

A triweekly review of French news and trends
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"Transatlantic Dialogue USA-France-Germany"

New exchange and cooperation program will lead to renewed links between the three nations

ON DECEMBER 12, French Ambassador Jean-David Levitte, German Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger and Secretary General of the Franco-German Youth Office (FGYO) Babette Nieder announced at a press conference in the National Press Club (Washington, D.C.) the launch of a French-German-American program designed to promote friendships and educational exchanges among French, German and American youths. The FGYO was created in 1963 under the terms of the Elysee Treaty for the purpose of promoting reconciliation between the French and German nations. Since then, it has been a platform for projects and exchanges in many different areas (education, business, athletics, etc...) and it enables 200,000 young people to take part in over 7,000 exchange programs annually.



From left to right: Daniel Hamilton, executive director of John Hopkins University's E.U. Center, German Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, French Ambassador Jean-David Levitte, Peter Hickman, vice-chairman of the National Press Club, and Babette Nieder, secretary general of the Franco-German Youth Office.

(Courtesy: Alan E. Porter, ASAP Worldwide Productions)

The main goal of the new "USA-France-Germany" program is to encourage and reinforce transatlantic debate and discourse and to improve understanding among the three nations. A number of trilateral educational seminars and conferences will be organized in the spring of 2004, involving students and scholars from universities in the United States and Germany. Additionally, the Franco-German Youth Office will establish a program of "Travel and Project Grants," supported by private-public partnerships and foundation donations, to enable Americans to participate in Franco-German youth seminars in Europe and to permit French and German youths to do the same in the United States.

For more information, visit www.ofaj.org.

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Baker Meets Chirac for Iraqi Debt

France and U.S. are on the same wavelength regarding the cancellation of Iraqi debt

PRESIDENT OF THE IRAQI Governing Council Abdel-Aziz al-Hakim met with French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin in Paris on December 15 in order to discuss the situation in Iraq. During a joint press briefing, Villepin declared that the French Government is prepared to cancel or renegotiate Iraq's debts with France, which amount to approximately \$3 billion. "Through the Paris Club framework, France, together with other creditors, believes that an agreement could be reached in 2004, if the requisite conditions are met," explained Villepin.

The following day, on December 16, U.S. Special Envoy James Baker called on President Jacques Chirac in Paris to further discuss the possible cancellation of Iraqi debt. Following their meeting, a joint declaration was released by France, Germany and the United States reading:

"Debt reduction is critical if the Iraqi people are to have a chance to build a free and prosperous Iraq. Therefore, France, Germany and the United States agree that there should be substantial debt reduction for Iraq in the Paris Club in 2004, and will work closely with each other and with other countries to achieve this objective. The exact percentage of debt reduction is subject to future agreement between the parties."

FORMER FRENCH PRESIDENT "IMMORTALIZED"

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, 78, was elected on December 11 as one of the 40 members of the Académie Française, the oldest institution in France, created in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu in an effort to standardize the French language by maintaining consistent rules of spelling, grammar, and rhetoric.



The Académie Française

(Courtesy: Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

The 40 members of the Academy are known as the "immortals," as members are elected for life. The membership has traditionally included prominent figures from a wide range of fields, from poets and philosophers to scientists, politicians, and clergymen. Giscard d'Estaing, who will be taking the seat left vacant by late Senegalese president and author Léopold Sédar Senghor, will join the ranks of such distinguished former members as Victor Hugo, Jean Racine, Voltaire, and Claude Lévi-Strauss.

The work of the French Academy has chiefly consisted in the preparation and revision of a dictionary (1st ed. 1694, 9th ed. 1992-). In light of the globalization of recent years, the Academy has also had the task of deciding which foreign words should enter the French dictionary. It is responsible

for awarding some 60 major literary prizes each year.

E.U. ENLARGEMENT MASSIVELY BACKED BY FRANCE

On November 26, the Athens treaty, which enlarges the European Union to include 10 new members, was ratified by 505 representatives of the French National Assembly, with only 3 voting against. On December 10, the Senate also voted overwhelmingly for enlargement, by 287 to 1. French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin told the Assembly that this was "a historical date for France, a day when Europe will reunite." He also called for a "national mobilization" to help build a new, enlarged Europe.

