France and Cameroon: “Debt-for-Nature” Swap

France and Cameroon signed an unprecedented agreement on June 22, arranging a "debt-for-nature swap" that will serve two goals: reduce Cameroon’s foreign debt and help preserve the Congo River Basin rainforest.

France’s Debt Development Contract (C2D) will provide 100 percent debt relief for the loans France had previously contracted to Cameroon. Due to the reduced financial obligation, funds totaling 570 million euros, which would have otherwise been paid back to France, will now become available for Cameroon to invest in projects that will ultimately reduce poverty.

Over the next five years, Cameroon will use the funds to finance and develop four different sectors: education, health, infrastructure and natural resources. At the suggestion of French President Jacques Chirac, this is the first C2D agreement that allocates funds to protect natural resources and the environment. Approximately 20 million euros are earmarked specifically for preserving 7 percent of the Congo River Basin.

The funds will combat both the human encroachment on the forest and poverty in the area. The debt-for-nature swap consists of five components that seek to preserve the area’s biodiversity and promote sustainable, environmentally friendly farming. The agreement also increases funds for community forest resources and for boosting research capacity. Different departments in the French government will oversee specific aspects of the agreement and will work closely with Cameroon’s foreign service members to ensure the program’s success.

The Congo River Basin, which spans six African countries, is the world’s second largest rainforest and is home to some of the most pristine and endangered species in the world. The gorillas, leopards, chimpanzees and elephants in the nearly 580,000-square-mile forest are continually threatened by growing human populations that clear-cut the land for timber and agricultural purposes.

The debt-for-nature swap is yet another facet of France’s multi-pronged approach toward preserving the Congo Basin’s forest ecosystems, a high environmental priority for France and the international community. In 2002 France entered the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP), a collection of governments, intergovernmental organizations, and nongovernmental research groups and associations which encourage communication and coordination of sustainable development projects. France has served as the main facilitator for the 29-member partnership since 2005.

France is also a key participant in the Commission in Charge of Central African Forests (COMIFAC)’s initiative to obtain legislative protection of the rainforest, educate local populations about conservation and protect the delicate biodiversity throughout the region. France has earmarked 82 million euros for COMIFAC’s projects in the Congo Basin through 2008.

France’s commitment to environmental preservation in Africa has not gone without praise. The WWF, formerly known as the World Wildlife Fund, has lauded the debt-for-nature swap and has stated its hopes that other countries will follow France and Cameroon’s lead to pursue similar agreements.

France’s decision to forgive Cameroon’s debt and simultaneously secure the forest’s future sustainability will serve to improve the country’s infrastructure and civil society, diversify its economy and alleviate poverty.

79th AATF Convention: An Interactive Forum for French Teachers

More than 550 dedicated French teachers and professors from all over the United States gathered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to attend the annual American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) convention from July 5 through 8. Now in its 79th year, the prestigious conference offers an extensive program filled with educational seminars, distinguished speakers, and entertaining cultural events. This year’s theme was “Vues sur le monde francophone: cinéma et société.” Editor-in-Chief of The French Review, Christopher P. Pinet, played an instrumental role in organizing Minister Begag’s visit.

Renowned sociologist, author, and French Minister Delegate for the Promotion of Equal Opportunities, Azouz Begag, delivered the keynote speech during the morning to kick off the convention. The film version of Begag’s autobiographical novel, Le Gène du Chaouïs, was screened later that evening and was followed by a question and answer session. ”French society must be able to successfully identify its problems, without taboos, so that it can resolve them and embrace the diversity that makes it so rich,” stated Minister Begag. “We should not be afraid of recognizing differences. The government must not only ensure there is equal opportunity but must also convince everyone it exists, with national education offering all—with no exceptions—access to knowledge and skills regardless of social, economic or physical disadvantages.”

Later that afternoon, French Ambassador to the United States, Jean-David Levitte, addressed the welcoming luncheon, lauding the teachers for their commitment to promoting the French language and for helping to maintain excellent relations between the two countries.

The conference’s organizers sought to provide a forum for professional exchange among French teachers, present innovative materials and strategies for improving French instruction.

