Professor Engineers Marathon Journeys — and Physiological Advances

For Philippe Fuchs, ultramarathon runner and professor of engineering at the elite Ecole des Mines de Paris, it’s not about the destination — it’s about the journey. Fuchs, who runs 30 to 45 miles every day during his trips, is determined to take advantage of the magnificent sights along his route: “If someone wants to show me something, I stop! I’m not so much interested in competition as discovery,” Fuchs says of his travels.

At 58 and after more than 20 years running, Fuchs has seen a lot. Since his very first run at the age of 36, in which he traveled from Nantes to Mont-Saint-Michel in three days, Fuchs has embarked on multiple cross-country marathons. Many of these runs have, fittingly, been in collaboration with the French national forestry service, the Gendarmerie Nationale, and the French Ministry of Agriculture, as the runs coincided with the Olympics. In 1992, he ran from Paris to the Barcelona Olympic Games and in 2004 he ran 1,500 miles to reach the Athens Olympics. But the 2008 Beijing Olympics presented a new challenge: Fuchs had to pass through far-off countries and the treacherous Gobi Desert. He explains, “The greatest risk there is of injuring yourself: You have to run [435 miles] on rugged dirt tracks, at temperatures of [104 degrees Fahrenheit] in the shade...except there isn’t any shade!”

Fuchs’s adventures are not just an opportunity for him to stretch his legs, however. He has partnered with Dassault Systèmes, a world leader in computer-aided design software, and the Institute of Movement Sciences in Marseille, to create a model of his foot. Once this virtual foot — the world’s first — is perfected, it will be used in hospitals for physiotherapy exercises and could potentially be the first step in creating a model of the entire human body. In this way, Fuchs’s marathons feed both of his passions, running and engineering, and simultaneously provide him with experiences, such as running through Mongolia, Montenegro and the Croatian islands, which he describes as “unforgettable.”

The Red, White, and Blue Goes Green with New Environmental Legislature

A leader of renewable energy, France reached another milestone in its environmental efforts on July 23 with the passage of the Grenelle 1 Bill, approved by the Senate. This bill is the culmination of two years of deliberation within the Grenelle de l’environnement, a consultative roundtable of state and civil actors advanced by French President Nicolas Sarkozy and launched in May 2007. The first of its kind, Grenelle 1 restructures French environmental policies and develops new requirements for growth compatible with the idea of finite world resources. The Act drew from the experiences of a committee comprised of employers, government representatives, local authorities, unions and NGOs.

The Grenelle de l’environnement officially recognizes the urgency of the environmental situation. One of the top priorities of the law is the construction sector, where all new buildings will have to abide by low energy consumption requirements by 2012. In line with EU commitments, French lawmakers also raised the 2020 national objective for renewable energy production from 20 to 23 percent. The bill aims to preserve natural resources and biodiversity; increase research funding for sustainable development to one billion dollars, and improve water purity, while doubling France’s water supply by 2015. The act also focuses on fiscal policy, choice of infrastructure, regulation of public purchasing, transport policy and farming, fishing and product distribution. In addition to creating an anticipated 600,000 “green” jobs, the environmental plan extends awareness to the public by conveying present and future concerns, including the possible depletion of oil before the end of the century. Ministers of Ecology and head of the Grenelle Jean-Louis Borloo underscored that the legislation represents “a shared vision of the future...that reunites the actors of society and representatives of the nation,” demonstrating that “a concerted ecological transformation is possible.”

French First Lady Gives First-Rate Performance

In honor of Nelson Mandela’s 91st birthday, French First Lady Carla Bruni-Sarkozy took to the stage for the first time since her union with the French president a year and a half ago. On July 18, Mrs. Bruni-Sarkozy honored the former South African president at New York City’s Radio City Music Hall for the Mandela Day Concert by performing Bob Dylan’s “Blowin’ in the Wind” with Dave Stewart, from the group Eurythmics. President Sarkozy was among the distinguished crowd that attended the first lady’s performance, which also included her hit “Quelqu’un m’a dit.”