FRANCE LEADS INTERNATIONAL MILITARY EXERCISE

Three thousand soldiers from Canada, Morocco and nine European nations, participated in a military exercise in Sisson, Picardy, from November 24 to December 5. The troops involved simulated an invasion of northern France, with all the battles taking place on computer screens. This virtual operation, called "Opera 3T," was organized and led by France, as part of its plan to set up a rapid-reaction force headquarters that could be used by both NATO and the European Union. The new force will have its headquarters in Lille in northern France and will seek certification from NATO in 2006.

120 TERROR SUSPECTS ARRESTED BY FRENCH

Pierre de Bousquet de Florian, France's director of intelligence, said in a recent interview that 120 terror group suspects have been arrested in France since the September 11 attacks against the United States. In particular, he noted that his services foiled a plot to bomb the U.S. Embassy in 2001.

Bousquet de Florian, warning that France continues to be a target for terrorists, also stated "Islamic extremists include us in their hatred of the West."

NEWS FROM FRANCE / December 23, 2003

AMBASSADOR HONORED AT FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Ambassador of France Jean-David Levitte was honored as this year's "host ambassador" for the 26th annual Festival of Lights held by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Maryland. Before lighting the over 400,000 lights that adorn the grounds, Levitte spoke about the importance of light as a symbol of hope, mentioning that for the French hope is best summed up in the three words of the French national motto: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."



Chirac Proposes Law to Uphold Secularism

ON DECEMBER 17, following a report by the Bernard Stasi Commission, French President Jacques Chirac made an important speech supporting a law banning the display and wearing of ostensible religious symbols in public schools. Chirac expressed his desire that such a law "be adopted and put into effect by the National Assembly by September." He affirmed, however, that smaller, more discreet religious emblems should not be proscribed.

Secularism is an essential part of the French national heritage, and has become even more necessary in the light of the increasing cultural diversity of modern French society. Prohibiting overt religious symbols in schools is in total accordance with the principles of separation between religion and state, between public and private matters. Such symbols would of course continue to be allowed elsewhere, but not in public schools, a domain which the French government feels must remain a neutral place to study and an environment free of religious or political tensions.

Chirac also endorsed several other of the Bernard Stasi Commission's proposals, including further efforts by the government to renovate deprived urban areas, the establishment early next year of an independent commission to fight against all forms of discrimination, the stepping up of the fight against xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism, and the inclusion of lessons on different world religions in school syllabuses.

This decision is founded on France's historic attachment to the principles of republicanism, secularism and equality. Far from being a form of religious oppression or discrimination, it stems from a strong secular tradition dating from the 1905 "Concordat Act" that separated church and state. According to this 1905 law, freedom of worship in France is an inviolable right, however "the state neither recognizes nor subsidizes any religion." As always in the past, all citizens are free to believe in and practice their respective religions, provided that such religious observance is exercised within the limits of "the laws on security, public law and order, and respect for other citizens." ■

Entente Cordiale Reasserted

FRENCH PRESIDENT JACQUES CHIRAC and British Prime Minister Tony Blair met in London for the 26th Franco-British Summit on November 24. The two leaders expressed their desire to make 2004 a year of *confiance cordiale*, or cordial trust, thus marking the continuing vitality of their nations' friendship.

Indeed, Chirac and Blair announced their intention to celebrate the centenary of the *entente cordiale*, the friendly understanding reached in April 1904 to settle long-standing disputes between the two nations. This agreement reconciled the two former rivals and eventually led to their alliance during World War I. Queen Elisabeth II will pay a state visit to France from April 5 to 7, 2004, with a return visit by Chirac the following autumn. Chirac also invited Blair and the Queen to a ceremony

in France next June to mark the 60th anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy. Other initiatives will include a wide-ranging program of events open to the public. Much of the money raised will benefit the fight against cancer. For more information, please visit: www.entente-cordiale.org.



French President Jacques Chirac and British Prime Minister Tony Blair
(Courtesy: Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

The two governments also proposed that the European Union develop its rapid reaction capabilities to enhance its ability to support the United Nations in short-term crisis management situations. In a joint communiqué, Chirac and Blair said that "the E.U. should be capable and willing to deploy coherent and credible battle-group sized forces in an autonomous operation within 15 days to respond to a crisis." Both insisted that European Union plans will not undermine NATO. ■

France Fights AIDS and Discrimination

FRANCE WILL EXAMINE with its European partners the possibility of combining their research efforts to discover a vaccine against AIDS, President Jacques Chirac announced on December 1, shortly after the 16th World Day against AIDS. This pooling of resources would be carried out "to complement the research undertaken at the national level," declared Chirac, who judged "alarming" the evolution of the disease in the world.