Convention participants also attended a series of classes and workshops that helped American teachers connect with the modern day language, current issues, and cultural norms of contemporary francophone societies.

Other conference highlights included the second Grande Dictée, which challenged participants’ spelling and grammar knowledge; three film screenings, a panel discussion on Franco-American cultural relations, an impressive concert entitled “French Impressions-A Jazz Cabaret,” and a wine and cheese reception offered by the French Embassy with 50 exhibitors from French-related organizations.

Executive Director of the AATF Jayne Abrate hoped that the conference would “…provide [teachers] with the skills and tools needed to promote French in their schools and communities and to realize the importance of promoting French at every opportunity.”

The American Association of Teachers of French, the largest organization of French teachers in the world, was founded in 1927. The AATF produces several publications, coordinates projects such as National French Week and pen pal programs, awards scholarships and grants, and provides classroom materials for teachers. For more information, please visit: www.frenchteachers.org.
France Takes Second Place in World Cup

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mid chants of "Allez les Bleus!" France ended its World Cup run with a heartbreaking loss to Italy in its second World Cup final in Berlin on July 9.

France briefly led the game 1-0 in the first half before Italy scored on a corner kick to tie the game. The two teams then remained tied throughout the second half and two overtime periods before penalty kicks decided the final outcome of the game. France missed one shot, which unfortunately was not enough to secure a victory. This game was the second World Cup final to be decided by penalty kicks.

The game also marked the final match for French soccer superstar and team captain Zinédine Zidane, who came out of retirement to join the French team at the start of the tournament. His comeback has entranced soccer fans worldwide and has proved that he is one of the most vibrant, creative forces on the field.

For his play in the tournament, Zidane won the Golden Ball award, which recognizes the tournament's most valuable player. Two other French players were nominated for the award during the 2006 World Cup final to be decided by penalty kicks.

Reflecting on France's overall performance during the World Cup, French President Jacques Chirac remarked that: "my initial feeling is one of both happiness and regret. I'm happy for the superb achievement of the French players, our French national team that behaved extraordinarily well up to the final. And I'm regretful that fate-and I really mean fate, luck-and it was truly a matter of luck-wasn't favorable. So there's no need for me to express my sympathy, I simply want to convey my admiration and my esteem. (...) My thoughts go out in particular to Zinédine Zidane who, I understand, was wearing the French jersey for the last time. I don't know what happened and why he was sanctioned, but I would like to express the great esteem I have for a man who embodied both the best values of the sport and the greatest human qualities imaginable. He brought honor to French sports and, quite simply, honor to France."

Six French players were veterans of the 1998 World Cup Champion team, and after a quick elimination in the 2002 World Cup, many dismissed the French team as being over the hill, too old and too tired to be competitive. However France has since silenced their critics and emerged as the surprise team in this year's World Cup.

France started slowly, tying Switzerland 0-0 and South Korea 1-1 before beating Togo 2-0 to qualify for the second round. France then defeated Spain, upset defending World Cup Champion Brazil and shut out Portugal to reach the final. In each match, France was the underdog, but their stunning defense stifled some of the most creative soccer players in the world and prevented them from scoring.

The World Cup, organized every four years by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), took place this year in soccer stadiums throughout Germany. After a year of qualifying tournaments, the World Cup began with 32 teams divided into eight groups of four. After three games against other teams in their group, the top two teams advance to the highly anticipated elimination rounds. Every four years the World Cup is a stunning display of national solidarity and international camaraderie. This year, teams hailed from all six continents and games were televised to every corner of the globe. The stadiums in Germany were often filled with spectators sporting their country's colors and singing their national anthem in an exuberant display of pride.

France-Oceania Summit Focuses on Building Partnerships

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aris hosted the Second France-Oceania Summit on June 26, with cooperation high on its agenda. France highlighted its commitment to the Oceanic region and encouraged stronger bonds between the Oceanic countries themselves on a variety of issues such as stability, sustainable development, environmental protection and security.