Though Mrs. Bruni-Sarkozy had previously stated that she would not appear on stage while her husband was president, she made an exception to contribute to Mandela Day as she was named a Global Ambassador for the protection of mothers and children against HIV/AIDS of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. “That which stirs up my admiration is the charity of public figures, such as Nelson Mandela, [and] their capacity to get involved for the good of others,” she declared in an interview for French magazine l’Express.

This charity event, which held a crowd of 5,900, will support the Nelson Mandela Foundation in its endeavor to raise HIV/AIDS and poverty awareness in Africa. July 18 also marked the first annual “Mandela Day,” which will serve “to honor and celebrate former South African President Nelson Mandela and his legacy.”

Mrs. Bruni-Sarkozy was part of an impressive line-up that included artists such as Stevie Wonder, Alicia Keys, and Aretha Franklin, as well as actors Morgan Freeman and Matt Damon, among others.
France Navigates Toward New Maritime Policy

During his visit to Le Havre on July 16, French President Nicolas Sarkozy explained the government’s plans for the town’s major port, but also seized the opportunity to define and expand on France’s newly established, ambitious goals in maritime policy. Developed by the Grenelle de la Mer, a consultative body of state actors and civil experts, these objectives aim to maximize the benefits from France’s seven million square miles of maritime territory and its numerous international ports in a way that will also “safeguard the future of the Earth’s seas.”

To achieve this, President Sarkozy emphasized the need for France to “open itself once again to the sea that border it.” He hopes to initiate the construction of a rapid *Train à Grande Vitesse* (TGV) railway running from Paris to Le Havre which would bring the capital closer to France’s sea-trading activities and make Greater Paris a maritime metropolis. He also discussed an initiative to “protect the sea’s natural resources in order to use them in a more sustainable manner.” This involves increasing the proportion of Marine Protected Areas from one percent of its marine territory to 10 percent by 2012. The President also aims to tap into the ocean’s renewable energy resources. To bolster the country’s maritime workforce, President Sarkozy intends to establish policies for industrial trades of the sea and to develop highly specialized schools for maritime training. He plans on reinforcing state actions at sea by creating a body that organizes and coordinates the sharing of resources divided among Customs, the Gendarmerie, the Navy, and Maritime Affairs. Hopes are that strategic allocations and regroupings of their resources will result in more effective operations to combat pollution, illegal fishing, and narcotic trafficking, and to enforce security of maritime transport.

These ambitions will be more precisely defined in the coming months, when the government issues the *livre bleu*: a book that brings together maritime policy proposals from the State, regional departments, overseas departments, labor unions, and NGOs.

France Finds Châteaux Stimulating, Culturally and Economically

Fontainebleau (above), the famous French château that once lodged countless members of French royalty, is getting a makeover this summer with the help of numerous stone masons, restoration experts, and other artisans. The maintenance of Fontainebleau, located approximately 30 miles southeast of Paris, is a large undertaking, since the palace contains more than 1,500 rooms, including a gilded boudoir where Marie Antoinette spent some of her days. Fontainebleau, however, is not the only château receiving the royal treatment this summer. About 50 French châteaux, such as the world-renowned palace of Versailles, will also benefit from extra attention. Furthermore, 75 cathedrals, including Notre-Dame de Paris, are receiving additional funds.

These renovation and restoration projects are a large component of the broad economic stimulus program that French President Nicolas Sarkozy unveiled in December 2008. Of the $37 billion stimulus, a total of approximately $140 million has been designated specifically for these kinds of national beautification projects. The French government is determined to enact this stimulus package as quickly as possible. Patrick Devedjian, the minister in charge of the French relance, or stimulus, plans to spend 75 percent of the stimulus money within the year. "We want rapid results," says Mr. Devedjian.