Explaining that preventing hazardous behaviors, especially among young people, should be a priority, Chirac asked the minister for national education, Luc Ferry, "to continue his [communication] efforts" in this field. The city of Paris was recently commended for its summer ad campaign promoting safe sex, in which 13 famous Parisian monuments and neigh-

borhoods were depicted covered with condoms. In addition, Chirac announced plans to reinforce the fight against discrimination. On this matter, he expressed his satisfaction with the planned creation, in 2004, of a High Commission which will fight discrimination against people suffering from AIDS.

France "shares the World Health Organization's objective to treat three million people in the world by 2005," declared Chirac, who presented this objective as a "first stage." The French president exhorted the other countries united in the fight against AIDS "to take part in this effort" by keeping their promises of financial help for research and distribution of free medicine to AIDS victims. The funds necessary for such an operation would amount to \$3 billion. France is already committed to a contribution of 150 million euros for 2004. ■



Air France, American Red Cross Unite to Combat Measles

ON DECEMBER 3, Air France signed a three-year agreement with the American Red Cross to help the U.S.-based agency carry out its Measles Initiative. Launched in 2001, this initiative represents a long-term commitment to control measles in Africa by vaccinating 200 million children and thus preventing 1.2 million deaths over the next five years.

As part of the partnership, Air France agreed to provide transportation to several African countries for volunteers of the American Red Cross who participate in the measles vaccination campaign. The agreement would also allow members of the airline's frequent-flier program to donate miles for tickets that would support the American Red Cross's international programs, including the Measles Initiative. To

increase the visibility of this campaign, Air France will promote the Measles Initiative at various airport ticket counters throughout the United States.

"We are committed to helping an American institution like the Red Cross by assisting them with their transportation needs," Marie-Joseph Male, vice-president and general manager of Air France USA, declared. "The American Red Cross is proud of our partnership with Air France. Because of their generous donation of tickets and their efforts to educate customers about the tragedy of measles, we can now share firsthand our life-saving efforts with American youth and our advocates around the country," added Gerry Jones, American Red Cross's vice-president for international services. 

Louisiana Purchase Re-Enacted

TO COMMEMORATE the bicentennial of the Louisiana Purchase, the Louisiana State Museum in New Orleans

hosted a re-enactment of the historic land acquisition on December 20, 2003, exactly 200 years after the original purchase. Touted by some as the most significant real estate transaction in history, the Louisiana Purchase was negotiated by President Thomas Jefferson and First Consul Napoléon Bonaparte, and resulted in the transfer of over 800,000 square miles of land from France to the U.S. for \$15 million.



"Hoisting American Colors, Louisiana Cession, 1803,"
Thure de Thulstrup

(Courtesy: Louisiana State Museum / Louisiana Historical Society)

This treaty transformed America overnight from a fledgling country to a formidable nation, effectively doubling its size and permitting western expansion. This territory would eventually be segmented into all or part of 15 American states: Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas and Wyoming.

The re-enactment of the signing of the Franco-American agreement was performed in the *Sala Capitular* of the Cabildo, the room in which the transfer of territory actually took place. Depicted by Swedish artist Thure de Thulstrup in his oil painting "Hoisting American Colors, Louisiana Cession, 1803," the raising of the American flag was acted out in Jackson Square in front of the Cabildo. The ceremony included 20 French, American and Spanish soldiers in period dress with a flag party of four officers, civilians and a drum corps. Jean-Louis Debré, president of France's National Assembly, and U.S. Interior Secretary Gale Norton attended the ceremony.

Please visit www.louisiana.culture.fr for more details. 



"The Triplets of Belleville" Delights American Film Critics

FILM CRITICS had nothing but praise for Sylvain Chomet's animated film, "The Triplets of Belleville," which had its U.S. premier on November 26 in Los Angeles and New York City. The Los Angeles Times proclaimed that "'Belleville' delights in the dazzling eccentricity of its uninhibited imagination," whereas the New York Times described it as "the oddest movie of the year, by turns sweet and sinister ... invitingly funny and forbiddingly dark. It may also be one of the best, a tour de force of ink-washed, cross-hatched mischief and unlikely sublimity."

