

Twelve Countries Join French Aid Initiative

THE French initiative to enact a levy on airline tickets in order to collect funds for developing nations (see NFF 05.08 and 05.13) won the full support of 12 countries on March 1, at the conclusion of an international summit in Paris on innovative financing schemes for Third World aid. In addition, 30 countries have expressed an interest in the project, and may soon announce their participation. As of now, the countries subscribing to France's initiative include Brazil, Chile, Cyprus, Congo, the Ivory Coast, Jordan, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mauritius, Nicaragua and Norway. While not introducing a new tax, Britain will use an existing surcharge in air travel to contribute to the new fund, which will focus on combating AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria in poor countries. These diseases claim over 6 million victims every year.

The initiative championed by President Jacques Chirac is gathering momentum, and French authorities hope that other major

Western countries with high numbers of airline passengers will soon follow suit. U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, who fully supports the plan and spoke at the conference's opening, noted that current government pledges are falling short of what is needed, which is why innovative fundraising ideas are essential.

France will be the first country to apply the new levy, which will add between one to 40 euros (\$1.2 to \$47) to the price of an airline ticket starting this July (economy-class travelers will not pay more than a 10-euro surcharge). The initiative is expected to raise 200 million euros per year in development aid.

The 12 countries committed to the program, notably France and Brazil, are considering the establishment of an international drug purchase facility to boost access to drugs for AIDS and HIV sufferers in the developing world.



French President Jacques Chirac, left, listens as U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan addresses the conference in Paris on innovative financing schemes.

La Fayette Commemorations Launched

THE Marquis de La Fayette's 250th Anniversary Commemoration campaign was launched on March 7 with a fundraiser at the residence of French Ambassador Jean-David Levitte. The event was attended by several members of the La Fayette committee's honorary board of directors, including Claude Teboul, president of France-Louisiane Franco-Américaine; Michel Besson, national president of France-Etats-Unis; L. J. Durel, Jr., president of La Fayette Consolidated Government as well as Warren A. Perrin, chairman of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana.



Joseph Boze's portrait of the Marquis de La Fayette, commissioned by Jefferson (1789)

A series of events will take place throughout 2007 to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Marquis, including a La Fayette Mardi Gras, a Marquis pageant, several commemorative trips, as well as events co-sponsored by symphony orchestras and performing arts societies in France and the United States.

Marie-Joseph-Paul-Roch-Yves-Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de La Fayette (September 6, 1757 – May 20, 1834) was once quoted as saying that he loved lib-

erty "with the enthusiasm of religion, the rapture of love, and the conviction of geometry." La Fayette dedicated his life to the establishment of democracy in America and France and became known as the "Hero of Two Worlds," due to his immense contributions to both countries' revolutions.

La Fayette was born in Auvergne, France. Since childhood, he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps and to enroll in the military. At the age of 16, La Fayette enlisted in the French Army. At the age of 19, he joined the American revolutionary forces, where he was given the rank of major general of the United States (making him America's youngest general officer ever). He soon met General George Washington with whom he established a lifelong friendship.

One of his most significant accomplishments on the battlefield was at the battle of Yorktown, VA, where the victory of French and American forces led by General George Washington sealed Britain's defeat in 1781. In recognition of La Fayette's key contribution to America's independence, he was made an honorary U.S. citizen in 2002 by President George W. Bush, becoming one of only six individuals to have been granted this major honor.

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MARCH OF THE PENGUINS WINS OSCAR

French Director Luc Jacquet's *March of the Penguins* won the Oscar for Best Documentary. The film recently became America's second highest grossing documentary (see NFF 05.10).



Courtesy: Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

MAJOR COCAINE SEIZURE

On February 28, French customs officials and the French Navy seized one and a half tons of cocaine hidden in the frame of a ship off the coast of Dakar, Senegal. The interception of the *Master Endeavour*, a vessel transporting blocks of marble from Panama, took place 1,300 kilometers, approximately 700 nautical miles, from shore. The Center for Maritime Operations (COM) located in Brest, northern France, coordinated the operation under the authority of the Maritime Prefect for the Atlantic Ocean and with the authorization of the Republic of Panama.

LOUVRE EXHIBIT IN SAUDI ARABIA



16-century Iranian Carpet from the Louvre's collection

During his three-day state visit to Saudi Arabia on March 4-6, French President Jacques Chirac and Saudi King Abdullah inaugurated a major Louvre exhibit dedicated to Islamic art in Riyadh. This marks the first time the Kingdom has hosted a public exhibition of art objects from a foreign country. The exhibit, titled "Form and Color in Islamic Art—The Louvre Collection," features over 100 objects from the famous Paris museum's Islamic art collection. The works displayed at the Riyadh-Louvre exhibition include ceramics, carpets, wooden doors and miniatures, as well as textiles, dating from the birth of Islam to the early-20th century.