In addition to the restoration of cathedrals and chateaux, other artistic endeavors underway include the construction of a museum devoted to Lalique glass in Strasbourg and a new center for Mediterranean culture in Marseille. The stimulus is also financing less glamorous, but equally important, projects such as fixing potholes and upgrading transportation networks.
Chicago Goes Crazy Over *Fous de Bassin*

This summer, Ilotopie, a world-renowned French performance troupe, will bring the waters of Lake Michigan to life with its hour-long spectacle *Fous de Bassin* (Water Fools). The company is famous for its waterborne wonders and will be making its American debut August 21 and 22 at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater's World's Stage Series. With heads bursting into flames, a 12-foot-tall performer riding a penny farthing, and cruising cars — all of which takes place on the surface of Lake Michigan — the performance promises to entertain.

Though Ilotopie’s spectacle may appear magical to audiences, the troupe actually uses ingeniously engineered vehicles to move its performers above the water as they act out humorous everyday situations. “Bringing Ilotopie to Navy Pier provides Chicagoans and our visitors the opportunity to witness some of the world’s most incredible and inspiring performers using our City’s beautiful Lake Michigan waterfront as a unique and limitless performance space,” stated Criss Henderson, executive director of World’s Stage Series.

Founded in the 1980s, Ilotopie has a cast of 21 artists and 10 technicians who have brought their street theater and aquatic magic to venues such as France’s Seine River and the *Grand Canal de Versailles* as well as England’s Thames River. The troupe has also appeared in festivals throughout Europe, Singapore, and Australia.

Both performances will begin at sundown and are free to the public, while limited preferential seating is available for reservation online for a fee. For more information, please visit: [www.chicagoshakes.com](http://www.chicagoshakes.com).

No Summer Holidays for French-American Relations

The summer season took on a French flair as various events highlighted the French-U.S. alliance. French Ambassador to the U.S. Pierre Vimont joined the celebration of the enactment of the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail Designation Act on July 25 in the New York Hudson Valley cities of Newburgh and Dobbs Ferry. This trail traces the journey of French troops from Newport, RI, to Yorktown, VA, where they joined American troops and the French Navy. Orchestrated by French General Jean-Baptiste de Rochambeau and U.S. General George Washington, the joint operation in Yorktown led to the decisive 1781 victory against England.

As such, the Ambassador characterized the trail as a “clear demonstration that the destinies of France and the U.S. had become tightly intertwined.”

Commemorating Gen. Washington’s headquarters in Newburgh and his meeting place with Gen. Rochambeau in Dobbs Ferry is part of a larger regional legislative effort led by U.S. Reps and French Caucus members Maurice Hinchey and Nita Lowey. By officially recognizing the route, they aim to encourage federal funding for historical preservation, tourism, and education in the region.

On August 2-4, Ambassador Vimont was invited by the Arkansas congressional delegation to spend two days in Little Rock meeting with Governor Beebe and other dignitaries. He also toured the Clinton Presidential Library and US affiliates of French-owned companies, including Dassault Fokon Jet and L’Oreal USA, that have invested in the state. He was introduced by U.S. Representative Vic Snyder before giving a speech on “France’s Role in the World” at the Clinton School of Public Service. In Rogers, he addressed a crowd at the Arkansas Trade World Center on myriad issues, ranging from trade and investment to health care and diplomacy, after a warm introduction by U.S. Representative Boozman, co-chair of the French Caucus. Impressed by the state’s skilled work force, the Ambassador plans to “spread the word that more French companies should invest in Arkansas.”

An Illuminating Display of French Ingenuity

Once upon a time, Alain Guilhot was told that light architecture was a "useless expense." "Everyone thought I was crazy,” says Guilhot. Now, more than thirty years after he created the Light Architecture Council, people all over the world have come to see the value of light architecture, a process that manipulates the light of a structure or place in order to maximize its aesthetics or practical utility. These projects can have grander implications for cities than just physical appearances, however. Light architecture is now considered to be a contributing element toward social peace, “the phenomenon [that sociologists call] ‘reappropriation’ of the city by its inhabitants. We create a link that provokes pride and respect for the neighborhood,” Guilhot explains.