There has been a great deal of anticipation for "The Triplets of Belleville" in the United States. The film was a very popular selection at this year's Cannes Film Festival, in addition

to being a success at the box office during its run in France. Chomet was nominated for an Academy Award in 1998 for the animated short film, "The Old Lady and the Pigeons."



A scene from the "Triplets of Belleville"

(Courtesy: Sony Pictures Classics)

"The Triplets of Belleville" tells the story of Madame Souza, your typical good-natured grandma, who adopts and raises her grandson, Champion. It is through her gift of a tricycle that Champion realizes his love for cycling, which ultimately leads him to become a contender in the Tour de France in his adulthood. However, Champion is kidnapped, moving Madame Souza to go on a grand quest to find her grandson. Her journey (by paddle boat) leads her to the marvelous city of Belleville: a city evocative of Manhattan that Chomet paints with endearing characters and tongue-in-cheek stereotypes. 

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FRENCH DESIGN FINALIST FOR WTC MEMORIAL

French architect Pierre David's design for the World Trade Center Memorial, "Garden of Light," was one of eight finalists, announced on November 19 by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation. David's project includes a garden, a private area for the victims' families, and a room filled with lights, one for each of the 2,982 victims. It was selected among 5,201 submissions from 63 nations and 49 states, in what was the largest design competition in history. The 13-member jury will choose a finalist by the end of the year. For more information, please visit www.wtcsitememorial.org.

PARIS AND D.C. MAYORS MEET

On November 21, Bertrand Delanoë, mayor of Paris, and Anthony Williams, mayor of Washington, D.C., met at Paris's Hôtel de Ville to discuss economic development and cultural exchanges between the two sister cities. The two cities share many similarities (indeed, a French architect, Pierre L'Enfant, designed Washington's master plan) and so they have much to learn from each other. Delanoë promised to return Williams's visit before May 2004.

FRANCE AND CANADA LAUNCH WEB SITE

France and Canada announced the launch of a Web site devoted to the French presence in North America throughout the 1608-1759 period. "La Nouvelle France" makes 22,000 documents available online. According to Ian E. Wilson, a national archivist for Canada, "It is a unique resource that is not only dedicated to sharing the richness of French history but also to help us understand the determination and cleverness of our ancestors." The site, "Nouvelle-France, Horizons Nouveaux," can be consulted at www.archives-canadafrance.org.

AMERICAN RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS CULTURAL AWARD

Terrie Sultan, of the University of Houston's Blaffer Gallery, was named a Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters, one of France's most prestigious cultural distinctions, on December 2. "I am so honored and excited," said Sultan. "French culture has been a deep and abiding interest of mine since childhood. I'm very proud of this recognition." Created in 1957, the award is given twice every year to individuals from all over the world who have excelled in the arts or literature. Before moving to Houston, Sultan worked for the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.



Christmas decorations on display at the Strasbourg Christkindelsmärik
(Courtesy: Strasbourg Tourist Office)

Alsace: Christmas Market Extravaganza



CERTAIN FRENCH REGIONS have very old Christmas traditions. The Christmas tree first appeared in France in 1605, in the city of Strasbourg, and Avignon (inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi) first introduced the manger, or crèche, to the country during the early 1300s. Since 1802, Marseille has held a "Foire aux Santons" in which all kinds of nativity figures can be found, and Paris has long decorated the Champs-Élysées with its *lumières de Noël* (Christmas lights).

But the most famous French Christmas traditions are without a doubt those of the Alsace region. Cities such as Strasbourg, Colmar and Nancy, with their fairy-tale timbered buildings and strong

Germanic influences, with their Christmas shops selling ornaments and cuckoo clocks, are the place to be in December.

One can find Christmas markets from November to January in almost every city or village in Alsace, but the most renowned is Strasbourg's, which is visited by around 1.5 million people every year. Strasbourg's "Christkindelsmärik" (or "Baby Jesus market") is now celebrating its 433rd year! Created in 1570 by the city's Protestant community, the market spreads across several streets and includes traditional handmade toy shops, the bredle market (for pastries and cookies) and the 30-meter-high Christmas tree in Place Kleber.

For more information, please visit:

www.noel-strasbourg.com

Christmas in France

A 1,500-Year History



CHRISTMAS IN FRANCE, better known to the French as *Noël*, is almost as old as the country itself, with a history that goes back more than 1,500 years. The historical significance dates back to the year 496 AD when Clovis, King of the Franks, and 3,000 of his warriors were converted and baptized into the Christian faith on December 25 in Reims. The date was chosen by Bishop Rémi so that the "rebirth" of King Clovis and his men corresponded to the day when Christians everywhere celebrate the birth of Jesus. Other historical events that took place during Christmas Day, such as Charlemagne's crowning by Pope Leo III in the year 800, helped to make Christmas both a secular and a religious event in France.

