On February 24, French actress Marion Cotillard took home the Oscar for Best Actress at the 80th Annual Academy Awards ceremony in Los Angeles for her portrayal of singer Edith Piaf in "La Vie en rose" (French title: "La Môme") — see NFF 08.01. The win makes her the second woman ever to earn the Best Actress Oscar for a non-English role.

It was a big night for the French cinema industry, which won two more Oscars at the ceremony. "La Vie en rose" claimed a second for Best Make-Up, and Philippe Pollet-Villard’s "Le Mozart des pickpockets" ("The Mozart of Pickpockets") was named Best Live Action Short Film. The two films were among several to be nominated for an Oscar, including Vincent Paronnaud and Marjane Satrapi’s "Persepolis" (Best Animated Feature), as well as "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly," which was nominated in four categories.

During her acceptance speech at the awards ceremony, Cotillard thanked both life and love, exclaiming, "And it is true: there are some angels in this city." However, the Oscar was just one in a series of wins for the actress: her performance in "La Vie en rose" earned her a Golden Globe, a BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) award, a César (French film award), and a Czech Lion award.


Marion Cotillard became the first French woman to win the Best Actress Oscar since Simone Signoret was chosen in 1960 for her role in "Room at the Top." Catherine Deneuve was nominated for the award in 1993 for "Indochine," and Juliette Binoche was selected as the Best Supporting Actress in 1997 for "The English Patient." In addition, nine French films have claimed the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar (and another three have won special or honorary awards in the category).

France’s cinematic recognition in the U.S. did not go unnoticed. French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Prime Minister François Fillon, and Minister of Culture and Communication Christine Albanel lauded Marion Cotillard on her win (see below). Prime Minister Fillon characterized Philippe Pollet-Villard’s Best Short Film Oscar as "an important award that demonstrates the vitality of French cinematographic creation." As for "La Vie en rose," he declared, "All of French artistic creation is honored because Marion Cotillard was able to touch the entire world by embodying another great French artist, Edith Piaf, whose voice and incredible destiny resonate within each of us."

Ariane 5 Soars to Success with the ATV
On Sunday, March 9, in its first mission of the year, Arianespace successfully launched the European Space Agency’s first ATV (Automated Transfer Vehicle), dubbed "Jules Verne," toward its rendezvous with the International Space Station (ISS). The mission was carried out by an Ariane 5 ES launcher from Europe’s Spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana (pictured on left). On a visit to Kourou last month, French President Nicolas Sarkozy congratulated the teams from the French Space Agency, Arianespace, and European Space Agency. As Arianespace’s first mission to the ISS, the ATV is designed to bring supplies (water, air, food, propellants for the Russian section, spare parts, experimental hardware, etc.), and reboost the ISS into its nominal orbit. The ISS now weighs more than 240 metric tons, including the recently attached European laboratory, Columbus (see p. 5). After docking to the ISS for up to six months, the ATV will be loaded with waste by the astronauts and deorbited. The ATV was built by EADS Astrium. A large cylinder measuring about 10 meters long by 4.5 meters in diameter, the ATV comprises two main parts: a service module with the avionics and propulsion systems, and a pressurized cargo carrier. For more information, please visit: www.arianespace.com.
New Policy Opens Doors for France’s Underprivileged Youth

A new policy plan to provide education and career opportunities for the youth of France’s metropolitan suburbs was announced on January 22 by Fadela Amara, Minister of State attached to the Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs. The Esprit-Banlieues (Hope for the Suburbs) plan will be a five-year project incorporating major changes in five policy sectors: equal opportunity, education, security, transportation, and public housing.

The new policies are designed to provide new prospects for underprivileged youth living on the outskirts of France’s major cities. Equal opportunity policies include an autonomy contract offering young people comprehensive support in obtaining stable employment or job training. Young adults interested in starting their own businesses — 1 out of 2 according to a recent census (see NFF 08.01) — would receive long-term mentorship from professionals in their field. To further prepare students for future careers, extensive education reforms will be established, including the creation of 30 scholastic excellence centers, as well as six technical schools. Under the program, the state would provide employment guidance to over 100,000 youths over a three-year period.

The policy will also work to provide an environment conducive to enduring social change through three initiatives. In an effort to curb violence, approximately 200 neighborhood police units will be assigned to promote safety and security in the areas affected by violence in recent years. Discussions of housing reform will take place to reevaluate the allocations for public housing, as well as a possible agreement with lessors to guarantee accommodation standards. Finally, new methods of eco-friendly transportation, including public bus lines and tramways, will be constructed in selected areas so that inhabitants of suburbs may have greater access to employment opportunities in cities.

Québec Celebrates 400th Anniversary

2008 marks the 400th Anniversary of Quebec City.