His recent projects include the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur, the Oriental Pearl Tower in Shanghai, and France’s Eiffel Tower. He also founded the world-renowned Lyon Festival of Light, which welcomes four million visitors over the span of four days each December, and has designed and planned projects in Cannes, Rabat, Saint Petersburg, Doha, and Ho Chi Minh City. Of the countless cities Guilhot has visited, he still remains captivated by the energy and youth of New York City, where he hopes to complete his next project: the illumination of Central Park.
When picturing the right bank of the Seine in Paris, palm trees and sandy beaches do not usually come to mind. But in July, the area of the city bordering the River Seine undergoes its annual transformation, becoming a communal vacation destination for Parisian beach-lovers. Paris Plage — also known as the Beach of Paris — teems with action from July 20 to August 20 as millions gather to relax and delight in the sun at the heart of the city.

Due to the downturn of the global economy, Paris Plage — which is free and open to all — expects a record number of visitors for the summer of 2009. It spans almost two full miles, most of which is covered by about 2.7 million pounds of sand. Paris Plage, however, includes quite a bit more than the average beach. Along the Georges Pompidou Expressway and the city hall, there are activities and services designed to educate and entertain people of all ages.

As a family destination, this summertime getaway has many programs structured specifically for children. Curious kids can revel in the four different science programs: an astronomy section, where they can explore our solar system; an interactive sustainability area to teach them about recycling; a section where they can study the physical composition of sand and dunes. For future artists, there’s the Nougaro workshop, which blends music, poetry and art through the songs of Claude Nougaro, a French singer who melded traditional French music with Brazilian rhythms and American jazz. Children also have the opportunity to create their own masks, drawings, digital art, t-shirts, murals and more. Jugglers and musicians enliven the scene with performances tailored to a younger audience.

Paris Plage: Past and Present

Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoë’s vision — a stretch of sand covering the cement of the Pompidou Expressway — was brought to life in 2002 and instantly became a smash success, attracting visitors in bathing suits by the droves.

The summer transformation of the Seine’s banks has expanded to meet a growing demand, adding diverse attractions each year. In 2004, a 90-foot pool was added, allowing 200 people at a time to splash into the summertime fun. After children have finished washing the waters, adults are given the chance to participate in an adult-only aqua class. With showers, clothes checks and changing rooms on location, the public can change or freshen up at the beaches to maximize their time in the sun. Forgot a suit or need a new one? Not to worry: vending machines dispense bathing suits for only $6.30. As time went on, other additions to the Paris Plages repertoire included rock climbing and music performances in the evening.

With the development of these new features came the need to physically expand the beach. In 2007, Paris Plage’s two sand beaches, two grass stretches and pebble coast attracted three million visitors. Attendees reclined on 300 deck chairs and loungers under the cool shade of palm trees and parasols.

This pedestrian paradise benefits from the financial and in-kind contributions of 15 organizations which collectively provided approximately $1.4 million of the $3.5 million budget for 2009. Monoprix, a sponsor since the event’s 2002 sandy inception, sets up stands on the side of the Seine and sells products to tourists. Société Lafarge, a seven-year participant, provides the beach with 2,000 tons of sand. Company Eau de Paris supplies pure drinking water to visitors, while FNAC contributes music, Citelum the lighting, Electricité de France the electricity and Orange the nautical equipment.

The popularity of the Parisian beach captured the attention of other European cities, which also created their own versions of the event. Now in its sixth year, Toulouse Plage on the Quai de la Daurade in the South of France organizes touristic, athletic and cultural activities. The Milano Beach offers similar entertainment and even a free day-care center. In Hamburg, the public can use their regular city rail passes to take boat rides along the Elbe River. Palm and coconut trees decorate Bruxelles-les-Bains, where the public can partake in cultural and sporting events and enjoy exotic drinks and international foods under straw huts. The Berlin Strand set up beach bars while in Budapest, one can bask in the sun by day and dance in bars and gaze at the Danube by night. Adapting Paris Plage’s philosophy, admission is free for all the beaches.

