than the ones he had been using in his language classes — a book that would specifically target these problem areas. It's a book Gagnon plans to market to community colleges and universities.

"This book cuts to the chase," Gagnon explained.

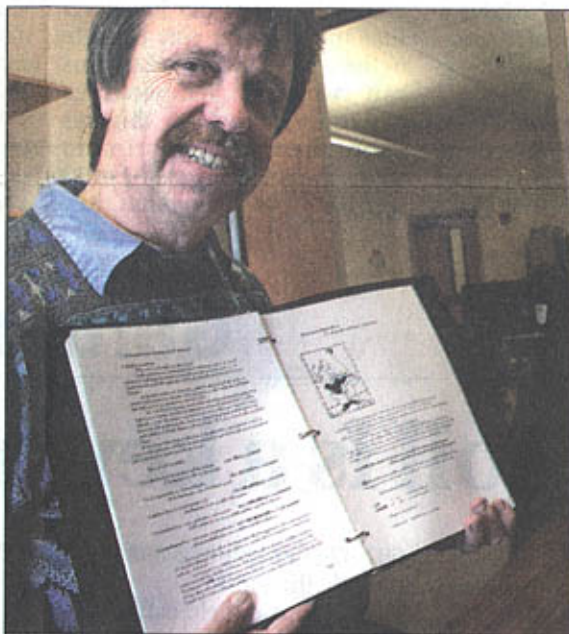
The title of his book promises the reader clarity and ease of navigation through the maze of an unfamiliar language. The book is written primarily in English with examples in both Spanish and English.

"The Spanish Sampler For Rapid Assimilation of Spanish Grammar and Linguistic Theory" delivers on its promise.

Gagnon has divided the book in three sections: Structure, Lexicon and Application. There are 44 samples listed in the index. These samples address specific language questions and are clearly explained by examples.

Geissler's cartoons deliver rules of grammar such as gender, vowels and verbs in clever word play that is humorously conceived and aptly drawn.

A cartoon on page 32 shows a man shakily holding a barbell over his head. The caption



JOHN GUSSENHOVEN/The Springfield News

Armand Gagnon displays a English-to-Spanish book that he hopes to get published. Gagnon is a spanish language instructor at LCC.

reads, "You' and 'I' are weak." The grammar lesson is on strong and weak vowels. Gagnon calls the weak vowels "phonetic parasites" since they join with other vowels to form one sound (diphthongs), while strong vowels stand alone.

The caption is an example not only of Geissler's humor, but his overall outlook on his art and his life.

"I don't like rules," he said half-jokingly. "I'm defiant."

Geissler's art reflects his avoidance of rules and actions that would classify him as similar to others.

Gagnon's goal in writing "The Spanish Sampler" is just the opposite. His purpose is to show the common principles of grammar in English and Spanish, rooted in universal elements of language.

Gagnon began teaching himself French at age 10 to acquire a "secret code" unknown to his parents, and by age 12 was sufficiently fluent to converse with a new neighbor from Amiens, France.

He continued to study French throughout high school, but a crush on a Cuban girl inspired him to study Spanish in his junior year.

Gagnon has BA and MA degrees in Spanish.

Mastery of both languages allows him to freelance as a translator both on- and off-line. He has also been hired to teach Spanish to employees of local businesses.

A native of the Los Angeles area, he visited Disneyland during its first week open in July 1955, and has subsequently subtitled videos for Walt Disney Productions. Gagnon has traveled to Chile, Mexico, Spain, France, Canada and much of the United States.

Gagnon is a veteran teacher, having taught Spanish and English as a second language at the kindergarten through college levels. He was named honorary "teacher of public school teachers" through the state of California's bilingual certification classes, and was nominated for Instructor of the Year for 1999-2000 at Lane Community College.

Geissler, on the other hand, freely admits that words are not his thing. "I failed English five times," he said.

That is why he was hired not as a reporter but as a cartoonist at the Idaho Free Press and Caldwell News-Tribune in 1967. He was 26.

His cartoon panel, "The Great Society," appeared on the editorial page of both newspapers.

Geissler is an admirer of Charles Schulz, and was given an original Peanuts cartoon strip by a friend of Schulz he had met. The strip was subsequently stolen.

Now, 38 years later, newspaper readers can still see Geissler's cartoons on an editorial page — The Springfield News frequently prints his cartoons. Occasionally they are political in nature.

As the author of "The Great Society," every cartoon was political and each one exhibited the attitude of its creator.

"I want to do what I want to do," Geissler said recently.

This could have been a quote from his first day at work at the Idaho newspaper.

The Idaho Free Press reporter who wrote about Geissler's upcoming 1967 cartoon strip warned its readers, "Nothing concerning government policies and policy makers is sacred as far as Geissler is concerned. You'll see why on Monday."

Gagnon's book and Geissler's cartoons do not warrant a warning. You will see why when you read them.

You will see be taught Spanish by a linguist, be entertained by a cartoonist — and be thankful they met at Fred Meyer that May day.