Many of the Christmas traditions that we so cherish today have been practiced in France for many hundreds of years. Strasbourg, for instance, became in 1605 the first French city to feature a fir tree as the holy tree of Christmas. The tree, which symbolized the tree in the Garden of Eden, was decorated with artificial roses, apples, sugar, and painted hosts. In the middle of the 17th century, the tree was lit for the first time by hanging candles on its branches. It was not until early in the 20th century that the first electric lights appeared on Christmas.

Another custom that has deep historical roots in France is that of the manger, better known in France as "*la crèche*." Indeed, the word manger is derived from the French for "to eat." Although mangers had been represented in churches and cathedrals since the 12th century, the popular manger was first introduced in France by the Saint Francis of Assisi family

between 1316-1334, in Avignon. But it was not until the 16th century that the making of crèches became a widespread custom. Today, each family in each region has their own particular way of presenting the crèche, which is usually put on display in an important part of the house. In *Provence*, little terra-cotta figures known as "*santons*," or little saints, are placed around the manger, which is decorated with sticks, moss and rocks that the children have collected, to represent the holy family and the other characters of the Nativity. Sometimes, these same figurines also represent townspeople such as mayors, policemen, butchers, bakers and farmers. In the stable is the reproduction of the famous birth of Baby Jesus (whose figurine traditionally only makes its appearance, logically enough, on Christmas Day).



Santons de Noël
(Courtesy: Strasbourg Tourist Office)

As with children in America, children in France, whether from religious or non religious families, anxiously await the arrival of *le Père Noël*, or Father Christmas (better known to Americans as Santa Claus). *Père Noël*, like his American counterpart, has a fluffy white beard, a long red robe, and a pair of wooden shoes. Before going to bed on Christmas Eve, while the parents attend midnight mass at their local cathedral or church, the children of France leave their shoes by the fireplace with the hope of finding goodies stuffed in them on Christmas morning.

In a country where all of these rich traditions and festivities have existed for centuries and have a deep historical significance, it is no wonder that France is a favorite holiday destination for all those who are searching for the roots of their own Christmas traditions!



French Christmas Cuisine



THE FRENCH CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS season with many traditional dishes, each delectable and almost as enticing to the eye as to the palate itself. On

Christmas Eve (following the *Messe de Minuit*, or Midnight Mass, for practicing Christians), the appropriately named *Réveillon* (derived from the verb *réveiller*, to wake up or revive) is a huge convivial family feast. The menu for the meal varies according to region, each one having certain firmly established gastronomic customs. Dishes ranging from turkey, capon, goose and chicken to *boudin blanc* (white sausage) are normally served. In Alsace, roast goose is given the place of honor on the table, whereas in Burgundy, turkey garnished with chestnuts is usually the principal course. In Brittany, buckwheat cakes with sour cream are common, while in Paris and Ile-de-France, *foie gras* and oysters are the *crème de la crème*. Typical wine choices include Muscadet, Anjou, Sauterne and Champagne.

Throughout the Christmas season, the French keep tradition alive with various desserts, each one possessing a story or

symbolic ritual to go along with it. The most famous dessert is the *bûche de Noël* (Yule log), a log-shaped, rolled cake often-

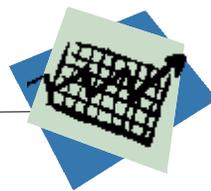


A traditional bûche de Noël
(Courtesy: Terakoya)

times filled with chestnut cream and coated in homemade marzipan. Created in the 19th century by Parisian pastry chefs, this cake was inspired by a special wood log burned from Christmas Eve to New Year's Day in the Périgord, a practice stemming from an old pagan celebration. In southern France, the *pain calendeau* is a Christmas loaf, part of which is given to the poor. Another well-known specialty, served during *la Fête des Rois* (Epiphany) on January 6, is *la Galette des Rois* (Twelfth Night cake), a round cake cut into pieces which are handed

out by a child, known as *le petit roi* (the little king) or *l'enfant soleil* (the sun child), who is hiding underneath the table. The "winner," or the child who finds *la fève* (a hidden charm inside the cake), is crowned King or Queen.

