50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome

Celebrations reverberated throughout the 27 member states of the European Union March 24-25 as Europe celebrated half a century of a united Europe upon the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, the agreement that founded the European Economic Community—the forerunner of the EU. The festivities commenced with EU leaders congregating in Berlin over the weekend to issue a political declaration setting out Europe’s values and ambitions for the future. The two-page “Berlin Declaration” was signed March 25 and praised achievements made over the past 50 years, such as peace and stability in Europe as well as the introduction of the Euro and border-free travel.

Thousands of revelers of all ages gathered in Berlin to celebrate the event. Celebrations ranged from a special late-night opening of the city’s museums to all-night parties at Berlin’s discos. Over 30 clubs and 100 DJ’s and food tents set up along Berlin’s historic Unter den Linden Boulevard. Fireworks Sunday night marked the conclusion of the festivities.

Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin Visits U.S.

French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin visited the United States March 15-16. He began his two-day tour in New York by meeting U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. Together, they addressed the main international issues in which France is particularly active within a U.N. framework, be it Côte d’Ivoire, Lebanon or Kosovo. Speaking to the media after the meeting, Dominique de Villepin expressed France’s determination on adopting rapidly a new U.N. resolution on Iran. Villepin has been a frequent visitor to the U.N., first as a Foreign Minister and even since he became Prime Minister in 2005.

On the same day, the French Prime Minister met with former President Bill Clinton. Later that night, he appeared as a guest on the PBS TV program, “The Charlie Rose Show,” where he discussed a variety of subjects within the realm of international relations. During the hour-long interview, the French Prime Minister characterized U.S.-French relations on the international scene: “I think that if you [analyze] all the different fields in which we work together—counter-terrorism, Iran, Lebanon, Africa—we have been working very well together. And I think that [Secretary of State] Condoleezza Rice is right when she says that the relationship between France and the U.S. is much better in practice than in theory; […] As far as cooperation is concerned, we work very closely and well together.” Proving himself very knowledgeable about France and the Prime Minister, who lived several years himself in the U.S., Charlie Rose explored various other issues during the interview with Prime Minister de Villepin, ranging from French foreign policy and the upcoming French elections, to the war in Iraq and the situation in Darfur. Finally, Dominique de Villepin met in New York with Amartya Sen, Nobel prize laureate for Economics.

The next day, the prime minister traveled to Boston to speak at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government about international relations, French-American relations and the changing world order.

The French prime minister focused on the responsibility of the United States, France, and Europe in the world, calling for the regional powers to assume their roles and tackle shared challenges abroad. “Diversity is key to society; balance is key to society. No people will tolerate growing inequalities in the long term,” he said. “The United States, France, and Europe have more duties than others do,” noting that “we share fundamental values. Our destinies are linked, our friendship is profound,” de Villepin declared.

The prime minister’s discussion culminated by citing the “particular responsibility” of the United States and Europe to craft “lasting solutions to the challenges of our time. Let us gain strength from the ties of friendship between our two nations,” he declared, and “together, let’s act as builders to move toward greater peace and justice.”

Referencing the 50th anniversary of the European Union, Mr. de Villepin also called upon Europe to “re-establish a true common project and to adopt a new founding text” and “to assume its role as a military power.” The role of the U.S., he asserted, is to “exert renewed influence, share its demands for democracy with more and more countries. […] The United States’ true strength […] is its ability to embody progress and modernity; it is its mastery of cutting-edge technologies; it is the attractiveness of its land and its culture to the rest of the world.”
En bref

FRENCH FIGURE SKATER TAKES HOME GOLD

Frenchman Brian Joubret, 22, skated to victory March 23 (picture on left), becoming France’s first men’s World Champion since Alain Calmat in 1965. “I was so nervous,” Joubret said following his victory. “I didn’t want to finish second. When I got to the podium it felt great.” In addition to his most recently acquired title at the 2007 World Championships, the French figure skater claimed victory at the European Figure Skating Championships in both 2004 and 2007. He is also the five-time winner of the French National Championships and finished sixth overall at last year’s Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy. Joubret has been skating since the age of four and is especially known for his jumping abilities.