TURIN PARALYMPICS

Following the successful Winter Olympics in Turin, the city welcomed its partner, the Winter Paralympics, hoping to make the latter a similar success. The Paralympics were held from March 10-19. Twenty-five athletes represented France in the main ski events as well as in other Paralympic winter sports. The Turin Paralympics was a special occasion as the French Federation of Handicapped Sports celebrated its 50th anniversary. As of March 16th, France has already taken home four gold medals and six bronze medals, three of which won by alpine skier Solène Jambaqué.

NEWS FROM FRANCE / March 22, 2006

90th Anniversary of Verdun Battle

ON February 21, France commemorated the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Verdun, the devastating 300-day clash between the French and German armies during World War I. The battle was the most violent confrontation to take place during the war, involving 10 months of artillery fire between the two armies. Three hundred thousand French and German soldiers perished and nine French villages were decimated.

Religious services and ceremonies were held throughout the day to commemorate the event and a costumed reenactment of the battle was staged in Caures Forest, where the first shots were fired on February 21, 1916. American singer



Scene from recent blockbuster, *Joyeux Noël*

Barbara Hendricks performed in Verdun's cathedral and in the Douaumont ossuary, the final resting place of thousands of soldiers.

Soldiers of all faiths participated in the battle, and all were honored for their bravery. Dalil Boubakeur, the president of the French Council on the Islamic Faith, has recently presented a memorial to President Jacques Chirac to honor the Muslim soldiers from France's colonies who gave their lives in the war. The memorial is currently being constructed at Douaumont and will be inaugurated in June of this year. Major commemorations were also held in the Verdun synagogue, to honor the allied soldiers of Jewish faith who courageously fought for France.

FRANCE MOURNS LOSS OF A POILU

One of the eight surviving soldiers of World War I, known in France as "poilus," passed away during the night on February 25, at the age of 107. Ferdinand Gilson, a native of Champigny-sur-Marne, arrived on the Belgian front in March of 1918 to join the infantry, but was soon transferred to the artillery division, where he was stationed until the end of the war. In 1940, he refused to work for the Germans and joined the French resistance. Among many acts of courage during this dangerous time, he hid four American pilots from the occupation's forces. According to official figures, his death leaves only seven surviving French WWI veterans.

France Outlines Clean Water Objectives

NELLY Olin, Minister for Ecology and Sustainable Development, headed the French delegation to the fourth World Water Forum which was held in Mexico from March 16 to 22.

The World Water Forum, held every three years, brings together local authorities, NGOs, consumer associations, water and sanitation experts, researchers and political leaders— all involved in water management. The various speakers shared their experiences and exchanged ideas about water policies.



This year's Forum strived to strengthen field initiatives in order to meet the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. The central theme, "Local Actions for a Global Challenge," was chosen for that reason.

France is one of the leading donors in this sector, annually devoting 268 million euros in bilateral aid and 100 million euros in multilateral aid. France's objective is to double this aid by 2009 by committing an additional 180 million euros, main-

FOREIGN MINISTRY WEB SITE REVAMPED

France.diplomatie, the Web site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has become one of the premier French government Web sites and a key instrument for promoting France.

In order to provide even better service to the public, *France Diplomatie* is now offering new services using the latest technologies (RSS format and podcasts). Subscribers can receive diplomatic news, the latest travel advisories, and audio and video files relating to current international affairs (seen from France) on their own Web site, MP3 player or computer. *France.diplomatie* has adopted a more colorful, streamlined presentation of its new services and information. The revamped site provides instant access via three drop-down menus, making the site's core services easier to locate. Check out the Web site's latest improvements at www.diplomatie.gouv.fr.



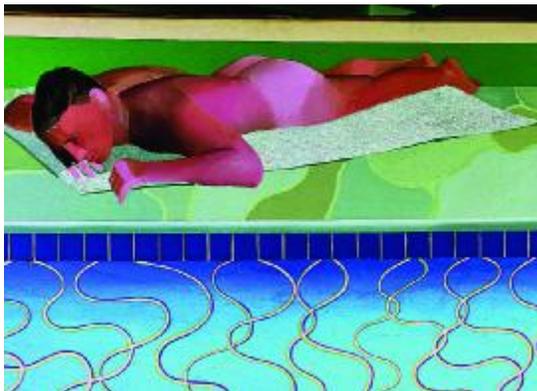
ly for Africa. The French delegation emphasized the idea of establishing a global mechanism for the observation, follow-up and evaluation of programs in the water and sanitation sector. French expertise in terms of institutions, financing, resource management, investments and equipment could play a key role in ensuring that the world's population has access to clean water.



Los Angeles Art Exhibition Held in Paris

THE Centre Pompidou in Paris is hosting a new exhibit titled "Los Angeles 1955-1985" until July 17. This ambitious survey of L.A. art in Paris presents a rich, dynamic period of time in the history of the West Coast city, during which some of its defining characteristics—mass entertainment, consumerism, popular culture, and changing urban lifestyles—all flourished.