Although taken very seriously as an art, the tantalizing French fares of Christmas are always a fun treat to eat as well as to behold.



Welcoming Business to France

Several new reforms will make France even more attractive to foreign business ventures

FRENCH PRIME MINISTER Jean-Pierre Raffarin held an intergovernmental meeting December 11 devoted to finding new ways to make France more attractive to foreign business. He explained that "in a context of bitter competition between countries to attract young talents and job-creating investments ... [the] reinforcement of France's economic appeal constitutes a priority that has to be taken into account in the government's structural reforms."

The government has identified three main priorities: cultivating the positive image of France within the cultural and scientific communities, strengthening Francophilia among foreign elites and encouraging the establishment of foreign firms in France. Forty initiatives are in the works, many of which have already been announced, such as a new, more favorable tax status for foreign managers working in France, tax incentives for foreign film-makers who produce movies on French territory,

and incentives for research and development spending. Other measures seek to attract foreign researchers to France or to encourage the return of French post-doctorates who have gone abroad. Raffarin wants to turn France into "the number one host nation in Europe for foreign students in the fields of science and economy."

During the meeting, two initiatives were announced that will help France measure and increase its appeal. A new Strategic Council on the economic appeal of France, composed of 20 French and foreign CEOs, including former U.S. ambassador Felix Rohatyn, was created. And a new "balance sheet" of France's appeal, which will be regularly updated, was launched. Its first edition, published by the French Agency for International Investments, ranks France fourth in terms of securing foreign investments, and second in Europe for its productivity rate. ■ ■

TGV Celebrates One Billion Users

ON NOVEMBER 28, France's national railroad company, the SNCF, celebrated a remarkable achievement: the transportation of over one billion passengers on its *Train à Grande Vitesse* (better known as the TGV) over 22 years of service. Though the one billionth rider was not specifically identified, the SNCF held a contest in honor of the historical day. Ten of the best, most original essays of passenger accounts were selected from a large pool of entries, and the winning authors received three pairs of round-trip, first-class tickets to ride the TGV (within France), Eurostar (Paris-London), and Thalys (Paris-Brussels-Amsterdam-Cologne). The SNCF also held an event at its Paris-Conflans factory located south of the capital, where its president, Louis Gallois, said, "The TGV has changed the image of France and



The Thalys TGV linking Paris and Brussels
(Courtesy: Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

changed the French."

Owned and operated by the SNCF, the TGV was officially inaugurated on September 27, 1981, when it made its first 260-km/hour (162-mph) trip from Paris to Lyon. Today, the SNCF runs 660 TGV trains carrying some 200,000 passengers each day at top speeds of 300 km/hour (186 mph) across 1,500 km (932 miles) of special tracks. With the number of riders increasing each year, the SNCF hopes to reach the 2 billion mark by 2010, when it will be transporting passengers at even faster speeds. In 2002, the TGV brought in 2.8 billion euros (\$3.4 billion) of business, and has since seen a 2 percent increase during the first three quarters of 2003. The SNCF's upcoming projects include opening high-speed lines toward eastern France (Paris-Strasbourg), and abroad, from Lyon to Turin, Italy. ■ ■

Airbus Takes Lead in Aircraft Market

EUROPE'S PREMIER AIRCRAFT manufacturer, Airbus, has overtaken its rival Boeing for the first time in terms of sales, passing the symbolic 51 percent market threshold, up from 18 percent eight years ago. Founded in 1970, French-based Airbus is also quickly moving ahead to complete a project by 2006 to create the world's largest passenger aircraft - a \$12 billion undertaking that Airbus hopes will secure its position as the dominant aircraft manufacturer. This new aircraft, the A380, will be a super-jumbo jet costing \$250 million, weighing one million pounds, and capable of carrying up to 800 passengers.

NEW BUSINESS CREATION UP STRONGLY

France's start-up rate went up by 14.4 percent in the past three months, suggesting that the government's economic reforms, in particular the Dutreil law promoting entrepreneurship, are beginning to take root.