500TH ANNIVERSARY OF NAMING OF AMERICA

Five hundred years ago this April 25, the German cartographer Martin Van Waldseemüller published in the French the geographic naming of America500. Five centuries later, cities throughout the world are commemorating the geographic naming of America launched by the initiative America500, which will take place within the context of World Geography Month. The map often referred to as America’s Birth Certificate, presents us a key as a classification tool to unlock human knowledge based on astronomy, geography, climate-botany and transportation routes for cultural settlement, “according to America500 director Alain Le Guellec. In addition to recognizing Waldseemüller’s contributions, America500, through several cultural and educational endeavors, hopes to re-ignite the Spirit of Explorers in youth, by continuing the cartographer’s vision of awakening curiosity in students for generations to come. For more information, please visit WhoNamedAmerica.com.

France’s TGV Breaking New Ground and New Records

France’s high-speed train, the TGV, has been the subject of headlines lately with the ground-breaking news of the train’s expansion into Eastern France and beyond, as well as its renewed title for the world’s fastest conventional train.

French President Jacques Chirac inaugurated the TGV’s new rail track, the most recent addition to France’s network of high-speed trains, in a ceremony March 15. With trains moving at the unparalleled speed of 200 mph, France’s fastest rail link to date will transport, starting June 10, passengers from Paris to Strasbourg in a mere two hours and 20 minutes, reducing traveling time between the two cities in half. French President Jacques Chirac called the service a “major industrial success” which demonstrated “French research, development and innovation,” adding that “the formation of a national network of rail lines was essential in order to take up the environmental challenges.”

The TGV-Est will offer direct links between Paris and 21 city-center stations throughout eastern France. It will also link the capital to ten cross-border destinations. The $3.3 billion project was launched in 2002 with the support of over a dozen financial partners, including the governments of France and Luxembourg. An additional 62 miles of track is planned to be added by 2015. In France, the TGV network of trains covers a total of 5,000 miles and average a speed of 137 mph. There are, as well, 1,000 miles of dedicated tracks operated at a speed of 200 mph.

TGV-Est director Alain Le Guellec stated that some 37 million Europeans will be added to the 100 million already traveling every year on TGV trains. He also predicted that the opening would lead to an increase in rail traffic, up to 65 percent by 2011, half of which is expected to come from transfers from air to rail.

The TGV not only broke new ground with the recent addition to its network, it also shattered the world speed record for conventional trains on April 3, reaching 357.2 mph. An experimental version of the TGV, the V150 manufactured by Alstom and equipped with two supercharged, 25,000-horsepower engines and extra-large wheels, broke the previous world record also established by the TGV in 1990. The TGV’s technology now not only promises to offer more destinations throughout Europe at faster speeds, but is also, as President Chirac characterizes: “Economically efficient and respectful of the environment, the TGV is a major asset in efforts to ensure sustainable development in transport.”

France Celebrates Bicentennial of Grand Sanhédrin

France celebrated the bicentennial of the creation of the Grand Sanhédrin, the Jewish high court that convened at the request of Napoleon I in 1807 in order to organize the religious life of Jews in France. In Jewish tradition, “Sanhédrin” means “sitting together” or “council” and refers to an assembly of judges required in every city.

A ceremony March 11 at the Hôtel de Ville in Paris kicked off the commemorative activities, which included the opening of an exhibition honoring 2,000 years of Jewish history in France. Present at the event were Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoë and Defense Minister Michèle-Alliot-Marie as well as over 1,000 members of the Jewish community. “Two centuries later, no answers of the Grand Sanhédrin have been refuted: the pact between the Jews and the French state has been entirely respected,” said Joël Mergui, the president of the Consistory of Paris. “The Jews who live in France are perfectly integrated and are defenders of the country.” For more information, please visit www.diplomatic.gouv.fr.