This year marks the 400th anniversary of the founding of Quebec City and the establishment of French presence in North America, and the capital of this francophone providence is overflowing with celebratory activities. The theme for the 400th is “The Encounter,” highlighting Quebec’s historic role as a meeting place for peoples and cultures.

Québec’s ties to France are a defining characteristic of the province. First contact was made in 1534, when Jacques Cartier arrived at the Gaspe Peninsula and claimed the lands for France, marking the beginning of French civilization in North America. Samuel de Champlain followed in 1608 with the founding of Quebec City (see p.3), a city that has preserved its cultural and historical identity and was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985.

The 400th anniversary festivities kicked off on December 31, 2007, with a New Year’s extravaganza that was followed in February by the Carnaval de Quebec, a Mardi Gras celebration including a delegation from the French city of Nice. Celebrations continue into the coming months, with highlights including conferences, expositions, festivals, and cultural events celebrating music, dance, literature, and art.

Québec City has designated a pavilion located in the Vieux Port as Espace 400e, the official celebration headquarters. It will be host to a wide variety of events and a major exhibit, “Passagers/Passengers,” designed by québecois film director Patrice Sauvé, is a transportable assembly of images, testimonies, and music paying homage to Quebec City and its diverse population over the course of history.


France Takes the Helm of Combined Task Force 150

On February 25, France, for the fifth time, took control of Task Force (CTF) 150, which constitutes the naval force participating in Operation Enduring Freedom. Rear Admiral Jean-Louis Kerignard, FN, assumed command of CTF 150 aboard FS Command and Supply ship "Marne," thus relieving his Pakistani counterpart.

The Task Force is a multinational coalition naval force established in the wake of the September 11 attacks in the United States. Its mission is to monitor, board, inspect and stop suspect shipping as part of the fight against terrorism. It prevents terrorists from using the sea as a venue for terrorist attacks or an enabler for terrorist attacks ashore. It includes operations in the Indian Ocean in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. These activities are referred to as Maritime Security Operations.

Countries presently contributing to CTF 150 are Canada, France, Germany, Pakistan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Other nations who have participated include Australia, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, and Turkey.

The command of the task force rotates between the different participating navies, with commands lasting between four to six months. The task force usually comprises 14 or 15 vessels.
New England Commemorates Samuel de Champlain in America

This image portrays Samuel de Champlain charting New England and New France. Several exhibitions this fall will commemorate Champlain's influence in North America.

Canada isn’t the only country on this side of the Atlantic to celebrate 400 years of French presence in North America. The John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, in partnership with the Boston Public Library (BPL), presents “Champlain’s America: New England and New France” as part of an international series of events commemorating the role of Frenchman Samuel de Champlain in the settlement of North America. The exhibition will run at the BPL from March 13 through May 31.

Sketching Champlain’s startling geographical ambition, from Narragansett Bay to Labrador to the Great Lakes, the exhibit will highlight Champlain’s genius and talent as an explorer, a mapmaker, and how his writings vastly deepened the contours of the “New settlement.” One of the most symbolic items on display will be his "Bref Discours," the rarely seen manuscript of his first book (never published) that describes his extensive travels along the coast of present-day New England and a voyage to the Caribbean. Beyond the life of Champlain, the exhibition also explores the complex relationship between New England and New France from the founding of Quebec onward. Several Quebec archives will be lending materials that tell the story of New England from the perspective of New France.

For Champlain, who made 29 journeys across the Atlantic, America was a lifelong obsession. After traveling through the Caribbean, he explored the East Coast of America from Cape Cod to the Saint Lawrence River. He founded Quebec City in 1608, and discovered Lake Champlain following year. His seminal map of 1613 offers a treasure trove of visual information about the flora and fauna of the region.

To commemorate his legacy and celebrate Lake Champlain, the State of Vermont will organize festivities in 2009. In October 2007, it signed a cooperation agreement with Maison de la France, the French Tourism Office in the United States, to formalize France’s support of these celebrations.

The exhibit will travel to Quebec City, Canada, in 2008, and to Vermont, Washington, D.C., and France, in 2009. For more information, please visit: www.jcb.lib.org. For information on Vermont 2009, please visit: www.celebratechamplain.org.

New York’s Fashion Week Welcomes French Designers

Kicking off February in style, the Big Apple played host to the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week, an eight-day-long event celebrating the best in fashion from February 1-8. Just a few weeks before the international la caravane de la mode hit cities like London, Milan, and Paris, several French designers lit up the catwalk at New York’s Bryant Park, receiving notable exposure in the international fashion scene.