The A380 will be large enough to allow carriers to design more passenger-friendly interiors. Some carriers are planning to boast amenities such as casinos, fitness centers, full-scale bars, and duty-free shopping areas. Airbus is predicting a long-term demand of at least 1,500 of its super-sized jets and already has 129 orders for the airplane from carriers including Singapore Airlines, Qantas, Air France, Lufthansa, Korean Airlines, and Virgin Atlantic. Fifty percent of all Airbus's work is carried out in the United States, in large part by American sub-contractors. ■ ■

CHRISTMAS ARRIVAL FOR MARS EXPRESS

Europe's scientists are eagerly looking forward to a Christmas treat: their *Mars Express* spacecraft is expected to reach the red planet on December 25. This vehicle, named *Beagle 2*, is smaller, slightly less mobile and more focused on finding possible signs of past life on Mars than its American predecessors, the twin NASA rovers. But it is certainly revolutionary, for even with a landed mass of less than 30 kilograms (66.14 pounds), it can still perform many types of scientific analyses and collect samples for immediate study on the surface of Mars.

PUBLIC CELL-PHONE CHARGER

"Cogib," designed by Lionel Coq and Sébastien Grau, is France's answer to annoying, impromptu cell-phone battery failures. Permitting on-the-spot recharging for cell phones, palm pilots and laptops, these armored, theft-proof terminals restore battery life for about one euro, finish within 20 minutes and can adapt to 95 percent of all cell-phone brands. Targeting airports, train stations, universities and malls, the two entrepreneurs plan to sell about 5,000 prototypes in Europe, before introducing their product to the American market in 2006.

MONSIEUR INTELLIGENCE ECONOMIQUE

In an attempt to address a perceived disparity between itself and English-speaking countries, France has just created a new governmental position, a *Monsieur intelligence économique* (economic intelligence chief), who will soon be nominated by French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin and who will be in charge of coordinating and improving the diffusion of economic intelligence in France. Such intelligence would include information on contracts, stock markets, the price of raw materials, corporate strategies and the launch of new research projects.

FIRST LONG-DISTANCE ULTRASOUND PROBE

A robotic probe, developed by a team of engineers from Bourges and maneuvered by Dr. Philippe Arbeille, a professor at the medical university in Tours, conducted the first successful long-distance ultrasound on a patient 5,000 km (3,107 miles) away, in Cyprus. From his office in Tours, Dr. Arbeille coordinated the movements of the robot, nicknamed "Otelu," through satellite data transmissions. A joint venture between France, Italy, Greece and the United Kingdom, this technology promises faster diagnoses for patients in remote areas.

NEW "MARIANNE" ON FRENCH STAMPS

Following the tradition that a new Marianne stamp be issued each presidential term, French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin launched an environmentally themed design contest for the stamp's new edition, slated for print production in January 2005. For the first time, all French citizens are invited to depict France's national symbol, Marianne, before the March 15, 2004, deadline. After a pre-selection by regional juries and a national jury headed by actress Véronique Genest, the French public will vote on three front runners, one of which will be selected by President Jacques Chirac.

WINE LABELS

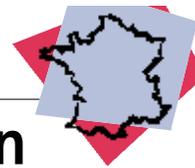
Starting next spring, the labeling of wines will become more accurate, by indicating the exact provenance of the ingredients used in the making of the final product. French vine growers are currently lobbying for labels that would even mention the status of the wine's producer, specifying whether it is a cooperative, an independent vine grower or a corporation. This reinforcement of existing labeling laws will provide consumers with more information and should help the fight against counterfeited products.

PARISIAN WINTER WONDERLAND

Just north of Paris, the renowned French stadium, *Le Stade de France*, was transformed into a giant winter sports complex offering over 20 different types of winter sports for French people to sample. The event, which ran from November 30 to December 7, contained two small ski slopes that were created by bringing in almost 1,000 square meters of snow, two luge tracks, an ice rink, a surf simulator to test one's balance, and a children's snow garden.

MATRIX IN PHILOSOPHY CLASSES

The final episode of "The Matrix" trilogy, which recently hit the screens in France, drew in not only regular moviegoers but also scholars of all kinds. French high school teachers are using these action-packed movies to teach Kant and Plato's philosophy to their students (philosophy is a required subject in French schools). According to teachers, Matrix is more than a "money-making machine," it is also a "philosophical machine" which deals with complex themes such as moral duty, liberty and destiny. Six philosophy professors released this month the first published study (in France) of the trilogy.



Record Amount Raised by Telethon to Help Afflicted Children

A RECORD 95.15 MILLION euros were donated recently to help children who are handicapped or the victims of genetic afflictions. The money was raised during this year's three-day "France 2 Telethon," held in early December. The Telethon is a major event in France, and after 30 hours of live broadcasting, France 2 announced that it had fulfilled its objective by surpassing last year's donations by over 3 million euros. The pledge money is used to help fund research on genetic diseases.