U.S. and E.U. "Open the Skies" With Air Travel Agreement

European Union ministers and the U.S. have successfully brokered a deal to be signed later this month that will liberalize transatlantic air travel by March 2008. The “open skies” agreement, unanimously approved by European Union transport ministers, will reduce aviation restrictions between the U.S. and Europe.

In addition to allowing further foreign investment in airline companies, U.S. and European flights will now be able to travel to more cities. Virgin Atlantic chairman, Richard Branson, lauded the agreement, proclaiming it “a good day for the traveler, as consumers should be able to fly from any city to any city between the E.U. and U.S.” The new routes will increase airline passengers and could generate up to 80,000 new jobs, according to E.U. estimates. The E.U. projects that the increased competition between airlines will concurrently bring better overall services and a potential $16 billion in savings for passengers.

Vice President of the European Commission Jacques Barrot, welcomed the support of the European ministers and called the decision one “of great political and economic importance.” Barrot also expressed confidence that the progress with “open skies” would deliver an “even closer cooperation between the two sides and a healthier air transport industry in general, not just across the Atlantic, but in due course with other countries all over the world.”
US Delegation Travels to France To Explore Geographic Indicators

A group of high-level representatives of agriculture from four American states traveled to France as part of a special delegation on “geographical indicators” (GI) for agricultural products (a GI refers to such designations as Champagne, Cognac, Chablis, Beaufort cheese, etc…). The four-day “Country Tour,” March 9 to 12, stressed the role of GIs in promoting rural development and protecting agricultural know-how through quality assurance and product marketing. The delegation included Mr. Greg Ibach (Nebraska), Mr. Larry Gabriel (South Dakota), Mr. Todd Staples (Texas) and Mr. Roger Allbee (Vermont).

Delegates began their visit in the Champagne region of France (northeast), where they spoke with officials from the Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne (CIVC: the Champagne GI Board) about the bright relationship between a GI and numerous trademarks, and U.S. General Consul in Bordeaux, Mr. J. Brinton Rowdybush. They also visited vineyards and wine cellars where they were able to observe and discuss benefits resulting from GI (the Champagne appellation) with local producers.

The tour then continued to Paris where delegates discussed issues with French Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dominique Busseureau, and leaders of French farmers associations. They also attended the Salon International de l’Agriculture (SIA: International Agriculture Show), Europe’s largest and best-known agricultural show.

The last segment of the “Country Tour” took place in the Charentes region where the delegation met with representatives from the Bureau of Cognac (BNIC: Bureau National Interprofessionnel du Cognac), as well as oyster and potato farmers who demonstrated how a GI can add value to the products and help preserve family farms.

Geographic indicators derive from a legal concept different from trademarks: they identify agricultural products as being from a certain territory, region or locality of a state (known as “terroir” in French), in which case a given trait or quality of the product can be attributed essentially to its geographic origins, a concept that is proven to add value to products and to stimulate rural development. France uses geographic indicators for about 15 percent of its total agricultural products, notably for wine, cheese, meats, fish and produce.

Film Festival Brings France to Hollywood

Lights, wine, cheese, action! Comedies, dramas, box office blockbusters, and independent films from the past year will soon be featured in Hollywood’s French film celebration April 16 through 22. The event, “City of Lights, City of Angels” (COL-COA), is the entertainment capital’s largest film festival devoted exclusively to French cinema, with over 9,000 attendees last year.

There is an exciting lineup of assorted films in this year’s program. Among the reeds to roll will be “La Môme (La Vie en Rose),” “Ne le dis à personne (Tell No One),” “Changement d’adresse (Change of Address),” “Ma pauvre foi (Bad Faith),” “Hors de prix (Priceless),” “Paris, je t’aime” and “La Raison du plus faible (The Right of the Weakest).” Before the screenings, participants will for the first time, have the opportunity to attend a series of panel discussions, dubbed “Happy Hour Talks,” complete with delectable wine and savory cheese tastings.