France maintains sovereignty over three territories known as the Oceanic overseas collectivities: French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and the Territory of the Wallis and Futuna Islands. Through this summit, France hoped to strengthen relations between its French territories and surrounding Oceanic countries. Another goal was to coordinate development aid--both direct aid from Australia and New Zealand to the Pacific region, as well as aid from France and Europe.

The Second France-Oceania Summit assessed the implementation of several initiatives discussed in the first summit, held in Papeete, Tahiti, in 2003. Some of these projects included protecting the coral reefs in the South Pacific; the French-Australian project for the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS; the Conference on Research for the Environment; and the PREPARE project, where New Zealand and France partnered with the World Health Organization to promote care for transmissible epidemic diseases.

France proposed to boost development aid to this region from 42 percent of its GNP to 50 percent by 2007. This increase will make France the largest G8 contributor to the region. Currently, France provides 19 percent of the aid generated by the European Community via the European Development Fund.

The Second France-Oceania Summit coincided with the opening of the Musée des Arts Premiers (www.quabransy.com) on June 20 in Paris--a museum which French President Jacques Chirac hopes will provide "a showcase for Europe in the immense richness of Oceanic cultures and the beauty of their traditions."

Delegates from Australia, The Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu participated in the summit, in addition to leaders from France's three overseas collectivities in the South Pacific and representatives from the European Union, the Pacific Community, and the Pacific Islands Forum.
Caucus Celebrates France and America

Several days of torrential downpour in Washington, D.C. could not dampen the spirit of the French-American Alliance. Over one hundred guests, including current and former Members of Congress, French Members of Parliament, congressional staff, French and American journalists, diplomats and representatives from French and American businesses, gathered at French Ambassador Jean-David Levitte’s residence to celebrate the Congressional French Caucus and the Former Members Committee on France of the U.S. Association of Former Members of Congress. Created in October 2003, the French Caucus was born with the mission of fostering an open dialogue and cross-cultural understanding between the U.S. and France—its oldest ally. After only a few years, the Congressional French Caucus is now comprised of 84 Members of Congress. The Former Members Committee on France was subsequently established, with the similar mission of recognizing the vital role that former Members of Congress can play in strengthening the bilateral relationship.

Highlighting the longstanding French-American friendship, Ambassador Levitte made reference to D-Day and the Battle of Yorktown. The latter, fought nearly 225 years ago, is one of the first instances of the close military cooperation that continues today, and exemplifies how France and the U.S. have worked together to develop the democratic ideals and principles of freedom that both countries today enjoy. Ambassador Levitte also paid special tribute to the WWII veterans in attendance, noting that without their sacrifice and the strong support of the United States, France would not be a free country living in a unified Europe.


Reemergence of DELF-DALF Exams

Since the suspension of French language proficiency exams in the U.S. in 2003, the French government has re-implemented the DELF (Diplôme d’études en langue française) and DALF (Diplôme approfondi de langue française) diplomas that assess the French-language skills of non-native French speakers. These exams, which correspond to the Council of Europe’s Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, exempt successful candidates from language entrance examinations at French universities.

Individuals also take the DELF and DALF exams for personal and professional reasons.

Between June 11 and 16, the first U.S. exam session was held in Portland, Oregon. Over 50 candidates participated. The Philadelphia and New York centers are expected to begin theirhold examinations in 2007 to test French-language skills. For more information about receiving a DELF or DALF diploma by the French Education Ministry, please visit: www.ciep.fr.

Lockheed Martin and Arianespace Team Up

Jean-Yves Le Gall, Chief Executive Officer of Arianespace, announced on June 20 that Arianespace, headquartered in Evry, France, will launch the VINASAT-1 satellite for Vietnam Posts and Telecommunications Corporation in 2008. VINASAT-1 will be built by Lockheed Martin Commercial Space Systems (LMCSS).

The first Vietnamese telecommunications satellite, VINASAT-1 will be launched on an Ariane V vehicle during the first half of 2008 from the Guiana Space Center, Europe’s Spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana.

VINASAT-1 is the 275th contract won by Arianespace since the company’s founding in March 1980 and the 53rd launch for a satellite operator in the Asia-Pacific region. VINASAT-1 is the 39th satellite platform built by Lockheed Martin to be launched by Arianespace.