The entire top floor of the National Museum of Modern Art at the Centre Pompidou is devoted to the exhibit, which encompasses paintings, sculptures, photography, video performances and film. As well as sections on mainstream movements such as Pop and Minimalism, the exhibition also showcases various fringe movements, such as American Feminist art, African-American assemblages and Chicano works (including a



The Sunbather, by David Hockney (1966)

pioneering performance by Harry Gamboa). World-renowned artists such as Edward Ruscha and David Hockney also make an appearance.

The art exhibit's goal is to bring the viewer to Los Angeles, and to provide an overview of art movements in the city.

Responding to the *Los Angeles Times* on why the focus was on Los Angeles, Catherine Grenier, the exhibit's organizer, answered, "Artists in Europe are really focusing on the Los Angeles art scene. For young people, L.A. artists have become much more important on the international art scene. They have a real reverence for young artists here."

For more information, visit www.cnac-gp.fr.



Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights, Edward Ruscha (1962)

Spirit of Franco-American Unity Celebrated

ON February 14, the citizens of Locust Valley, New York, received a bronze plaque commemorating a friendship formed 50 years ago when the city adopted Sainte Mère l'Eglise (located in Normandy) as their sister city. When the inhabitants of Locust Valley realized the dire needs of their French counterparts, who were in great need of assistance following World War II, they took it upon themselves to provide support in



Sister cities unite

France Franco-American unity.

what became known as "Operation Democracy."

As a complement to the Marshall Plan, the U.S. aid package offered to much of Western Europe after World War II, Operation Freedom helped Sainte Mère l'Eglise's inhabitants, offering them food, medical supplies and other helpful materials. The citizens of Locust Valley were honored to receive this plaque symbolizing the spirit of

Memoirs of Former White House Pastry Chef



Cover of Mesnier's memoir

Former White House pastry chef, Roland Mesnier, recently published his memoirs, *Sucre d'Etat* ("State Sugar"). Mesnier, who spent 25 years in the White House preparing elegant desserts for Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George Bush Sr., Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, grew up in a small village near Besançon in eastern France. In his memoirs, he describes the challenges of

working at the White House and reveals the dessert preferences of the American presidents for whom he baked. For example, he recounts that Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton were the biggest gourmands, with Reagan in particular having a soft spot for chocolate mousse. Reagan would often have to sneak downstairs for sweets, because his wife had asked Mesnier not to serve him desserts.

SPENCER ABRAHAM JOINS FRENCH NUCLEAR COMPANY

The French nuclear company, Areva, recently announced that Spencer Abraham will join the company as the new Chairman of the Board of Directors. Abraham served as the Secretary of Energy during President George W. Bush's first term and his background and expertise should prove helpful in developing Areva's U.S. operations.

JOINT FRENCH-AMERICAN TEAM DISCOVERS NEW SPECIES

A new species of crustacean was recently discovered in the South Pacific approximately 900 miles south of Easter Island. A group of American and French divers from the French Institute for Sea Exploration (IFREMER), discovered the new crustacean that resembles a lobster. Scientists say that this animal is so distinct that it merits its own family and genus. The animal has been named *Kiwi hirsuta* and is unique in that it is blind, and its pincers are covered with silky blond fur. It belongs to the *Kiwaidea* family, named after the goddess of crustaceans in Polynesian mythology.

FIRST LOUVRE - U.S. MUSEUM HIGH SCHOOL EXCHANGE

In coordination with the High Museum of Art in Atlanta and the Musée du Louvre, the first educational exchange program between an American and French high school was organized in January 2006. A group of students from North High School in Atlanta traveled to France in January to receive a behind-the-scenes tour of the Louvre. They were hosted by French families during their stay in Paris. In October, when the High Museum will host an exhibit of paintings from the Louvre, a group of Parisian high school students will come to Atlanta to visit the High Museum and stay with American families. The program was established to promote an understanding of the cultural and historical context of the art that is represented in both museums.

FRENCH FILM FESTIVAL HELD IN RICHMOND, VA

The 14th annual VCU French Film Festival will be held in Richmond, Virginia from March 31 to April 2. The VCU is the most important French film festival in the United States. Last year over 17,500 spectators participated in the festival and organizers are expecting an even better turnout this year. The festival offers an opportunity for the American public to view the best of French films as well as an opportunity to converse with directors and actors from the films. Roman Duris, who won the César for best actor, and best director Jacques Audiard will be present for the screening of *The Beat That My Heart Skipped*. This year's festival will feature a total of 13 motion pictures and 11 short films. For more information please visit www.frenchfilm.vcu.edu.



TGV Celebrates 25 Years!

A Speedy History



© SNCF - French National Railway

TWENTY-FIVE years ago last month, on February 26, 1981, the French TGV (*Train à Grande Vitesse*, or High Speed Train) beat the world record, making it the world's fastest train, at a speed of 236 miles per hour. On September 22 of that year, the train was inaugurated by François Mitterrand, the French president at

the time. Five days later, the TGV began running commercially, with about 13 daily roundtrips between Paris and other French cities.