Inspired by the French resort town Megève, Lacoste designer Christophe Lemaire sent an alpine-themed collection down a runway covered in sheepskin. A seemingly atypical choice for the iconic French tennis brand, the ski-focused clothes embody a sense of "sportif élégance." Hervé Léger by Max Azria presented variations on Léger’s signature "bandage" dress, reinvented with feathers, silk organza, and other intricate details (photo above). In men’s wear, Grenoble native Catherine Malandrino featured a collection influenced by an eclectic combination of Paris’s Latin Quarter, French icon Serge Gainsbourg, and Sean Connery’s James Bond.

The French presence at Fashion Week didn’t stop at the runway, as several French companies helped support the event. A long-standing participant, Evian Natural Spring Water was the first sponsor to align with New York Fashion Week in 1993. This year the company boasted a trend-setting limited edition bottle crafted by French designer Christian Lacroix. To quench a different kind of thirst, bars poured out fashionable cocktails concocted with a key French ingredient: Chambord Black Raspberry Liqueur, dubbed "The Official Liqueur of Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week." An all-natural liqueur produced in France’s Loire Valley, Chambord has been providing Fashion Week guests with signature cocktails for two years in a row. For more information, please visit: www.mbfashionweek.com/newyork.

French Ambassador Makes First Visit to Louisiana

French Ambassador to the U.S. Pierre Vimont made his first official visit to Louisiana from February 21 to 23. The tour gave Ambassador Vimont the opportunity to learn about Louisiana’s diversity, to meet with key political figures such as the recently elected governor Bobby Jindal, mayors of Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Lafayette and Lake Charles, as well as to exchange with active members of the local educational, cultural and economic sectors. Ambassador Vimont was also made an Honorary Member of the State’s House of Representatives.

During a poignant ceremony, the Ambassador paid homage to two World War II veterans, Mr. Randolph Richmond and Mr. Bryan Bell, presenting them with the Legion of Honor, France’s highest award. In honor of Black History Month, Ambassador Vimont symbolically placed a wreath of flowers onto the Tomb of the Unknown Slave in the Faubourg Tremé. A historic quarter of New Orleans, Faubourg Tremé was home to one of the first African-American communities of the United States. During the course of his visit, Ambassador Vimont also donated 1,800 French books to Louisiana’s school libraries that encourage the learning of French. Some of these books, provided by ADI-FLOR (a charitable organization dedicated to internationally distributing francophone literature), had also been given out in New York at the end of last year (see NFF 07.13).

Total Oil to Expand Texas Refinery

Total Oil announced on February 12 plans to expand its Port Arthur refinery in Texas. The company, headquartered in Paris, France, scheduled the project for commissioning in 2011. Up to 2,200 people will work on the $2.2-billion project. The expansion will include the construction of a 50,000-barrel-per-day coker, a desulfurization unit, a vacuum distillation unit, and other related units. The new units will increase the facility’s deep-conversion capacity and expand its ability to process heavy crude oil. The facility plans to add three million tons per year of ultra low sulfur automotive diesel to the refinery’s current production, raising total output of all products combined to around twelve million tons per year. The project is the latest step in the ongoing process of adjusting Total’s refining base to market demand, as illustrated by the divestiture of the hydrocracker commissioned at the Normandy refinery in Le Havre, France, in 2006 and the current construction of desulfurization units in the United Kingdom and Germany. For more information, please visit: www.total.com.

News from France

© Société du 400e anniversaire de Québec
Cuisine spiced with saffron and paprika, folk music performed on wooden xylophones, belly dancers clothed in evanescent draperys: these are not the customary images that the French-speaking world calls to mind. However, this March, the month-long Fête de la Francophonie brings together the entire francophone world, from Hanoi to Abidjan. 

French, along with English, is spoken on more continents than any other language. Nearly 80 million people worldwide claim French as their mother tongue, and thousands more speak French as a second language or are studying it in school. La Francophonie celebration this month brings together 175 million people from 63 nations for a series of film screenings, concerts, and numerous other cultural events.

La Francophonie, a term coined over a century ago, describes the international linguistic and cultural community which shares the common thread of the French language, and brings together a myriad of cultural traditions. The expression was first used in 1880 by geographer Onésime Reclus and later adopted by poet and former Senegalese president Léopold Sédar Senghor. In its broadest meaning, La Francophonie encompasses all efforts to promote French language and values. It represents a mosaic of peoples with a common goal to promote linguistic and cultural diversity, and unites countries that share a common heritage but strive to affirm their unique identity in a globalizing world.

The international Francophone (French-speaking) community is also represented by the political group l’Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (International Organization of the Francophonie, or OIF), which was created in 1970 and made an official institution in 1995. The organization combines 68 member states and observer states, 32 of which designate French as an official language. The institution’s goals are four fold: to promote French language and cultural diversity; to maintain peace; to support education and research; and to cooperate in the interest of sustainable development and multilateral solidarity. The OIF’s current Secretary-General is Abdou Diouf, former president of Senegal. This position was also previously held by Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former Secretary-General of the United Nations.