The turnkey VINASAT-1 satellite system will be built at Lockheed Martin Commercial Space Systems’ plant in Newtown, Pennsylvania, using the A2100 platform. Weighing about 2,600 kg at launch, it will be positioned at 132 degrees east longitude, and will offer a design life exceeding 15 years. Fitted with 20 C- and Ku-band transponders, VINASAT-1 will provide radio, television and telephone transmission services for all of Vietnam and the Asia Pacific region from its geostationary orbit.

Ted Gavrilis, LMSCS president, stated that: “Lockheed Martin Commercial Space Systems is proud to join Arianespace’s highly professional launch team to ensure the successful launch of VINASAT-1. We are confident that the expertise and heritage we bring to the VINASAT-1 program, along with Arianespace’s outstanding launch service, will result in superior program execution for an on-time delivery of Vietnam’s first telecommunications spacecraft.”
On July 14, French citizens worldwide celebrated the 217th anniversary of the birth of the French Republic. Fireworks exploded over the Eiffel Tower and across France in a jubilant celebration, but on July 14, 1789, a different burst of patriotism changed the course of history.

In the summer of 1789, all was not well in France. A bad harvest the year before left the poor starvning. The political system, which concentrated power in the hands of a few corrupt aristocrats and the king, forced the working classes to bear the financial burden of the country's substantial national debt. No one was more outraged than the bourgeoisie — the new middle class which, while growing in number and in wealth, were denied the political power of the aristocracy.

Frustrated and impassioned, revolutionaries raided the armory at les Invalides on the morning of July 14. Armed and eager, they marched to the Bastille, a prison that had come to symbolize the hypocrisy and corruption of the regime. After a brief standoff, the citizens stormed the citadel and liberated all the prisoners. This event sparked the French Revolution. The revolutionaries were inspired by the ideals of the Enlightenment; "liberté, égalité and fraternité" became the rallying cry that spread throughout the country. The bravery of the French revolutionaries who risked their lives for freedom and democracy impressed people worldwide.

In France, the people—not the king—held the power.

One year later on July 14, the Fête de la Federation solidified the glory and new national character of the French Republic. Despite predicted thunderstorms, hundreds of thousands of citizens filled the Champs de Mars, which was then a field outside of Paris. The revelers drank, danced, sang and cheered as troops paraded throughout Paris. The Marquis de La Fayette, the French hero of the American War of Independence, took an oath to uphold the new constitution and protect the liberties it provided. The king also swore to uphold the new constitution decreed by the National Assembly. These busts of patriotism and solidarity signaled that the unity of the nation was no longer an abstract concept, but a reality.

Representatives from across Europe and France’s newest ally, the United States, gathered in Paris to celebrate the new Republic. The American delegation, led by navy hero John Paul Jones, was met with cheers from the French people. Grateful for French assistance during its own revolution 10 years earlier, the delegation presented France with an American flag, the first ever to fly outside of the United States. It represented the strong alliance between the two countries that would endure for many centuries to come.

**Bastille Day in the U.S. Today**

Nestled squarely in the middle of an asphalt intersection and towering not that nearly 4,000 miles away from Paris and more than 210 years later—storming the Bastille.

A little to the west and a farther down the Mississippi River, a man, powdered wig on his head, blue waistcoat unbuttoned, and a woman, rather ostentatiously dressed, are paraded down the street. Soon they will arrive in Soulard Park in St. Louis, and King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette will be ceremoniously beheaded.

It’s Bastille Day in the United States!

The popularity of Bastille Day festivals nationwide proves that the spirit of France, the most longstanding friend of the U.S., is still alive and thriving. Milwaukee’s Bastille Day Festival is the nation’s largest—nearly 200,000 people attended last year—and honors the culture of France, as well as the area’s French heritage (NFF, Vol. 06.07).

"It started out as a neighborhood celebration," Anne Harrison, director of l’Alliance Française de Milwaukee, said. "But since then, it has grown exponentially. What we try to do every year is to give it a little French flair."