Paris Plage has revolutionized notions about vacationing in Paris and throughout Europe. Offering a plethora of activities and events, the banks of the Seine have become a public space that benefits all. This beach fulfills the city dwellers’ wish for a fun and relaxing summer escape without having to go any further than their own backyard for an affordable vacation getaway.
Pipe Dream Comes True with Parisian Tunnel

It is unheard of! Ten minutes of travel time from Malmaison to Versailles, France, instead of the usual 45-minute drive. French autoroute agency Cofiroute expects to complete the A86 tunnel by 2010. This Parisian motorway is expected to significantly reduce the transit time for commuters. An approximately $3 billion project, the tunnel will complete the A86 ringroad around Paris — a beltway that will link the three main departments of Paris and relieve pressure on current road infrastructure. This project also aims to maximize safety with a camera-equipped radar system to regulate speed. To effectively control circulation, an information system will collect and relay data such as speed and density of traffic to a central control office. The tunnel will also increase accessibility between the suburbs of Paris.

The tunnel will be comprised of two toll tunnels that run 50 miles under busy neighborhoods. The A86 East tunnel, exclusive-for light vehicles, will have two decks with three lanes running southbound on one level and three lanes running northbound on the other. A low clearance and narrow lanes limit the size of vehicles that can enter to six-feet, eight-inches - similar to that of parking garages. These dimensions, along with a slight incline of the road, restrict the speed limit to a proposed 44 miles per hour. While an estimated 85 percent of Parisian vehicles meet the dimensions to take the East tunnel, larger vehicles will have access to the West tunnel. The A86 West tunnel is a single-deck and a two-lane, two-way tunnel. With 16 feet of headroom, larger vehicles can run at 37 miles per hour to ameliorate safety conditions. This motorway will tunnel the driving experience in Greater Paris in a safer and more efficient manner.

Ma Chaîne Étudiante Channels Student Resources

"Ma Chaîne Étudiante" (MCE), both a television channel and a Web site, will reach out to the four million French people within the 16/29 age group on October 1. It is entirely dedicated to student life and the difficult transition into the professional world. This television-Web site combination both informs youths as well as encourages networking and content sharing, and could become the first French community media platform to bring students together nationwide and encourage inter-school and inter-university exchange.

With documentaries, television series, and reruns throughout the day, and three hours of fresh content every evening, the channel will cover all facets of a French student’s experience by providing information on jobs and career paths, advice on internships, health, housing, and study abroad, reports on upcoming events such as concerts, movies, video-games, and trips, and sports matches.

Programming will revolve around three major categories: "Information and Services," "Orientation and Scholastic Training," and "Entertainment." Providing a wide spectrum of themes, the channel is comprised of a diverse bank of original programming, including the daily Ma Quotidienne, a round-table talk show bringing together experts on specific issues, C’est mon job! and Cas d’école that present mini-reports on a specific profession or scholastic program, respectively, or Faits vos jeux! where viewers follow the process of business investments in humanitarian projects proposed by students. To appeal to an increasingly globalized world, foreign language content will also be aired with subtitles and in its original version.

Prepare for a New Set of Wheels

In the upcoming launching of the Autolib’, a project initiated by Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoé, residents of Paris and 20 of its suburbs will be able to navigate their streets with an extra set of wheels. After encountering some legislative barriers, the project, riding on the success of the Vélib which has offered rentable bikes since 2007, received the green light. Like Zipcar in the United States, this project will provide an environmentally-conscious alternative to owning your own car. Autolib will soon enable residents of Greater Paris to rent a vehicle for $21.4 to $28.5 per month or $5.7 to $7.1 per half hour, according to initial estimations. A driver will have the option to pick up and leave a car at any of 1,400 stations, 700 of which will be located in Paris proper. Four-door vehicles with a trunk will be available for everyday use, while two-door vehicles will provide a more professional alternative. To ensure that a car will be available, a subscriber will have the option to reserve it online. In total, 3,000 to 4,000 Autolib’ cars are expected to cruise through the streets of Greater Paris by the end of 2010.