North American Events

La Fe de la Francophonie is being celebrated extensively in North America, especially in Québec, where French is the official language. Many events celebrating la Francophonie are being integrated into the festivities for Québec’s 400th anniversary (see page 2), including La Francôfête 2008, a celebration centering on the ten words of la Francophonie, chosen by Québec, France, and the OIF. This year’s words are: Apprivoiser (“to domesticate”), boussole (“compass”), jubilatoire (“jubilatory”), palabre (“palaver”), passerelle (“footbridge”), rhizome (“rootstock”), s’attabler (“to sit down at the table”), tact (“tact”), toi (“you” — familiar form), and visage (“face”).

In Ottawa, Canada, the Richelieu clubs of the Horace-Viau region organized the annual Richelieu Gala of la Francophonie as part of Francophonie week. The gala includes the announcement of the Richelieu Albert-Boyer Award in recognition of a personality who has distinguished himself through la Francophonie.

The United States has not neglected its own ties to la Francophonie. In Washington, D.C., la Francophonie festival includes film screenings, concerts, and conferences, and culminates in a giant celebration on March 14 at the Embassy of France. That evening, for la Grande Fête de la Francophonie, over 35 embassies, governments, and associations share their respective cultures with dances and culinary specialties from all over the French-speaking world.

New York celebrates the global francophone community as well, through traditional music, Haitian dance parties, and Swiss art exhibits. Attendees can also enjoy the French Creole culture at the Fête de la Martinique on March 19. For more information on French culture and events in these two cities, please visit www.francophoniedc.org and www.francophonieny.org.

World Events

Francophonie celebrations are taking place all over the globe as well. Countries with their own vastly diverse cultures, from Senegal to Vietnam to the Czech Republic, have organized a wide array of events to honor French culture.

In Europe, the Czech Republic hosts several events in its major cities, including art exhibitions, concerts, theater performances, and film screenings, including representation not only of France but the entire Francophone world. In Liberec, a photography exhibition titled “French from the outside” (Français de l’étranger) presents the work of four French artists living in the U.S., Japan, Italy and Turkey, who bring to their countries of residence a unique viewpoint influenced by French culture. For more information, please visit: www.alliancefrancaise.cz.

West Africa retains close cultural ties to France, and the events being held for la Fête de la Francophonie reflect the impact of that time while also placing emphasis on the roots of African culture. In Togo’s capital city of Lomé, an extensive program of cultural events reflects this theme, including academic conferences, film and theater, and school projects. Artist Habib Koite performs “Le griot moderne”, exploring the role of le griot, a traditional West African storyteller and guardian of oral tradition, in the modern world. French culture also plays a role in the education of new generations, and with Les clubs culturels, the high schools of Lomé have compiled a multi-faceted show using dance, music, and theater to celebrate la Francophonie.

In Dakar, Senegal, the Ministry of Education co-sponsored a francophone rap-poetry project, wherein Senegalese students wrote and recorded a rap song with the theme of l’éloge de l’autre (In Praise of the Other) and using the ten words of la Francophonie. The culmination of the project will take place at la Fête du Français on March 18, with a performance and CD presentation.

Representing Francophonie in Asia are Vietnam and Cambodia. In Vietnam, following the success of the 2007 festivities, the Asia-Pacific Branch of the University Bureau of la Francophonie in Hanoi has organized the Concours Dynamique 2008, a televised contest for francophone students to display their knowledge of French culture in Vietnam in areas such as art, sports, and literature.

There are also several events being held in Phnom-Penh, Cambodia, including the Concours Je Thème to support creative writing by university students and a conference titled “Quelle Francophonie pour le Cambodge,” examining the place of Cambodia in the Francophone world and the cultural issues therein.

For more information on Francophonie events in Canada and the world, please visit: www.20mars.francophonie.org.
**Europe Connects to International Space Station**

French Air Force brigadier general Léopold Eyharts was part of a crew of seven astronauts who made an expedition to the International Space Station (ISS) in February. Their mission, to deliver and install the European-built laboratory Columbus, marks a major advancement for Europe and serves as “a role model for international cooperation,” according to German astronaut Hans Schlegel.

Columbus, weighing approximately 10.3 tons and measuring 98 cubic yards, is the first permanent European installation in space and will enable the realization of hundreds of experiments in microgravity. With the addition of Columbus, the International Space Station — a giant research facility orbiting 220 miles above the Earth — is now 57% completed. When finished, it is expected to weigh nearly one million pounds.