The TGV set a new record for the world's fastest conventional train on May 18, 1990, with a top speed of 320.3 mph.

To properly celebrate the TGV's 25th anniversary as a leader in high-speed transportation, France's railway company, SNCF, is putting out all the stops. A special competition being held from April through September will award a total of 25,000 kilometers' worth of travel to the lucky winners. The competition will focus on trivia questions about the TGV, and one of the winners will be randomly selected to receive 25 years of free TGV transportation! Weekend specials in June and competitions to win free train tickets from April through September will also be part of the celebrations.

The SNCF (Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer) was created in 1938 and steadily increased its trains' speeds until 1955, when it surpassed the world record with a speed of about 205 miles an hour. But the true seeds of the TGV were planted five years later, when SNCF engineers envisioned combining very powerful gas-turbine engines and steep grades that would function as a sort of gentle roller-coaster by using momentum from the land's natural contours.

Experiments with this new technology brought about the TGV's first prototype in March of 1972, the TGV 001. However, the 1973 oil crisis led the SNCF to eschew gas-turbine power and focus on electric-powered trains, thus paving the way for today's TGV. The new train had the potential for very high speeds but was slowed by conventional tracks. To accommodate the new technology, construction began in 1976 on a line dedicated to high-speed train travel between Paris and Lyon, linking two of

France's largest cities. The TGV's record-breaking speed in 1981 triggered an enthusiastic response from the government, which led to a proliferation of high speed tracks throughout France, including the TGV Atlantique in 1989, the TGV Rhônes-Alpes in 1992 and the TGV Méditerranée in 2001.

SNCF engineers are now developing ways to push average commercial speeds above the 200-mph barrier. Since 1999, research has focused on the EMU train-set, a system that distributes propulsive power throughout the train cars rather than having a single locomotive pull the whole train. This developing technology is expected to substantially increase energy efficiency. Reduced-noise technology to minimize disturbances to nearby neighborhoods is also under development. Finally, engineers are seeking to improve the performance of TGV trains on standard tracks. One option being pursued is to allow the train cars to tilt, so that high speeds during curves can be maintained without affecting passenger comfort.

Learn more at www.sncf.com and www.trainweb.org/tgvpages.



INSIDE THE TGV



© SNCF

The TGV is equally impressive on the inside. Special family cars feature seats facing each other and a common table. To accommodate business people, telephone connections and wireless internet access are offered in most trains. For travelers looking for entertainment, DVD players are available for rent (with a choice of about 500 DVDs, including 50 for children). Other conveniences are also provided, such as the possibility of combining a plane ticket and a TGV ticket into a single ticket recognized by major airlines such as Air France, American Airlines and United Airlines. This is particularly convenient in Paris's Charles de Gaulle international airport, where the TGV runs straight through one of the terminals. A new IDTGV (www.idtgv.com) service is being tested on the Paris-Toulon line. This service allows people with the same travel desires to be grouped together. For example, those who like to get up and move around would buy an idZap ticket, whereas those who prefer a quiet ride would purchase an idZen ticket to work or sleep in peace.

The SNCF's ambitions continue today with the TGV Eastern Europe line, which is scheduled to open for service in June 2007 and will connect 37 million more people to the TGV network. The trains will travel 12 miles per hour faster than the current commercial speed of the TGV. These new lines will connect Paris to Frankfurt, Zurich, Strasbourg, Luxembourg, and many other destinations in between. Twenty-one out of the 32 new destinations will see travel times reduced by at least a third compared to conventional trains.

TGV technology is reaching far beyond Europe. It was used for the development of the Korea Train Express (KTX), the high speed transportation network in South Korea, and the *Alta Velocidad Española*, Spain's high-speed train network. Australia is also contemplating purchasing TGV technology for their future high-speed line between Sydney and Canberra. The American high-speed train that runs between Boston and Washington, Acela Express, is a distant cousin of the TGV (but does not benefit from a dedicated track).



A Dense Network

TODAY TGVs make about 600 round trips a day throughout France, and serve more than 170 train stations. Since its inception, 1.2 billion travelers have been transported in France and throughout Europe by the TGV, including 100 million people in 2005 alone (up from 65 million travelers in 2000). There are now 2,175 miles of high speed railroads throughout Europe, 957 of which are in France. These distances should triple before 2020 with the planned addition of the TGV East Europe line, the South Europe line, and the Brittany line.

The TGV connects many European countries, including the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, and even Great Britain, with the famous "Chunnel"—a tunnel underneath the English Channel. This engineering masterpiece began construction in 1987, and cost over \$15 billion to build. Since 1994, the 31-mile-long tunnel, of which 23 miles are underwater, makes it possible to travel from London to Paris in under three hours without taking one's feet off the ground! The Eurostar, the TGV train that runs through the "Chunnel," has doubled the number of travelers between the two countries. Almost 16 million people passed through the tunnel in 2005.