Autolib affords drivers an economical means of transportation.
Parliament Extends Business Operations on Sundays
The French parliament adopted a new bill on July 23 that extends the working hours of certain French businesses and allows the operation of others on Sundays. The new law balances France’s respect for family and personal time and expanding economic opportunity by permitting more businesses to operate on Sundays. Businesses that benefit from this legislation include those in touristic areas as well as those in cities with over one million people. Independently owned grocery stores in particular have been given permission to operate Sunday mornings until 1:00 p.m. Another important aspect of this legislation is a noticeable increase of wages: it guarantees that employees will earn up to doubled wages on Sundays and an extra day off.

National Education Goes Digital
Schools may be closed for the summer, but beginning this year, French students from elementary through high school can access free summer courses online that allow them to review the subjects covered throughout the year and hence prepare their return to school. Former education minister and current Minister of Labor Xavier Darcos announced the launching of this free online service, www.academie-en-ligne.fr, on June 19. This new summer course service, operated by the National Center of Long Distance Education is just the first step in the development of Académie en Ligne. This program aims to ensure equal opportunity and the continuation of a “free, secular, and obligatory” education system, as well as to adapt to the modern communication technologies. To achieve this, Minister Darcos hopes for the gradual buildup of an online resource where all contents and materials of the National Education curriculum are globally accessible to all people regardless of socioeconomic status and geographic location. Expanding just as classes start this September, the site will soon offer a location. Expanding just as classes start this September, the site will soon offer a free, secular, and obligatory education for all.

French Say Oui to Obama and U.S.
The 2009 Pew Global Attitudes Project, a poll covering a total of 25 nations, including France, demonstrates the tremendous improvement of French perceptions and attitudes towards the United States since President Barack Obama took office in 2009. Ninety-three percent of French respondents confirm that the American presidential election improved their favorability towards the U.S. Three out of every four now view the United States positively; a 33 point increase since 2008. French perceptions of American people have also improved: after an 11 point increase overall since last year, three out of four now view the American people positively.

The survey also demonstrates a newfound confidence in the American presidency as 91 percent of French respondents voiced confidence in President Obama. Eighty-two percent approve of his decision to close Guantanamo, 84 percent support his stimulus spending bill, and 88 percent back his decision to withdraw from Iraq. In addition, 74 percent now support the U.S.-led efforts of counter terrorism which is a 31 percentage point increase since 2007, and similar to the French attitudes recorded right after September 11, 2001. For more information, please visit: www.pewglobal.org.

Guinguettes Revive Riverside Joie de Vivre
Originating in the 18th century, guinguettes have been a constant source of inspiration to artists. Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s Bal du moulin de la galette and Vincent Van Gogh’s La Guinguette are two artistic depictions of the socio-cultural role these establishments played over a century ago. Far from becoming obsolete, this milieu still has a powerful hold on the French imagination and cultural perception.

The revival of the open-air cafés known as the guinguettes is bringing new life back to French riverbanks. These festive summer restaurants are the ideal place for a Sunday of relaxation where friends and family gather to enjoy good food, drinks, dance, and entertainment, all to the sounds of local music. Guinguettes are reappearing from the shores of the Loire to the Seine. The popular Chez Gégène at Joinville-le-Pont near Paris serves original fried foods and white wine while its terrace, overlooking the Marne, entices the public into a languorous tango or a wild swing. Other hot spots include la Goulue, where food is a family affair, and la Guinguette de l’île du Martin Pécheur, which is an ideal location for a picnic.