Although the rest of the Columbus crew has returned safely to Earth, Eyharts is due to remain in space until the next ISS mission in March. As part of the resident ISS crew, he will stay to finish the installation’s commissioning and to perform a series of experiments.

Eyharts’s participation in the International Space Station fortifies France’s goal to place a greater emphasis on space travel and research.

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**France Takes Measures to Improve Road Safety**

On February 13, the French government announced a series of toughened measures to improve road safety, aiming to reduce road deaths by 3,000 per year by 2012. In particular, the government is focusing on drunk driving — now the primary cause of accidents — and speeding.

Measures to halve the number of road deaths caused by excessive drinking include banning alcohol sales in gas stations and expanding the use of éthylotests antidémarrage, car breathalyzers that prevent the vehicle from starting if the driver’s blood alcohol level is too high. The éthylotest antidémarrage will be installed in all school buses by the start of the 2009-2010 school year. If arrested for driving while intoxicated, a driver will be required to install such a device upon his or her first offense and will have the vehicle confiscated for the second offense.

To combat speeding, 500 new radars will be installed for each of the next five years, more than doubling the number currently in place. In addition, Penalties for speeding will be toughened: a second offense for speeding 50 km/h (approximately 31 m/ph) over the speed limit will lead to confiscation of the driver’s vehicle.

These measures are designed to continue the improvements made in road safety over the past few decades. Between 1975 and 2001, road deaths in France declined by an average of 42.9% (see NFF 07.13). For more information, please visit: www.securiteroutiere.equipement.gouv.fr.

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**New Steps Toward Improving Nutrition**

On February 4, Roselyne Bachelot-Narquin, Minister of Health, Youth and Sport, introduced three additional measures to the National Program of Nutrition and Health 2006-2010 (PNNS), a comprehensive plan instituted to combat obesity. A survey conducted by the Institut National du Cancer (National Cancer Institute) and the Institut National de Veille Sanitaire (National Institute for Health Surveillance) revealed that 14.3 percent of children in France are overweight, and 3.5 percent are considered obese. The initiatives of the PNNS will ideally lower these statistics.

The first measure aims to curtail television advertisements for sugary food and beverages during youth programming hours. A 2007 survey shows that after watching such advertisements, 47 percent of children wanted to consume the products and 91 percent of that figure claimed to have gotten what they wanted after asking their parents. In March, professionals in the sector will launch a dialogue on how to reduce these statistics. The PNNS’s second phase hopes to cut back on the sale of candy at checkout areas in grocery stores and other retailers. The final step will reevaluate the selection of foods served at school cafeterias.

In conjunction with these new initiatives, the National Institute of Agricultural Research and the French Food Safety Agency created the Observatoire de la Qualité de l’Alimentation (OQALI — Food Quality Council). The commission will monitor portion sizes and the nutritional composition of food and promote healthy eating habits through national campaigns. In addition, OQALI will compile a database of the nutritional breakdowns of foods to best analyze products and develop indicators to follow the evolution of food quality.

For more information, please visit: http://mangerbouger.fr.

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**France Creates Self-Repairing Natural Rubber**

A research team at the Chemistry and Soft Materials Laboratory (National Center for Scientific Research, and the City of Paris Industrial Physics and Chemistry Higher Education Institution) has created a self-repairing material with rubber-like properties. The group, headed by Ludvik Leibler, published its work in the science journal Nature last month. As early as next year, the material may be put to practical use and applied to highways and roads, or even children’s toys. It has the same flexible qualities as rubber, and can return to its original form after malformations of up to 500 percent. Once cut or broken, the substance is able to repair itself in a short period of time due to links between the material’s hydrocarbon molecules. More remarkable, the material can self-repair even several hours after the damage occurs, and the process may be repeated several times without losing much elasticity.
Organics a Popular Choice

Forty-two percent of French people, roughly four out of ten, consume products of organic origin at least once per month, according to a 2007 survey issued by the Agence BIO, a French public-interest group that promotes l’agriculture biologique (organic farming). Showing a four percent increase from 2003, 37 percent of people claim to have purchased organic products within four weeks of taking the survey. The Baromètre 2007 (literally, a “barometer” of public opinion) also reflected a common desire to consume organic products outside of the home: 78 percent of parents prefer for their children to mange bio (eat organic) in school cafeterias; and 43 percent of people favor organic options in restaurants. Closely linked to this penchant for organics is the common desire among those surveyed to be eco-friendly when selecting foods. With two out of three French people opting for environmentally conscious products over other options, more and more people are beginning to associate the term “organic” with respect for the environment, the survey confirmed. 77 percent of people see organic consumption and production as optimistic options to combat and reduce environmental concerns.