In addition to screening French cinematic masterpieces, COL-COA serves as a resource for various professionals within the film industry, from producers and directors to agents and writers, who may be searching for new talent or ideas.

Since 1996, The Franco-American Cultural Fund, a partnership between several organizations, has sponsored COL-COA to encourage “cultural exchange between [the United States and France] through the magic of film.”

For more information, please visit: www.colcoa.org.

“Priceless,” featuring Audrey Tautou will be screened
Presidential Elections in France

As France enters into its campaign season, the whole country is abuzz with talk of the presidential elections scheduled to take place April 22 and May 6. As Jacques Chirac, who has held the position of Président de la République since 1995, prepares to leave office, France braces for a month of exhilarating political activity and debate.

Presidential elections in France take place every five years. The presidential campaign schedule follows a specific but flexible deadline, which states that the election must be held no less than 20 days and no more than 35 days before the expiry of the term of the incumbent President.

Getting Started: How to Become Recognized as a Candidate

On February 22, Le Journal Officiel de la République Française published a decree convocating the election, officially heralding France into the presidential season. Almost a month later, the Constitutional Council provided a list of 12 candidates to the Journal Officiel who meet certain preliminary requirements and have successfully carried out 2 procedures. The Journal Officiel, in turn, published the list on March 19 — a candidate cannot be recognized until his or her name has been published in the Journal Officiel. So how does one get to this stage?

To begin with, all candidates must be French citizens (but they can be born abroad), at least 23 years of age, registered voters and exercise moral dignity. Having met these requirements, a prospective candidate must gather the signatures of 500 elected representatives, from at least 30 different Departments or Overseas Territories, without surpassing 50 signatures from a single Department or Territory. Referred to as “presentation of the candidates,” the purpose of this measure is to allow only the most serious candidates to proceed to the first round of voting. Candidates must also submit a sworn statement with details of all their property and personal assets, (two months at the earliest and a month at the latest before the expiry of term of office of the current President) to the Constitutional Council and commit to submitting another statement at the end of their term of office so as to ensure greater transparency in political life. After having checked whether all the admissibility requirements are fulfilled, the Constitutional Council establishes a list of candidates. The Journal Officiel then publishes it at least 15 days before the first ballot.

A Majority Voting System

In order to ensure that a president always obtains the majority of the vote, France uses a two-ballot majority poll with the possibility for two rounds of elections in the event that a majority during the first round has not been reached. If no individual receives the majority of the vote in the first round, the top two candidates will compete in a second round to be held the second Sunday following the first ballot. This year, the first round of elections will take place in France April 22. If a candidate receives the majority of the vote, he or she will be announced as the winner by April 25. Should no person receive a majority vote, the top two contenders will compete in a second round of voting to be held May 6. Candidates are elected for a term of five years.

Campaigning à la française

Political hopefuls look to public venues as well as popular media, including the press, radio, television, and the Internet (blogs in particular: see article on page 6) to present their political platform to the public. In general, however, campaigning in France follows a guideline of rules designed to ensure equal press coverage among the candidates. This year the official campaign season will begin April 9 and end April 21. In order to guarantee that candidates receive equal treatment, the Conseil supérieur de l’audiovisuel, the public body which regulates the broadcast of media, ensures that all candidates receive an equivalent amount of broadcasting time on each radio station and television channel. Additionally, no political advertising is allowed on commercial broadcasts four months before the official campaign opens. In the weeks preceding a presidential election, each voter receives an electoral envelope containing all the candidates’ statements and manifestos. The distribution of candidates’ proposals is an initiative to diminish the influence of opinion polls on voters. Moreover, French law prohibits findings and statistics from public opinion polls from being published the week before the first ballot. There are several measures that govern presidential campaign financing. A presidential election campaign can be financed in two ways, either publicly or privately. Private funding is acquired chiefly from political parties in addition to the donations of private individuals. Contributions from business were banned in 1995. Donations from private individuals are limited to 4, 574 euros and all donations equal to or over 152.50 euros must be made by check. Total spending on presidential elections is capped at 13.7 million euros for candidates on the first ballot and 18.3 million euros for those on the second ballot. A certain percentage of campaign expenses are also reimbursed. They account for 5% of the limit on spending for all candidates and since 2001, 50% of the limit for those who obtained over 5% of votes on the first ballot. This reimbursement may not be greater than the spending the candidates report.