Along the Seine, la Guinguette de Neully on île de la Batte creates the quintessential guinguette experience with red- and white-checkered table cloths and lush green surroundings. In Lyon, the Quai des guinguettes revitalizes bistros and Sunday lunches. With satisfied appetites, people can engage in all types of river-related activities, such as canoeing, rowing races, water jousting, boat competitions, and fishing.

On this side of the Atlantic, the Alliance Française de Milwaukee hosts on September 13 its 11th Annual Cercle d’Or Fundraiser featuring its own guinguette experience from a local home titled Une Guinguette à Milwaukee. The evening is accompanied by a raffle for a visit to Lorgues, France; Dorset, England; and a journey through Côte d’Azur, France.

News from France does not endorse the content, views, and opinions of authors expressed in the aforementioned Web site.
Hidden Treasures in Paris

For the average tourist, visiting Paris includes climbing to the top of the Eiffel Tower, exploring the vast hallways of the Louvre, or overlooking the entire city from the steps of the Sacré-Cœur Basilica. Though these experiences are certainly invaluable, the tourist — and, sometimes, even the Parisian — can forget that there is much more to France’s capital than the most recognized attractions. Often, all it takes to discover a lesser-known museum, beautiful passageway, or romantic garden is a tiny detour.

By exploring one of the earliest neighborhoods in ancient Paris, history-lovers can rejoice in the discovery of traces from the second century A.D. during the Gallo-Roman period. Located close to Rue Saint-Jacques on the Left Bank, one can view an ancient house with its own private baths, under-floor heating system, and wall paintings. For the less squeamish, Paris’s underground sewer system is open for tours that explain its long and interesting history. In the tunnels through which Victor Hugo’s hero, Jean Valjean, carried the body of his adopted daughter’s sweetheart in Les Misérables, visitors explore ancient as well as modern devices that operate the sewers and make this system one of today’s best, largest, and most efficient. On a sweeter note, wine aficionados will appreciate Montmartre’s Grape Harvest Festival, which celebrates the arrival of the latest vintages each year from Parisian vines with a costume parade, concerts, and a grape harvest. Other under-visited tourist attractions include a museum of magic in the Marais and the location of lovers Abelard and Héloïse’s first meeting in the Île de la Cité.

These sights are just a glimpse of what one can discover with a little research and an adventurous spirit in Paris. For more information on tourism in France, please visit: www.franceguide.com.

Comic Book Museum Draws Crowds in Angoulême

The city of Angoulême in the west of France animates comic-lovers with its recently unveiled Musée de la bande dessinée (Comic Book museum). Each year, the city hosts le Festival international de la bande dessinée (the International Comic Book Festival) which includes four days of expositions, concerts, and the largest collection of comic books for sale. Now, however, le Musée de la bande dessinée will offer comic book-lovers year-round access to exhibitions.

Though comic books were once considered a minor form of art, recently comics have risen in prestige in the art world. Today, le bande dessinée has a much wider audience, on top of being recognized as a legitimate, dynamic art form. “It is our ambition to show that comic books are a reflection of their time and society,” stated Ambroise Lassalle, the museum curator. The museum highlights the art form’s history by showcasing some of its most famous fictional celebrities such as Bécassine, Gédéon, Tintin, and Mickey Mouse. A selection parallels the development of Franco-Belgian and American comics, while another features Japanese comics. A number of original objects, such as Bécassine, Gédéon, Tintin, and Mickey Mouse. A selection showcases the comic book creation process. At the end of their museum experience, visitors can browse the extensive collection of comics available for sale to take a little piece of the museum with them. For more information please visit: www.comicbd.org.

It’s Show Time for the Festival d’Avignon

Avignon hosted its 63rd annual Festival d’Avignon from July 7 to 29. Founded in 1947 by Jean Vilar, a famous French actor and director, the Festival d’Avignon has occupied a central role on the French cultural scene since its creation. The festival took place in the Cour d’Honneur du Palais des Papes, which was once the place of residence of several popes.