Projet Antares: First Neutrino Telescope

THE Antares project, a collaboration between 14 European laboratories, developed a telescope that could change the face of astrophysical observation as we know it. Located at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea, approximately 40 kilometers off the coast of Toulon, France, the new telescope uses neither visible nor invisible light to examine stars, but rather the neutrinos they emit. It is the first of its kind to use such technology.

Based in France, the project involves the participation of the French National Center of Scientific Research (CNRS) and many prestigious research universities. The initiative is a European collaboration, incorporating the talents of teams from Britain, Italy, Germany, Spain, Russia, and the Netherlands, and is an alliance between particle physics laboratories, oceanographers, astronomers and astrophysicists.

The construction of this telescope is a major development in the field of astrophysics, breaking new ground for scientists. The location, 2,400 meters under the sea, was chosen for the quality of the Mediterranean waters, which may enhance the telescope's ability to detect and capture neutrinos. These elementary particles have a low rate of interaction with dense matter and can travel long distances without being absorbed by interspatial objects, making neutrinos an ideal opportunity to access the mysteries of distant areas of the universe. The depths of the ocean offer an ideal environment for detecting these elusive particles; intercepting them while eliminating other particles. Scientists hope the analysis of these captured particles will allow them to recreate images of distant stars. For more information about this project, please visit antares.in2p3.fr. ■

Government Announces Massive Biofuels Investment

PRIME minister Dominique de Villepin announced on February 28 that the French government will invest 1 billion euros in the construction of ten new biofuel factories. The announcement of these new factories follows last year's tender to create six biofuel factories. By 2008, a total of sixteen biofuel and ethanol producing factories are projected to be completed in France.

On November 21, 2005, the government as well as professionals in the oil and automobile sectors adopted 15 measures to increase the development of biofuels to 5.75 percent in 2008.

In 2005, 500,000 tons (400,000 tons of biodiesel and 100,000 tons of ethanol) out of the total 40 million tons of fuel consumed were biofuels. The goals outlined for 2008 would increase biofuel consumption to three million tons, 2.2 million of which will be biodiesel. By 2015, the government hopes to increase biofuels to 10 percent of all fuels consumed in France. ■

First Ruins of Gallic Village Discovered in North of France

INRAP, the largest archaeological research institute in France, announced that it discovered a village from the Gaul period during an archaeological dig on February 28. The village was discovered during an archaeological dig at Gif-sur-Yvette in the north of France by a team of 12 INRAP archaeologists, which has been probing the region since November 2005. The village, dated to about 600 B.C., is made up of approximately 15 wooden buildings, mostly homes as well as barns and stables.

The discovery of this ancient village is the first of its kind in the northern area of France and could provide much informa-

FRENCH MAP PORTAL SITE COMING SOON

A bird's eye view of Hendaye in southwestern France

Looking for the perfect mountain for a weekend hike in France? Or just the nearest post office? Géoportail, the new cyber map service soon to be launched by France's Institut Géographique National, will allow users to do just that with a click of their mouse. Starting in June 2006, viewers will be able to survey a two-dimensional map of France—a version of Google Earth *à la française*. The map will be composed of more than 400,000 images with a high-quality resolution of 50 cm (Google Earth currently only covers approximately 20 percent of French territory at such a high resolution). All photos will be from the past five years, and the site should have 3D capabilities by September 2007. While the primary visualization services and most aerial images will be accessible free of charge, the site will also offer several fee-based services to finance IGN's activities. Learn more at www.ign.fr.

FRANCE ANNOUNCES PLAN FOR SUEZ-GAZ DE FRANCE MERGER

Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin announced plans for a merger between state-controlled Gaz de France (GDF) and the private utility company Suez Group on Saturday, February 25. The announcement was made following months of discussions to unite the companies' "close and complementary" activities in power production and distribution. The merger is expected to create an entity worth more than 72 billion euros.

OVERSEAS BUYING SPREE FOR FRENCH COMPANIES

In 2005, French acquisitions of foreign companies increased by 158 percent, while acquisitions of French companies by foreign companies decreased by 44 percent. Overall, French companies spent over \$72 billion in overseas acquisitions, with the biggest purchase being Pernod-Ricard's acquisition of Britain's Allied-Domecq for \$16.6 billion.

1 IN 7 WORK FOR FOREIGN FIRMS

A recently published study by INSEE reveals that one out of every seven French employees works for a foreign company, making the French economy more open to foreign capital than its main European neighbors. In Germany, Britain, and the Netherlands, the proportion of salaried workers employed by foreign companies hovers around one out of ten (in the U.S., it is one out of 20). The United States employs about 430,000 people in France and is France's biggest foreign investor.