The Institutional Act of March 11, 1988 on the financial transparency of political life, requires each candidate to maintain campaign accounts that specifically relate to the origin of their income and the nature of their spending. They are not allowed to personally manage their accounts and must appoint a financial trustee. Parties and committees that are formed to support the various candidates are also required to submit their campaign accounts. In the two months following the second ballot, the candidate’s accounts must be submitted to the Constitutional Council so that it can be confirmed that their financial documents are in order. Only the elected candidate’s statement is published by the Constitutional Council following the closing of the election. These provisions are designed to make politics fairer by limiting expenditures and they strive as well to guarantee a degree of equity among candidates. If a candidate is found in violation of any of these regulations, criminal and financial penalties could occur.

For French nationals who are interested in voting procedures outside of France, please visit:
www.consulfrance-washington.org
French Wine Gaining Increasing Market Share in U.S.

The sale of French wine has increased faster than the import trade of the global market: 4 times the market growth in volume and 2 times in value. Several factors contributed to the current prosperity of France’s market, including the shift in consumer’s attitudes towards the importance of caliber and quality of the wine that they wish to purchase. Buyers enjoyed the sophisticated grade of Bordeaux’s 2005 vintage, which some critics call "the best ever," resulting in an explosion of Bordeaux wine sales in the first nine months of 2006. Furthermore, exceptionally successful harvests for French wineyards between 2003 and 2005, garnered spectacular ratings in the American press. But wine was not the only French beverage sector to celebrate a boost in export sales. The performances of Cognac and Champagne confirm France’s position as a truly international force in the wine and spirits market (now an 8.74 billion euro industry). And cheeses do not lag behind: French cheese sales to the U.S. market also show a steep growth of 14% in value in 2006.

44th Annual Agriculture Trade Show Held in Paris

Visitors from more than 80 countries traveled to Paris last month to take part in the 44th Salon International de l’Agriculture, March 3 to 11. The yearly Agriculture Trade Show, open to the public, serves as a forum for education and interactive dialogue among members of the agricultural community and its consumers. In addition to the 1,000-plus exhibitors and 3,800 animals covering more than 1,480,000 square feet of space, the show featured several competitions and events.

Overlapping with World Agriculture Week, the Salon highlighted not only agriculture’s cultural traditions, but also its evolving role in the production of alternative energy sources. As part of this year’s theme “provider of new energies,” rapt visitors watched as grain, corn, and sugar beet were transformed into bioethanol, and sunflower and rapeseed became biodiesel. Other exhibits included a 640-square-foot environmentally friendly house with walls made from vegetable products, in addition to biodegradable household wraps made from renewable vegetable bases instead of aluminum and plastic.

Airbus A380 Tours United States

At 79 feet tall, the revolutionary plane stretches 239 feet long with a wingspan of 261 feet, can accommodate up to 853 passengers, and stays within the 80 meter-square box as specified by the International Civil Aviation Organization in order to easily fit into existing airports. Its 81,890 gallon fuel capacity and 560 mph cruising speed allows it to fly about 8,000 nautical miles.

Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board, Mark V. Rosenker, remarked as an A380 flew by in Washington, “It’s very impressive. It’s nice to be part of the beginning of something in aviation history.”