This acclaimed theater and performing arts festival allows artists from all over the world to perform for a diverse crowd. For any artist, participating in the Festival d’Avignon is an honor as it recognizes a high standard of quality in the world of performing arts.

Although this event takes place in France it isn’t limited to a French-speaking audience; over the years the festival has reached out to the international public by making its artistic program as accessible as possible to non-French speakers. From minres to theater and dance to visual arts, the Festival d’Avignon has it all.

This year’s program was exceptionally rich with many nationalities represented and performances held in English, Spanish, Italian, Arabic, Polish, German and Hebrew. By performing in their native tongue, artists could rejoice in a greater freedom of expression. Throughout the festival, artists established a dialogue with spectators, immersing them in a multicultural environment favoring cultural exchange and creating a unique, eye-opening experience.

NEWS FROM FRANCE
Summer Break

*News From France* will resume production at the end of September, early October. Until then, the publication would like to thank you for your loyal readership and wish everyone an excellent summer.

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“Cheers” to Four Hundred Years of Lake Champlain’s Name

Amb. Vimont (left) and Vermont Governor Douglas at the Shelburne Museum.

The year-long festivities of the Vermont Lake Champlain Quadricentennial Commission (LCQC) celebrate Lake Champlain and the French explorer, cartographer, and diplomat, Samuel de Champlain, after whom it is named. Marking the 400th anniversary of Champlain’s first voyage to the region, LCQC in cooperation with Québec, the state of New York, and France, commemorates the explorer’s impact as well as the history, culture, and splendor of Lake Champlain Valley.

Guided by 60 Algonquins on 24 canoes, Samuel de Champlain explored the lake, then called Bitawbagok, in July 1609. His objectives were to map and explore New France and find a route to the Pacific, all the while fostering alliances with Native American tribes. The first European to navigate the waters, Champlain successfully stopped the Iroquois invasions against Algonquins, Hurons, Nipissings, Montagnais, and Ojibways and left the groundwork for a commercial treaty between France and Native American tribes. Soon after his return to Europe, his influence and accomplishments were recognized and the lake was renamed in his honor.

LCQC expects to attract a large crowd to the year-long celebration. With this in mind, the commission collaborated with state organizations to complete several infrastructure projects, including fixing public access points to the lake and preparing state parks and historic sites for the increased tourist activity in 2009.

Throughout the year, over 100 events highlight the local culture, resources, and natural history. In August, participants of the Small Boats of Lake Champlain event will learn to build their own life-size cardboard boat, and participate in a three-mile boat race aboard kayaks, canoes, and paddle boats. During the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum Storytelling Festival, visitors can gather around a crackling fire, on the deck of a wooden boat, or in a theater to listen to the region’s best storytellers, historians, and musicians recount the history and legends of the lake. At a three-day music conference, visitors are enticed to dance to the rhythms of live, Franco-American themed musical performances. In September, the commission will offer bike tours that retrace the historic path that Samuel de Champlain once followed.

A main feature of the year-long celebration is the Burlington International Waterfront Festival. Québec and France joined Vermont to display music, film, theater, dancers, new technology, lake ecology and Native American and Franco-American history forums from July 2-14. French Ambassador to the United States Pierre Vimont joined in the festivities, which featured gastronomic treats, dancing, live music, films and cinema, all of which served to emphasize the Franco-American connection. At a special ceremony on the Shelburne Museum’s steamship Ticonderoga to unveil two wampums, or Native American belts, lent by the Chartres Cathedral, Ambassador Vimont expressed the hope that Vermont and France will build upon their already existing ties and expand into new areas of mutual cooperation. This trip was the Ambassador’s first to Vermont, but he stated that it is “a beautiful state, and I very much intend on coming back.”

Bordering New York, Vermont and Canada, Lake Champlain celebrates 400 years of cultural distinctiveness and rich history.