PARIBAS ACQUIRES ITALIAN BANK

On February 3, the second largest French bank, BNP Paribas, declared that it was buying a 48 percent stake in the Italian bank Banca Nazionale del Lavoro (BNL) and is bidding to buy the rest. BNL is Italy's sixth largest bank and if government regulators approve the transaction, this will be the biggest acquisition for a French Bank. BNP Paribas was created in 2000 from the merger of Banque Nationale de Paris and Paribas, and has since spent more than \$15 billion in acquisitions.

SUD DE FRANCE LABEL

The Languedoc-Roussillon region and its wineries reached an agreement to create a common "Sud de France" label on February 22. The region also plans to create eight centers around the world to promote "Sud de France" products. Languedoc-Roussillon, France's primary wine-exporting region, is home to the biggest vineyards in the world, which produce about 11.5 million hectoliters of wine every year.

FRANCE BOASTS LONGEST LIFESPAN

In February, the *Epidemiology Weekly* newsletter announced that on average, people live longer in France than anywhere else in Europe (see also NFF 05.04). The mortality rate for males over the age of 64 in France is 8 percent less than the average for the European Union and 15 percent less for women. The researchers credit France's world-class health system and wholesome diet for this impressive feat.

FARMERS INSPIRE CONFIDENCE



In the February 26 issue of *Ouest France*, a survey by Ifop showed that more than three-fourths of those polled have confidence in French farmers. The study, which was published on the occasion of the National Agriculture Expo in Paris (picture above), showed that despite ongoing concerns about food safety, 81 percent of the French trust their farmers and 76 percent believe they are seriously concerned about the health of French consumers

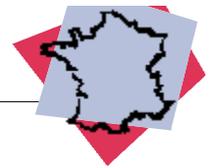
BOOMING BLOGGING

According to a recent study by Médiamétrie, France is home to the largest community of blogs in Europe and the second largest in the world, behind the United States. The same study concluded that one out of every ten citizens in France has created a blog. Skyblog alone, one of France's most popular blogging sites, reports an average of 10,000 to 15,000 new blog creations each day.

As in the United States, teenagers account for the bulk of these bloggers: eight out of ten French bloggers are between 13 and 24 years old.

MAKE YOUR OWN STAMP!

La Poste, France's national post office, is now offering customers the ability to order personalized stamps. After uploading a digital photo of their choice on www.laposte.fr, they can choose a border and see the final product before finalizing their order. La Poste offers 10 or 15 domestic stamps per sheet for a fee of \$12.30 or \$18.45. The personalized stamp is already proving a great success for La Poste: an average of 400 sheets are being printed daily, with many customers ordering them as gifts for birthdays or special occasions.



Equal Pay for Women Law Adopted

FRANCE adopted a law on February 23 to ensure equal pay for women in the private sector, just in time for International Women's Day on March 8. In France, women earn on average 20 percent less than their male counterparts, which is comparable to the difference found in most Western European countries (the gap is slightly higher in Italy and Spain, but slightly lower in Britain and Austria). The continued existence of such a gap clearly questions the principle of equality, and France has therefore decided to address the problem head-on.



NEW MISSING CHILD ALERT SYSTEM INSPIRED BY U.S.

A new alert system to help find kidnapped children has been set up in France following America's Amber Alert model (a.k.a. the Broadcast Emergency Response), which has enabled the safe return of 33 children since 1996. The new *Alerte Enlèvement* is a joint effort by several French ministries and the country's main broadcasters (six television stations, six radio stations, and three press agencies). The alert will interrupt programs every 15 minutes for a three-hour period with information and a photo of the abducted child. A toll-free number to report information will also be provided. For the alert to be used, five criteria must be met: the victim must be a child, the child must be officially kidnapped (not simply missing), the child's life must be in danger, specific information on the kidnapping—such as a description of the kidnapper or the car—must be available, and lastly, the parents' consent is needed. French authorities believe the alert will be used three to four times a year. To learn more, visit www.alerte-enlevement.gouv.fr.

The new law includes four main objectives. The first is to close the gender gap in earnings within five years by encouraging negotiations between companies and unions. The second objective is to help working mothers by reinforcing laws on maternity leave, making it easier to obtain day care for children, and giving help to small companies that need to temporarily fill in for women on maternity leave. France already has one of the world's most extensive day-care systems, as well as some of the most generous maternity-leave laws, which help explain why the country's fertility rate is the second highest in Europe (see NFF 06.01). The third goal is to increase women's access to professional and commercial bodies. Last but not least, the law aims to help women obtain professional training.

Though the law contains no coercive measures, the National Assembly will reconsider the issue in three years' time, and if progress is deemed insufficient, financial penalties for offending employers will be put in place. Accordingly, Catherine Vautrin, the minister for gender equality, declared, "This is a last warning before sanctions."