Jubilee Year in Lourdes

Catholics from around the world are flocking this year to Lourdes for the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the small town in southeastern France. Between February 11 and July 16, 1858, the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared before a 14-year-old girl, Bernadette Soubirous, 18 times. 67 miracles have been attributed to Saint Bernadette since her canonization in 1933, and Lourdes has become a world-renowned pilgrimage site for physical and spiritual healing, attracting six million visitors annually. This “Jubilee Year” officially began on December 8, 2007, and will end exactly one year later. One of the year’s highlights was the Mass held exactly 150 years after the first apparition on February 11, which drew 70,000 pilgrims. Lourdes organizers are also eagerly anticipating the upcoming visit from Pope Benedict XVI, which will likely take place in the fall. For more information, please visit: www.lourdes2008.com.

Social Network Gets People Talking

French entrepreneur Loïc Le Meur has people all over the world talking — literally. His latest venture — Seesmic, based in San Francisco with offices in Paris and Romania — is a new online forum that brings conversation alive through video. Created with the idea of personalizing social networking on the Internet, which until recently has been largely text-based, Seesmic enables its users to share experiences directly through webcams...much like video conferencing but online.

The site is designed to be user-friendly “for the community, by the community.” Users can record a video directly on Seesmic’s Web site, upload an existing video straight from their computer, or link to a video posted on a social network. In addition, Seesmic is being created with the help and guidance of the online virtual community who test out the software and report constructive criticism back to Le Meur, who in turn, posts a daily video show (followed by approximately 5,000 people) on his thoughts, experiences and decisions in crafting the business at www.loic.tv. Meanwhile, director of content and renowned French blogger VinVin (www.20sur20.net) is the virtual figurehead of the Seesmic Cafe, a humorous and insightful daily glimpse into recent conversations between users.

In addition to launching several successful startups, Le Meur is also arguably the most read French blogger, and organizer of LeWeb3, the largest annual European conference focused on rising stars and established voices on the Web (over 2,000 participants from 40 countries at the last edition — see NFF 07.13). Le Meur also served as Internet advisor to French President Nicolas Sarkozy and has been a regular invitee to the World Economic Forum in Davos.

For more information on Seesmic, please visit: www.seesmic.com.

New Initiatives within the French School System

Valérie Pécresse, Minister of Higher Education and Research, is heading a multi-million dollar initiative to revamp the French university system. This project, titled opération campus, will create ten campuses complete with superior sports equipment, new lecture halls, and modern research laboratories. President Nicolas Sarkozy has committed a total of 5 million euros (nearly 7.5 million dollars) to the initiative, in what Pécresse describes as “an exceptional effort” to attract further international interest to the French university system. The first projects toward realizing this goal and developing une vie de campus (a sense of campus life) will begin in early 2009.

Pécresse — along with Roselyne Bachelot-Narquin, Minister of Health, Youth Affairs, and Sport, and Bernard Laporte, Secretary of State for Sport — also hopes to renovate the university system by developing high-level sports programs. The mission “Sport à l’université” at the University Paris Sud, for example, will help to define ways to develop high-quality sports programs at other schools. Thanks to another initiative launched by Mr. Laporte, athletes with a desire to give back to their community will soon encounter new opportunities for sports-related community service. His project, presented last month, will be open to students age 18 to 25 who wish to help train sports teams, provide scholastic support in health and fitness, or work in sports-related projects with young people from troubled neighborhoods.

Further down on the scholastic ladder, a communication has been presented to advance cultural and artistic instruction in France’s primary and secondary education. Beginning next year, students will attend obligatory classes in art history, as well as refurbished programs in music, dance, and theater. Professors will receive certain benefits in the way of educational resources as well, such as free entry to museums and national monuments.

45th Agricultural Show Brings Farming to the Heart of Paris

The 45th annual Salon international de l’agriculture (SIA-Paris International Agricultural Show) opened its doors in Paris from February 23 to March 2 with the theme “L’Agriculture au cœur de la vie” (“Agriculture at the Heart of Life”). The International Agricultural Show is the largest annual event in Paris. This year’s Show attracted more than 608,000 visitors, a 3 percent increase from last year’s attendance rate. France is the world’s second-largest agricultural exporter after the United States.

First held in 1870, the Salon moved to Paris after World War I as a way of recognizing and thanking farmers’ wartime efforts. Originally, the SIA was a professional show that aimed to inform farmers about the latest equipment, techniques and developments in farming. Today, the SIA has evolved into a showcase of agriculture that seeks to educate the general public and to maintain a link between urban populations and farming. The SIA is divided into three parts: “animals,” which counted more than 3,000, including dogs, goats, sheep, rabbits, cows, horses, donkeys, and pigs; “products” and “nature/life.”