Although this marked the first time the A380 visited the U.S., many of its components were no strangers to the country. Airbus has spent in 2006 approximately $10 billion on procurement for American products, generating some 190,000 jobs in the U.S.
**Social News**

**SOCIÉTÉ**

### French Music Awards Honor Achievements in 2006

Radio and television personality Nagui and Michel Drucker hosted the 22nd annual Victoires de la Musique (Music’s Victories) March 10 in Paris to honor the best and the brightest of the francophone musical community. Similar to the Grammys, Les Victoires de la Musique recognizes French-speaking artists’ achievements of the year.

Olivia Ruiz was one of the biggest winners of the night, taking home awards for Female Artist and Musical Performance of the Year. Featured in the 2001 season of “Star Academy,” a pop music reality show similar to “American Idol” in the United States, the 27-year-old is one of France’s fastest rising stars.

The 37-year-old singer/songwriter Bénabar was awarded Male Artist of the Year, and his song “Le Dîner” (The Dinner) received the honor of Original Song of the Year. Bénabar is well known for his musical lyrics that depict day-to-day life events with humor and cynicism. Best New Artist went to “Slammeur” rapper, Grand Corps Malade, whose record “Midi 20” also received Best New Album (see article below). Other successful artists of the night included Miss Dominique, Abd Al Malik, M., and Superbus. Les Victoires de la musique was created in 1985 to honor France’s finest musical talents of the year. In addition to Les Victoires de la Musique, which recognizes success in the pop music community, Les Victoires de la Musique Classique and Les Victoires du Jazz are held separately to celebrate achievement in the classical and jazz community.

### French Slam - New Trend Sweeping Popular Culture

Abd Al Malik and Fabien Marsaud, two of France’s most beloved performers, brought home awards from the Victoires de la Musique for Album of the Year, honoring their success in the latest genre to sweep France: Slam. First developed in the U.S. through melodic verbal competitions, Slam is usually performed a capella and consists of improvised rhymes and metaphors, which penetrate the listener through recognizable rhythms and beats.

At first glance, it may seem that France’s most popular Slam performers have little in common. Malik experienced a childhood marked by delinquency and a modest upbringing, whereas Marsaud experienced a childhood filled with sporting events and family vacations. And while Malik went on to receive diplomas in philosophy and classical literature in Strasbourg, Marsaud later suffered a handicap from a sporting accident, thus adopting his nickname of Grand Corps Malade. Along the way, both developed creativity with words and rhythms which may strike a chord with others. As Grand Corps Malade writes, Slam is “above all a mouth that gives ears that receive. It’s the easiest way to share a text, and thus to share emotions and the desire to play with words.”

While each performer’s unique expression of the verbal art form relates specifically to his experience, the force of their chanson à texte lies in its power to convey emotion in a manner which may strike a chord with others. As Grand Corps Malade writes, Slam is “above all a mouth that gives and ears that receive. It’s the easiest way to share a text, and thus to share emotions and the desire to play with words.”

That desire defines Slam, which some call an art and others a movement. Asked to classify the genre, Marsaud writes: “Perhaps Slam is an art, perhaps slam is a movement, slam is definitely a moment… a moment of listening, a moment of tolerance, a moment of meetings, a moment of sharing.”

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**BULLFIGHTING SEASON AROUND THE CORNER**

Bullfighting aficionados will crowd the streets and amphitheaters of Arles, France, from April 6-9 as the region inaugurates the bullfighting season with La Fériade Pâques.

The Easter Feria, which dates back to 1830, assembles over 500,000 visitors to the region to observe the bullfights and accompanying festivities. For four days, the streets of Arles are illuminated as festival-goers celebrate the beginning of the season with trumpet music and paso-doble dancers through the early morning. The Roman amphitheater, which hosts the fights, holds as many as 60,000 spectators for two fights daily. The festival is a culmination of the rich culture and history of Arles, which has become the French capital of Spanish bullfighting since the sport first appeared in France in 1701. For more information, please visit: https://www.arenes-arles.com.