Going Green: The French Take Recycling Seriously

THE French are more environmentally conscious than ever before and have fully integrated recycling and other environmentally friendly practices into their daily lives, according to a recently released study by INSEE. The study, conducted in January, surveyed attitudes in France regarding recycling and the preservation of the environment. It found that 77



A Paris supermarket makes it easy for customers to sort their rubbish

percent of households interviewed recycle their glass and 73 percent recycle used batteries (up from 24 percent in 1998). Households today are also more likely to recycle paper and plastic products than in 1998 (71 percent versus 20 percent).

On average, eight out of ten households interviewed follow at least seven of the fourteen environmental practices considered in the study. These practices include the careful monitoring of electricity and water consumption (84 and 77 percent of households, respectively), using reusable tote bags for grocery shopping rather than plastic bags (63 percent), and taking energy savings into account when buying appliances (59 percent).

Proactive public policies have made it easier for the French to "act green." Since 2000, for example, Paris has installed special bins throughout the city, making it easier for residents to sort their trash so that it can be properly recycled.

To learn more, visit www.ifen.fr.

IT'S... SUPER MAMIE!!

On February 26, 81-year-old Marie-Madeleine Martinie (pictured) was elected Super Mamie France 2006. A resident of Lanester, Brittany, Martinie was among 16 candidates between the ages of 51 and 88 competing at the Forges-les-Eaux Casino in Normandy. Martinie, who has five children and 19 grandchildren, works as a freelance journalist, and has edited six books, including one children's novel. She is very involved in several Breton associations and hosts a radio show. The youngest candidate, Marie-Hélène Derouck, was elected Super Mamie of Solidarity. She has three children and six grandchildren, and works as a mother's helper. The competition was held under the auspices of the Interministerial Delegation to Families, to honor active grandmothers who are making a difference in their communities. March 5 marked Grandmother's Day in France. For more information, visit www.supermamie.com.





Eastwood Film Wins César: Best Foreign Film

THE 31ST annual presentation of the French Oscars, the Césars, was a success for Clint Eastwood, whose Oscar-winning film, *Million Dollar Baby*, received the award for best foreign film. Eastwood was unfortunately unable to attend the ceremony. Instead, British actor Hugh Grant accepted the award on his behalf. Grant was also recognized by the French National Academy of Arts and Techniques with an honorary César. He addressed the audience in French, thanking France for recognizing his contributions to cinema.



Scene from
Million Dollar Baby

The night's big winner was Jacques Audiard, director of *De Battre Mon Coeur S'est Arrêté* (The Beat That My Heart Skipped). His film received eight Césars, including Best Film and Best Director. Other award winners included Michel Bouquet, who won Best Actor for his role as former president François Mitterrand in *Promenade du Champ de Mars* and Nathalie Baye, named Best Actress for her performance in *Le Petit Lieutenant*.

To learn more, please visit www.lescesars-ducinema.com. For more about the movie, visit milliondollarbabymovie.warnerbros.com. 

Ingres Exhibit at the Louvre

THE Louvre Museum in Paris is hosting a major exhibition on French artist Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780-1867) for the first time in four decades. One hundred eighty drawings and paintings are on display from collections all over the world. This controversial artist has long been the subject of a heated debate among art historians: was he simply a reactionary, copying the classics, or was he a modernist visionary?

Ingres remained true to the tradition of his teacher, the great neoclassical painter Jacques-Louis David. Ingres's painting *Apotheosis of Homer* (1727), on display at the Louvre, expresses his admiration for the classical tradition, which depicted all the heroes of classicism in a much stricter format than that of his Romantic contemporaries.

To see Ingres as merely a neoclassical academic would be to give short shrift to the modernist aspect of his art. His love for fluid lines led to a more modern abstraction. This is evident in



La grande odalisque, 1814

the famous *Grande Odalisque* (1814), also on display at the exhibit, where the curve of the woman's body flows into the curve of the curtain in a harmony that creates an unrealistically elongated figure. These complexities would win him Picasso's admiration as well as that of other modern artists.

As visitors pass through the six chronological sections of the exhibit following the artistic progression in Ingres's 70-year career, the genius and controversy of this artist reveals itself in all its glory. For more information about the exhibit, which runs through May 15, visit www.louvre.fr. 

Dora Maar Expo at the Picasso Museum

LOVE and war are at the heart of the "Picasso-Dora Maar" exhibit currently on display at the Musée Picasso in Paris. The retrospective examines Picasso's work from 1935-1945, when the Spanish Civil War tore his native country apart.

Russian-born Maar, herself an artist, was Picasso's friend and companion during those ten years. A photographer and member of the Surrealist movement, she provided inspiration for Picasso. Her face appears in much of his work, especially in the looks of crying women and mythological creatures that Picasso painted.

Picasso and Maar shared similar artistic and political views, and Maar, who had at one point lived in Argentina, spoke Spanish with Picasso.

In 1936 and 1937, Picasso radicalized his



Dora Maar de face
(1936 - 1937)

paintings in reaction to the escalating conflict in Spain. He completed one of his most famous paintings, *Guernica*, a powerful depiction of the carnage of war in the town of Guernica, in 1937. Accompanying Picasso as he sketched and painted, Maar created the first photographic record of a work in progress.