Every year since 1964, the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries announces the laureates of the General Agricultural Competition, one of the most prestigious awards that recognizes excellence in three categories: animals, wines and products (which includes dairy products and “diverse products” — anything ranging from foies gras to fruits, fish, juice, etc.). Winners earn the right to feature the logo of the distinguished award on their products. The Competition was not the only forum to acknowledge distinction in cultural heritage. This year’s Salon also lent itself to the opportunity for French President Nicolas Sarkozy to announce a proposal to have French gastronomy recognized as Cultural Heritage by UNESCO. For more information, please visit: www.salon-agriculture.com.

Show attracted more than 608,000 visitors, a 3 percent increase from last year’s attendance rate. France is the world’s second-largest agricultural exporter after the United States.
Charles de Gaulle: A Museum of Memories

Paris inaugurated a museum in commemoration of former President Charles de Gaulle on February 23. Located within the Musée de l'Armée at L'Hôtel des Invalides, "L'Historial Charles de Gaulle," chronicles the life of one of France's most esteemed generals and statesmen.

An immense wall covered with 80 photos of the dignitary greets the visitor at the entrance, but even more striking is the exhibit's size. The space is nearly 27,000 square feet and can host hundreds of people at a time.

The museum holds a wealth of information surrounding de Gaulle's life, offering nearly 400 documents and 20 hours of commentary. The guided visit includes information from his military leadership in World War II to his formation of the Fifth Republic, and touches upon several less well known topics as well.

The new museum endeavors to attract additional visitors — both French and foreign — to Les Invalides. Bilingual audio-guides and an introductory video shown in eight languages navigate tourists as they make their way through one of the three branches of the exhibition that showcase different stages of de Gaulle’s life. This arrangement allows guests to meander through the museum at their own pace, choosing the path they find most captivating. "This place is simply a site of memories," muses Sharon Elbaz, assistant director of the Charles de Gaulle Foundation, as she considers how much time a person could pass losing themselves in the history of one of France's most renowned public figures.

France Celebrates Anniversary of the Birth of Simone de Beauvoir

France recently celebrated the 100th anniversary of the birth of Simone de Beauvoir, a prominent French existentialist and feminist. The anniversary of her birth was commemorated in Paris with several events, including the Simone de Beauvoir 100th Anniversary Colloquium from January 9 to 11.

Born on January 9, 1908, Beauvoir was recognized as a brilliant student at an early age, particularly in philosophy. Through her studies, she met Jean-Paul Sartre, an existential philosopher, with whom she maintained a lifelong intellectual and intimate relationship. Together, they launched "Les Temps Modernes" ("Modern Times"), a political and cultural journal, after World War II.

Beauvoir distinguished herself as an author, winning the prestigious Prix Goncourt, a French literary award, in 1954 for "Les Mandarins" ("The Mandarins"). Her best known work, however, was "Le Deuxième Sexe" ("The Second Sex"), published in two volumes in 1949. This book, which transformed Beauvoir into a feminist icon, argued that gender is a social construct, famously declaring, "On ne naît pas femme, on le devient." ("One is not born a woman; one becomes one.").

Beauvoir also wrote "L'Amérique au Jour le Jour" ("America Day by Day"), a chronicle of her 1947 travels in the U.S. as she completed a university conference tour. After the tour, she maintained a connection to the United States through her romantic relationship with American author Nelson Algren.

Though Beauvoir died in 1986, her legacy lives on, notably through the Prix Simone de Beauvoir pour la Liberté des Femmes (Simone de Beauvoir Award for the Freedom of Women), which seeks "to recognize the works and exceptional actions of men and women who, in the spirit of Simone de Beauvoir, contribute to the promotion of women's liberty throughout the world."

For more information, please visit: www.culture.gouv.fr.

COSMOMANIA Exhibit Retraces 50 Years of Space Exploration

COSMOMANIA, la folle histoire de l'espace (the crazy history of space), takes museum visitors through a timewarp of 50 years of space exploration history. The exhibition, which opened January 29, is on display at the Cité des Sciences and de l'Industrie in Paris, the largest science museum in Europe. The out-of-this-world exhibit will remain open until May 25.

COSMOMANIA highlights five major moments in space exploration history: the first human to enter outer space (Soviet Yuri Gagarin in 1961), Neil Armstrong's 1969 moon landing, the first launch of an Ariane rocket in 1979, the first internet retransmission of an image of the Martian surface in 1997, and the first flight of a taikonaut (Chinese astronaut) in 2003.

To bring these historic moments to life, a series of installations outfitted with period furniture and objects in rooms evoke an image of a respective year and country. The second room, for instance, is decorated as an American kitchen in 1969. In each room, museum-goers can learn about the featured event by watching and listening to television and radio reports, eavesdropping on supposed phone conversations, and reading newspapers and magazines from the period.