Every year visitors flock to see the street performers, cabaret singers, cooking demonstrations, take French lessons, taste wine and, of course, sample French food. Last year, nearly 10,000 beignets—the festival’s specialty—were sold, and booths throughout the streets offer crêpes, coq au vin, and Cajun food.

Milwaukee is not alone in celebrating the living spirit of the French and American alliance. In Los Angeles, under the pine trees, teams roll small balls down the sand pitch at the annual pétanque tournament. The rules of the game, which is the most popular in southern France, are similar to lawn bowling. The winning team is the one that lands its balls closest to the marker.

And while teams plot pétanque strategy in Los Angeles, waiters carrying trays loaded with glasses of champagne speed walk—runners are disqualified—down Pennsylvania Avenue in downtown Washington, D.C. The waiter’s race, sponsored by Brasserie Les Halles, was the first of its kind in the United States when it began in 1974. It attracts anywhere from 60 to 100 participants and more than 1,000 spectators each year. The race will conclude the restaurant’s 11 days of festivities that celebrate the close relationship between the two capital cities.

The celebrations continue nationwide. Benjamin Franklin, the United State’s first diplomat to France, will be the guest of honor at festivities in Philadelphia; revelers will dance the night away in Atlanta, Houston and Seattle; and in San Francisco, where the mayor declared Bastille Day a citywide holiday, the bleu, blanc et le rouge will be raised alongside the American flag outside city hall.

**The History Bastille Day and How it is Celebrated Today**

La Marseillaise is sung throughout France in celebration of freedom. The French national anthem was composed in 1792, during the heat of the French Revolution by Claude-Joseph Rouget de Lisle, a captain in the French army. Given only 20 hours to compose a battle march that would lead troops to the front and his country to freedom, he quickly wrote the “Battle Song of the Army of the Rhine.” It was first sung in the street by the fédérés (republican troops) from Marseille upon arriving in Paris and soon became the bugle call of the Revolution. Its stirring refrain asked French citizens to take up arms against tyranny and fight for freedom. Even after the Revolution ended, the anthem’s meaning was not lost—it has been used worldwide as a hymn for liberty. The French Ministry of War adopted an official version of la Marseillaise as France’s national anthem in 1887.
FedEx and France Create Export Synergies

FRANCE and FedEx Express reached an agreement June 26 that will boost and expand trade and investment between French and American small- and medium-sized businesses by increasing access to export assistance networks.

The alliance between FedEx Express and the French Office of Economic and Commercial Affairs (FOECA) targets the occasional importer or exporter by providing them with opportunities to find international buyers and the training needed to enter new markets. Officials also hope that the agreement will increase the nearly $1 billion in commercial and financial transactions that pass between these two countries daily.

FedEx’s role in the exchange will be to promote FOECA’s export assistance network already present in six cities in the United States—Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, New York, San Francisco and Washington, D.C. The network consists of 90 experts who monitor the U.S. market, provide business contacts and organize buyer meetings with U.S. companies who want to do business in France. FOECA also provides French businesses with U.S. contacts and helps businesses invest when necessary to increase their customer base.

“This initiative is a boon for small- and medium-sized businesses,” said Jean-François Boittin, Minister Counselor for Economic and Commercial Affairs at the French Embassy in the United States.

International Business Partnerships Celebrated

MEMBERS of the network “Entreprises et Développement” met on June 19 at the International Conference Center in Paris to recognize and celebrate the success of international business partnerships and to distribute awards. The program focuses on encouraging industrial partnerships between countries. It was launched 10 years ago with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of the Center for the Development of Enterprise in Brussels. Two hundred and fifty business relationships have been formed in a variety of sectors, including electronics, agribusiness, and paper goods.

These successful partnerships have resulted in the transfer of technology between partners and strategic access to new markets, allowing enterprises to grow in ways that would be otherwise difficult.

Brigitte Girardin, Minister Delegate for Cooperation, for Development and Francophony, and Minister Delegate for Industry François Loos presided over the event. Also present were Senegalese Minister of Industry and the Arts, Bineta-Samb Bâ and the Tunisian Secretary of Development and International Cooperation, Khélil Lajimi.