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**Blogs**

**PLAY ROLE IN PRESIDENTIAL RACE**

Conventional media has traditionally provided domestic and international coverage of political news and developments throughout the world, and France is no exception. The 2007 presidential elections, however, are increasingly setting themselves apart from previous election years by the immense popularity and intensity of France’s Internet campaign, which has facilitated international media coverage of the French elections. The many debates that have developed span a diverse range of topics and trends. One popular Web site, “The Observer,” allows French political enthusiasts to gauge public opinion from the outside and find out once and for all how domestic politics are perceived from abroad.

Developed at the initiative of French international news station “France24,” “The Observer” serves as a comprehensive guide to the latest development in international public opinion. The frenzy surrounding the presidential elections has highlighted the Internet’s role as a global village for which it is often renowned for bringing expatriates, Francophiles and political enthusiasts from all corners of the map into a central forum of debate and discussion. The site features regular newsfeeds from the international press and blogosphere, providing articles and comments concerning the elections, making it easier for internauts to follow the international conversation, in both English and French. For more information, please visit: http://observer.france24.com.

News From France does not endorse the content, views and opinions of authors expressed in the aforementioned Web sites. Any views or opinions mentioned therein do not necessarily state or reflect those of the French Government.
Harry Potter Casts His Way onto Stamps

Over a hundred cities throughout France bustled with excitement around stamp collecting and letter writing in celebration of the annual Fête du Timbre (stamps festival) on the weekend of March 10 and 11. Created in 1938 to promote the hobby of stamp collecting and to encourage more intimate interpersonal communication through letter writing, the celebration was particularly successful in its objectives this month, as post offices throughout France debuted a new collectors’ edition of stamps featuring the beloved schoolboy wizard Harry Potter.

The new collection is a timely tribute to the popular book and film series and comes just four months before the scheduled release of the book series’ final installment, “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows,” on July 21. Those eagerly awaiting the film can now enjoy constant reminders of its approach in their mailbox. Portraits of Harry Potter appear on stamps for domestic priority mail, while freckle-faced Ron Weasley appears on those for regular domestic mail and Miss Hermione Granger has been assigned to international correspondence.

The celebration does not stop there. Fans of the series are now being asked to apply their own artistic skills by sending in their original interpretations of Harry Potter-inspired stamps to La Poste for a competition ending in May. For more information on the festival, please visit: www.fetedutimbre.com.

Enthusiasm Erupts Over New Volcano Park

In the heart of Auvergne in central France, visitors are invited on a voyage to the center of the Earth. At the newly renovated, educational and interactive science center Vulcania located in the Parc Naturel Régional des Volcans d’Auvergne, an adventurous visitor can experience the wonderment and mystery of volcanoes through a series of interactive exhibits. "L’Aventure de la Terre" and three affiliated exhibitions that opened earlier in March unleash the secret of the Earth, the planet’s volcanoes, their wrath, as well as their fragile beauty.

As part of "L’Aventure," three attractions, “Le Grand Cratère” (the Grand Crater), Magma Explorer, and “Le Réveil des Géants d’Auvergne” (The Awakening of the Giants of Auvergne), run the gamut of volcanic activity from the inside out. “Le Grande Cratère,” a pyrotechnical show, re-creates the heat, odors, vibrations, and the noise of explosions felt on the edge of a crater in eruption. The journey continues into the inner depths of a volcano aboard the futuristic vessel “Magma Explorer.” The final attraction, “Le Réveil des Géants d’Auvergne,” plays an animated movie, introducing viewers to the awakening of the Giants of Auvergne, a group of volcanoes that erupted 10,000 years ago.

Vulcania is open from March 21 to October 7. For more information, please visit: www.vulcania.com.