Maar became Picasso's model in 1938 and 1939, posing for the two intensely colored series *Femmes assises* (Seated Women) and *Femmes au chapeau* (Women Wearing Hats). Maar's face conveys the sadness of the Spanish Civil War and Picasso's own concern with death.

The exhibit will run until May 22. For more information, visit www.musee-picasso.fr. 

NICE CARNIVAL!



The 2006 "Carnaval de Nice" was an overwhelming success, welcoming nearly 150,000 spectators from February 11 to 28. The carnival's theme was "The King of Dupes," and 11 countries participated in the three weeks of parades, shows, and merriment. The tradition of festivity in the southern city of Nice dates back to as early as 1294, when people enjoyed a brief period of indulgence and joviality before fasting 40 days for Lent. Ever since, the annual Carnival has been a favorite component of Nice's vibrant culture. To learn more, please visit www.nicecarnaval.com.

CEZANNE EXPO AT THE MUSEE D'ORSAY

As part of the "Year of Cézanne" celebration, the Musée d'Orsay will present an exhibition of the combined works of Paul Cézanne and Camille Pissarro between 1865 and 1885. Their strong friendship inspired many collaborative works during these two decades. The collection includes 60 works of art highlighting the similarities as well as the differences between the styles of Cézanne and Pissarro. Exciting displays include a series of portraits of each artist painted by the other, as well as several paintings of the same subject painted by both artists. The exhibit runs through May 28. For more information, please visit www.musee-orsay.fr.

BOOK FAIR CELEBRATES FRANCOPHONIE

The Paris Book Fair, held from March 17 to 22, was extended through October 9; the 100th anniversary of Leopold Sedar Senghor's birthday. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a stand at the Fair, at which the Association pour la diffusion de la pensée française (ADPF) is organizing a variety of meetings and lectures to present its latest publications. To celebrate Francophone cultures, the theme of this year's Fair, ADPF has published three booklets on Leopold Sedar Senghor, Assia Djebar, and Samuel Beckett, respectively, along with a publication listing authors and French language books published since 1990.



› Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York.

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Ready for a Prêt-à-Porter Retrospective

THE MUSEUM at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York is currently displaying the work of Lucien Lelong, the Paris-born designer who invented *prêt-à-porter*, or ready-to-wear fashions. The exhibit is the first to document the career of this groundbreaking designer and includes examples of Lelong daywear, sportswear and evening attire.

Born in 1889, Lelong was educated at the Hautes Etudes Commerciales in Paris, and his work reflects his business savvy. In 1934, Lelong introduced the first couture ready-to-wear line, Lucien Lelong Éditions. *Prêt-à-porter* clothes follow standard measurements (as opposed to made-to-measure clothes), thereby substantially lowering costs.

He was also the first to do "total look"



designing, which meant creating an empire with lines for lingerie, perfume, dresses and more. In the 1930s he launched Parfums Lelong, of which the most famous scents were "Passionnément" and "Indiscret." The brand still exists today, currently selling the much-loved "Indiscret."

Lelong's leadership was critical to the training of some of fashion's most celebrated designers. Hubert de Givenchy and Christian Dior worked in Lelong's workshop and learned from his understanding of Parisian elegance. His clientele was just as distinguished, and included actress Marlene Dietrich and the Duchess of Windsor.

The exhibit will run through April 15, and admission is free. For more information, visit www.fitnyc.edu/museum.

› Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York

Chicago Unveils First Ever Girodet Exhibit in U.S.

THE Art Institute of Chicago is presenting the first retrospective in the United States of the Romantic artist Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson (1767-1824). The exposition, called "Girodet: Romantic Rebel," comes from the Louvre Museum in Paris, where it attracted record crowds. One hundred works, on display until April 30, show the artist's transformation from the reigning neoclassical style of the time to romanticism.

The collection brings together an array of paintings of mythological subjects as well as depictions of Napoleon's military victories. Girodet painted during the French Revolution, a time of great political and social turmoil, which was in stark contrast to the strict and rational neoclassical art of the time—an inconsistency that Girodet would correct with his innovative art.

The neoclassical influence of his teacher, Jacques-Louis David, is evident, but Girodet's art is not without revolutionary changes. His painting *Endymion; Moonlight Effect* (1791), on display at the



Burial of Atala (1813)

exhibition, is a clear transformation of the neoclassical style, with a new emphasis placed on light as well as a mystery and irrationality absent in neoclassical paintings.

The exhibit also displays the famous *Burial of Atala* (1813) whose dream-like and almost erotic portrayal of a mythical subject is an obvious precursor to the more expressive and sensual art of romanticism. Like *Endymion*, Atala's body radiates with light.

Please visit www.artic.edu to learn more.

› Art Institute of Chicago

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