Awards were presented to seven partnerships that have been particularly successful, including three pairs from North Africa and four from Africa and the Caribbean.

Smart Car Soon To Hit U.S. Market

THE smart car, which can be conveniently parked nose-in without protruding into traffic, will hit U.S. pavement in 2008, announced DaimlerChrysler Chairman Dieter Zetsche on June 28.

DaimlerChrysler executives have many reasons to be optimistic about sales of the smart fortwo in the United States. “With gas hovering around $3 a gallon and finding a parking place like finding the Holy Grail, the time is right for ‘Smart,’” Zetsche said.

According to Smart Car of America, the smart car is made with the cooperation of France, Germany, and Switzerland. Using a combination of German and Swiss technology, the parts are assembled at the Smartville Energy Center in Hambach, France. France provides one of the largest markets for the “petite vehicle,” along with Germany and the United Kingdom. Smart was first introduced in 1998 and has since sold 750,000 cars in 36 countries. The fortwo launched in Canada in 2004 and last year sold 4,000 cars there—doubling its initial predictions.

Measuring 8.23 feet from bumper to bumper, the tiny car gets 40 miles per gallon in the city and up to 60 miles per gallon on the highway, boasting significantly lower emissions than other cars, Zetsche said. The fortwo will sell for around $15,000 and will be packed with desirable safety features such as air bags, anti-lock brakes, and electronic stability control.

The company will team up with Roger Penske’s United Auto Group, which will name between 30 and 50 dealers to sell the car. These smart dealerships will be located primarily in large cities and vacation retreats throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico, announced Penske. The company plans to offer three models: a coupe, a convertible, and a yet-to-be-named model. Smart cars recently caught the eye of moviegoers in the films “The Da Vinci Code” and “The Pink Panther,” and in 2008 they are sure to catch the eye of the American motorist.
**LE MANS TAKES PRO A BASKETBALL TITLE**

Les Manceaux emerged victorious from the French Pro A basketball championships on June 18, beating Nancy in the final at the Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy. It is their first league title since 1982 and brings their total to four. The win earned Le Mans a boost in rankings and a pass to Euroleague, the most prestigious of European competitions, for the years 2006 through 2009. At the close of the regular season Le Mans was on a roll, successively triumphing over Bourg-en-Bresse, Villeurbanne, and Pau-Orthez in the play-offs. In the final against Nancy the score was 43-44 at half time, but Le Mans finished strong, winning 93-88. Le Mans has now passed Pau-Orthez in the rankings and will play against them next season in Euroleague.

**FRANCE TAKES WORLD TITLE IN U21 RUGBY**

France took the under-21 rugby title, beating defending champion, South Africa, 24-13 on June 25. Flyhalf Lionel Beauxis led his team to victory, making France the first team from the northern hemisphere ever to win the under-21 championship. France was ahead 15-3 at halftime and Beauxis increased France’s lead to 21-6 in the final moments of the game. With only 10 minutes to go, the crowd of 13,000 was already celebrating France’s first under-21 world rugby crown.

"We knew we could beat South Africa after our first match against them and we made fewer errors this time," team captain Loic Jacquet told reporters. "Even if we scored through penalties," said Beauxis, "the principle was still to win." The flyhalf helped his team out by booting six penalties and two drop goals. After the game he complimented his teammates, saying, "We controlled the ball really well and a lot of the credit for that goes to the forwards."

**FRANCE UNVEILS GEO-PORTAL WEBSITE**

Detailed satellite images of France and French territories are now available online at a French government Web site, Geoportal.fr, a joint project of the National Geographic Institute and the Office of Geological and Mineral Research, was unveiled on June 24. France has said that the portal offers more detailed images of its territory than Google Earth’s similar program. During a presentation of the new site, French President Jacques Chirac emphasized the need for such a Web site in order to remain on the cutting edge of modern technology.