COSMOMANIA concludes with "Mars Base 2057," where visitors can experience the life of an astronaut on Mars in the distant future. For more information, please visit: www.cite-sciences.fr.

Les coups d'œil

Arc de Triomphe Boasts New Museum Exhibit

The rich history of the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile is now being commemorated with an exhibition housed within the monument itself. The exhibit, titled "Between Wars and Peace, the Arc de Triomphe Recounts History," opened on February 15 and will run through December 31. The top three floors within the arch are dedicated to the museum housing the exhibit, which showcases the Arc de Triomphe as a symbol of the history of Paris and of France as a whole. Initiated by Napoleon in 1806 to glorify the victories of the French Empire and completed in 1836 after his death, the Arc de Triomphe was conceived as a tribute to the armies of France during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The scenographic exhibit, from architect Christophe Girault and artist Maurice Benayoun, retraces the construction of the monument and the historical events it witnessed, including the funeral of Victor Hugo in 1885 and the burial of the Unknown Soldier in 1921. The exhibit is composed of three levels and seven stations. Three of the stations are interactive, including a display allowing visitors to take a closer look at the 450 feet of sculpted frieze on the entablature of the arch. For more information, please visit: www.monuments-nationaux.fr.

A Crispy Competition for the Best Baguette

A grand reception was held at Paris's city hall on February 18 to award the 2008 winner of le Grand Prix de la Baguette, an annual contest held to support local commerce and the traditional craft of bread making. Since 1993 the municipal government of Paris has sponsored the contest, which is open to all the bakers in the city. In a day-long judging held on February 12, a jury headed by Lyne Cohen-Solal, Assistant to the Mayor in charge of Trade, Craft Industry, and Independent Professions, assessed over a hundred baguettes in the categories of appearance, precision of baking, texture, smell, and taste to determine which bakery's entry was the best representation of the pain de tradition. This year the honor went to Anis Boualbsa, the baker at the boulangerie Le Duc de la Chapelle in Montmartre, who claimed the 4,000-euro prize and the distinction of producing the best baguette in Paris.

NEWS FROM FRANCE 7
Exhibition on the Dreyfus Affair Presented in Boston

A Parisian exhibition on the Dreyfus Affair has inspired a similar exhibit in the U.S. Presented by the Florence and Chafetz Hillel House at Boston University and the New Center for Arts and Culture, with the support of the French Consulate in Boston, "The Power of Prejudice: The Dreyfus Affair" is based on "Dreyfus — The Fight for Justice," an exhibition of the Musée d’Art et d’Histoire du Judaïsme in Paris. With original objects from the Lorraine Beitler Collection of the Dreyfus Affair at the University of Pennsylvania, the exhibition features documents, photos, video, and cartoons that relate the story of Captain Alfred Dreyfus. It will be on display at Boston University’s 808 Gallery on Commonwealth Avenue from February 27 to April 6.

Alfred Dreyfus, a patriotic officer, Jewish and born in French Alsace, was falsely accused of treason, twice tried and wrongfully convicted, imprisoned on Devil’s Island, and eventually exonerated after fierce debates that rocked and ultimately changed France at the turn of the 20th century. The exhibit retraces the affair through its many facets, including the issue of military vs. civilian justice, the use of anti-Semitism as a political tool, the role of the press and intellectuals, as well as its influence on the French Republic, Church and State relations, and the political Zionism movement.

In addition to the exhibition, a symposium on "Catalyst to History: Why Dreyfus Matters" and a film series are proposed. For more information, please visit: www.consulfrance-boston.org and www.bu.edu/hillel.

"Beyond the Iconic" of Paris Comes to Los Angeles

Visitors won’t find any of the usual shots of the Champs-Elysées or Pont Neuf in this exhibit, "Beyond the Iconic: Contemporary Photographs of Paris," an exhibition running from March 1 to June 1 at the Los Angeles Public Library, showcases rarely seen images of the City of Light. The 140 photographs in the exhibit have been brought to the U.S. for the first time from the collection of the Musée Carnavalet in Paris. Through their diversity of subjects and style, the works cast a light on often unseen aspects of the city and offer a deeper, more enriched understanding of Parisian life and culture.

The exhibition’s collection includes the work of 24 internationally acclaimed photographers, taken over the years 1971 to 2003. The diverse images evoke a great range of emotions and provide singular views into different sides of Paris. The exhibit also draws parallels between France’s capital and the City of Angels: "Los Angeles and Paris have much in common," comments Gloria Gerace, director of exhibitions for the Library Foundation of Los Angeles. "We are both large, romanticized urban centers too often identified by our icons and landmarks — such as the Hollywood Sign and the Eiffel Tower. This exhibition will look beyond that iconography.” For more information, please visit: www.lapl.org.