Extention of Louvre Museum to Open in Abu Dhabi

The world’s most frequently visited and well-known art museum has sketched plans to expand its halls. On March 6, French President Jacques Chirac announced that a 30-year loan agreement was established between France and the United Arab Emirates that would pave the way for a new branch of the Louvre to open in 2012 in Abu Dhabi.

The $2 billion agreement will allow the new museum to display thousands of works from France’s finest art museums.

Calling the decision a “historic moment and an unprecedented ambition,” President Chirac said that the two countries “could not give a more striking demonstration, before the whole world, of our common faith in the promises held out by the dialogue of cultures.” This unique opportunity for the Louvre to expand follows recent similar moves by other French museums which also began lending some of their works to the Middle East.

“We’re proud that Abu Dhabi wants to bring the Louvre here,” said French Minister of Culture and Communication Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres.

French architect Jean Nouvel will design the new Louvre in the shape of a large flying saucer on the Abu Dhabi waterfront. Rotating expositions of various periods and art movements will showcase some of the pieces from France’s best collections. For more information, please visit: www.culture.gouv.fr.
Exhibition on "Napoleon on the Nile" in New York City

The Dahesh Museum of Art in New York City announced that one of its most popular exhibits, “Napoleon on the Nile: Soldiers, Artists, and the Rediscovery of Egypt,” will remain on display until April 29. The collection includes many new additions, notably a number of engraved plate illustrations, some of the earliest maps of Egypt, and other related works.

Commemorative prints and medals, alongside archival letters, documents, and official bulletins recount the story of Napoleon’s campaigns in Egypt and his encounters with the British. The exhibition showcases the work of artists Gustave Doré, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Charles-Théodore Frère, and Fredrick Arthur Bridgman and demonstrates how the events in Egypt inspired art and science, while shaping contemporary understanding of the country.

Napoleon on the Nile focuses on the Description de l’Égypte, a seminal work, composed of 10 volumes of plates and 13 volumes of text, which remains one of the most important scholarly studies of ancient and modern Egypt. The astonishing range and precision of the Description plates was captured by Napoleon’s savants-167 physicians, engineers, economists, mathematicians, zoologists, botanists, archeologists, translators, journalists, and artists who accompanied the army. Their task was to catalogue all of Egypt’s wonders, from the architectural ruins of a still mysterious ancient civilization to indigenous flora and fauna. The resulting body of work took roughly twenty years and 2,000 skilled draftsmen and typographers to complete and endures today as an invaluable resource for scholars and artists.

For more information, please visit: www.daheshmuseum.org

Réalités et Rêves de Paris Debuts in Boston

An exhibition of photographs by Jonathan Stark, "Réalités et Rêves de Paris" (Realities and Dreams of Paris) premiered at the Alliance Française in Boston on April 3 and will continue through May 29. The opening reception was held on April 4 at the French Library and Alliance Française of Boston, where Stark displayed his Réalités, black and white scenes of Paris along with his Rêves, color abstractions of Paris that were taken while traveling along the Seine at night.

On May 9 Stark will navigate his audience through Paris during a lecture titled "A Photographer’s Love of Paris," followed by a question and answer session. Stark will discuss his admiration for the "City of Lights" and share with the audience how one instant, scene or object can capture his attention and then evolve into an anthology of photographs.

A Boston-based photographer, Stark brings an individual and distinct visual and emotional perspective to all his photography. Providing his audience with a unique experience and expressing his personal reactions to the sights around him has won Stark several awards including the American Society of Magazine Photographers’ Bronze and Special Merit Awards, and Provincetown Art Museum’s Summer Exhibition Special Merit Award. Currently, he is exhibiting three different collections, "Faces: Eyes, Lips, Heart," "France: Provence et d’autres endroits" and "Figures: Clothed and Unclothed Moments." For more information, please visit: www.frenchlib.org.