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**Preemptive Measures for Forest Fires**

**FIRE officials in southern France are preparing for another dry summer.** With nearly 5,000 acres already in flames, firefighters are taking preventative measures to avoid any further devastation. France’s national meteorological service released its summer drought predictions, and listed most of the southern region as “very vulnerable” to extreme dry conditions. "The conditions of the vegetation in the region are similar to what one would find mid-July,” said Prefect Christian Frémont, of Défense Sud. Forest fire season started early this year due to a severe shortage of rain since May. For many, this year’s drought brings back memories of the 2003 heat wave, when fire razed 148,263 acres. About 11 million acres of Mediterranean forest will be under high surveillance this summer. Sub-prefect Paul Boulvais recalled that, on average, fire claims 44,478 acres annually.

Officials will continue to take pre-emptive measures throughout the duration of the season. Marseille firefighters have been combating practice fires in a simulated valley covered with pine needles and brush. The simulation also provided an opportunity to test a new computer program which gives a precise layout of afflicted areas, including the location of potential hazards and nearby water sources. Some 8,100 firefighters, as well as 23 water-dropping aircrafts and 25,000 volunteers will be on hand to quickly intervene should any fires develop.

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**MySpace Opens Up to French Blog Scene**

**MYSPACE social networking Web site was launched on June 20 to compete with national blog sites in France. This trendy U.S.-imported site allows its youthful target audience to share photos, music and videos online. In addition to these special features, MySpace users can create personal profiles and communicate with friends online through forums and messages.**

With 86 million users in the United States, MySpace is the second most-frequently visited Web site after Yahoo and has more visitors than Google’s search engine each day. MySpace has become an online community for its American users and gives the French a chance to share photos, music and videos online. In addition to these special features, MySpace users can create personal profiles and communicate with friends online through forums and messages.

Although popular blogging sites such as Skyrock maintain a strong presence in the French market, American Web sites have met with great success in France. Microsoft, Google and Yahoo are well-liked among French web-surfers. Despite the leading U.S. social networking site faces stiff competition from other French sites, namely Meetic and Superlo, but MySpace founders are confident that the site will warm the hearts of French users.

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**Global Horticulture Initiative to Aid Developing Countries**

**A NEW project of the French Agricultural Research and Center for International Development (CIRAD) will address research shortcomings in the field of horticulture. The Global Horticulture Initiative was inaugurated at a conference held in Montpellier on March 22, 23, and 24 with the cooperation of the International Society for Horticultural Science and the World Vegetable Center. Agropolis International also lent its support.**

At the conference, participants outlined four areas of research: health issues, urban development, marketing, and the environment. The organizers of the Global Horticulture Initiative hope that the combined knowledge of horticultural experts will be helpful to the many individuals in the developing world that depend on agriculture for a living. The next step is to appoint the executive committee and to determine the location of its permanent office. The next meeting will take place in August in Seoul, South Korea, but the final location will most likely be in a developing country."
2006 is the 200th anniversary of the world-famous monument, the Arc de Triomphe.

Construction of the massive arch began on August 15, 1806. The project was commissioned by Napoleon as a tribute to the victories of the French army. Inspired by Roman antiquity, the arch measures 50 meters high and 45 meters wide, and was carved out of a block of stone weighing over 70,000 tons. It is crowned by an ornate frieze of stone weighing over 70,000 tons.

In addition to serving as a recognizable symbol of French national identity, the arch also honors the missing and unidentified soldiers who gave their lives for France. After WWI, the French Parliament made the decision to honor an unknown war-hero, a soldier whose body could not be identified. Since that time, visitors have come not only to marvel at the grandiose monument but also to pay their respects at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Gabriel Boissy was a journalist and literary critic in the early 1900’s. It was his idea to light a flame of remembrance, a flame that would burn constantly nearby the tomb. Then Minister of War André Maginot was the first to light it in 1923. These days the calendar is made far in advance and every evening the flame is rekindled at 6:30p.m. Different parties take turns filling this role, including veterans and organizations.

There are approximately 150 monuments in France’s capital that are open to the public and the arch is one of the most popular. Together with the Eiffel Tower, it is the most frequently visited attraction in Paris.

Tour de France Changes Route

COMPETITORS in the world’s most famous bicycle race are taking a new route in this year’s Tour de France. Off to a strong start on July 1, the cyclists will ride counter-clockwise around the country before finishing in Paris on July 23.

The start and finish of the new course are the same as last year. Departing from the historic town of Strasbourg, the course makes its way north to Valençay before heading south to Lorient. From Lorient the path winds through the beautiful region of southern France and the Pyrenees. Next, it climbs north again and east before taking the historic ride down the Champs-Elysées to the finish line. The countries visited along the route include Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Spain. The total distance is 3,639 km.

Experts are saying that the 93rd edition of the Tour could be the most unpredictable in years, without the presence of seven-time champion, Lance Armstrong. The new course presents many challenges for competitors, including a final time trial on a hilly 56-km stage between Le Creusot and Montceau-les-Mines. Jean-Marie Leblanc, the Tour director, has called it "a classic course.”

2006 Named “Year of Cézanne”

O NE hundred years after the death of postimpressionist master Paul Cézanne in 1906, several events commemorate his enduring legacy. Minister of Culture and Communication Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres inaugurated 2006 as the "Year of Cézanne" in early January.

The city of Aix-en-Provence, the Communauté d’Agglomération du Pays d’Aix, and the Ministry of Culture and Communication have organized other attractions to celebrate the painter, such as an outdoor tour that invites visitors to walk “in the steps of Cézanne.” The city property at Jas de Bouffan, which figures so prominently in Cézanne’s creations, will be open to the public for the first time.

Cézanne often worked in solitude, far from the packed salons and ateliers of Paris. He preferred Provence’s quiet serenity to the city bustle and rarely held exhibitions in his lifetime.

Les grandes baigneuses, Cézanne, 1894-1905

The city of Aix-en-Provence has organized other events to celebrate the painter’s life and works.

The horses and their director, Bartabas, the founder of the Académie équestre de Versailles, are renowned worldwide for their choreographed trots and gallops. Their light-hearted presentation served as the perfect beginning to the music festival that will see performances by Sting, Franz Ferdinand and the Lyon National Orchestra, as well as a one-woman show featuring actress Fanny Ardant. The festival began in 1946, and every year since, there have been concerts, theatrical performances, dance recitals and film screenings in Lyon’s two ancient Roman amphitheaters. More than 100,000 people are expected to attend the festival this year.

NEW MEANING FOR “HORSE-AROUND”

The sound of horses, stomping per-
"Monet in Normandy" Exhibit Held in San Francisco

For many art lovers, French painters define the impressionist movement. And for that same group of art connoisseurs, Claude Monet and his water lilies, haystacks and sweeping seascapes, are the perfect embodiment of impressionism. A new exhibit, running through September 17 at the Legion of Honor in San Francisco (www.monetinnor-mandy.org), examines Monet’s long fascination with the countryside of Normandy.

"Monet in Normandy" showcases 53 paintings made between 1866 and the mid-1920s and gathered from nearly 40 museums and private collections worldwide.

Monet grew up surrounded by the chalky cliffs, long stretches of beaches and busy seaports of the coastal region in Northern France.

The Guthrie Complex in Minneapolis Opens to Public

The line extended for almost four blocks down South 2nd Street at the opening of the new Guthrie in Minneapolis on June 25. The 285,000-square foot complex designed by French architect Jean Nouvel has replaced the old Vineland Place facility to become what is considered to be the premier resident theater in the country. A Guthrie press release described the new location among the industrial and agrarian buildings that line the Mississippi River as an "architectural landmark that celebrates architecture and the arts so carefully," said Guthrie Artistic Director Joe Dowling.

"Nouvel's design immediately identifies the building as a theater, a place of mystery, and a place where poetry mingles with image. It is a striking example of how Nouvel links architecture and the arts so carefully," said Guthrie Artistic Director Joe Dowling. Nouvel made a name for himself in architecture with his 1987 creations, the Nemausus residential building, the Arab World Institute in Paris as well as the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris. The new Guthrie is his first major North American project. For more information or to purchase tickets online, please visit www.guthrietheater.org.