This year, along with the myriad of stars who gave their time and talents to help promote the cause, the Telethon featured many children who offered their personal stories about their everyday struggles

with muscular dystrophy (MS). Indeed, as well as raising funds, this year's Telethon's main goal was to help people better understand what MS is and what its devastating effects are. With the help of *l'Association Française Contre les Myopathies* (AFM - French Association Against Muscular Dystrophy), thousands of children have received help, and a cure for MS seems ever closer.

From 1988 to 2002, 7,500 research programs and study grants covering over 740 diseases have been made possible through the Telethon and with generous donations from the French public. Donations to help support the fight against muscular dystrophy are still possible through the AFM's Web site at www.afm-france.org.



One of many children helped by the Telethon
(Courtesy: Telethon / AFM / R. Bourguet)

Government Launches Internet Education Campaign

THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT launched a campaign on December 1 to raise public awareness of the benefits of using computers and the Internet. The goal of the campaign is to reduce the digital divide in France by appealing to those who are traditionally not accustomed to using computer technology and the Internet. In France, these voluntary or involuntary holdouts often include many senior citizens, women, low-income households, and individuals who do not hold university degrees.

The campaign, called "*Internet Déclaré d'Utilité Tout Public*" ("Internet Declared Useful for Everyone") was backed by the minister delegate for industry, Nicole Fontaine, and by the minister delegate for research and new technology, Claudie

Haigneré, and is supported by private groups, computer manufacturers, publishers, and Internet service providers. To earn the campaign's label, computer manufacturers must comply with guidelines which ensure that their products are affordable, simple to install and use, and capable of performing basic Internet tasks.

During three weeks, radio commercials helped support the campaign by airing testimonials that touted the usefulness of the Internet in daily life. Educational and informational brochures on computers and the Internet will also continue to be distributed at post offices, partner organizations and stores, as well as in government offices. On each radio testimonial and brochure, a message proclaims, "Today, the Internet is for all, truly for everyone."



Internet campaign poster
(Courtesy: Ministry of Industry)

The Court of the Future

THE LONG ARM OF THE LAW will be speedier and more flexible in the future, when technologies demonstrated during a virtual presentation in Caen, Normandy, take off. With Minister of Justice Dominique Perben in attendance, the Court of Appeal of Caen simulated a trial on December 1 in which neither the accused nor the plaintiff were physically present in the courtroom. Instead, they, as well as the witnesses and the court experts, participated through a videoconference system, which allowed for the real-time broadcast of their remarks.

"The judicial process could gain in speed ... quality ... and flexibility," said Perben, referring to the videoconference system but also to other proposed innovations, including secure telephones for private attorney-client conversations and interactive booths that would be located in police stations and from which one could rapidly lodge complaints.

Videoconferencing would be particularly beneficial in

"NEMO" FINDS NICHE

Puppies, kittens and rabbits are all popular cuddly pets. But who ever heard of asking for a fish for Christmas? It's all the rage in France, where the commercial success of Disney's "Finding Nemo," has surpassed all expectations. European pet stores are being inundated with holiday requests for the real Clownfish, a saltwater species from the Indo-Pacific oceans. In France, "Finding Nemo" broke the first-day attendance record for animated films and attracted an astounding 2 million spectators its first week.

civil and commercial cases that do not require the physical presence of the plaintiffs or the accused, and in cases, such as those involving sexual assault, in which the victim or witnesses are reluctant to show up in court. While costly at first, these technologies would create savings in the long term, for instance by limiting the need to travel to court.

The Ministry of Justice has set up a commission to study the effectiveness of these technologies and to help decide how to introduce them into French courtrooms.



Lille, 2004 Euro Culture Capital, Spruces Up

LILLE, CHOSEN TO BE Europe's Cultural Capital in 2004 (along with Genoa, Italy) will mark the year in style. The inaugural weekend, held on December 6-7, already attracted over 500,000 onlookers, more than twice the number expected. The city will host over 2,000 events during the upcoming year, including exhibits, concerts, plays and festivals. Lille also has a new look: a just renovated opera house, and an all-pink train station.

With an investment of more than 140 million euros to revitalize the city, its cultural sites as well as its transportation system, Lille is ready to welcome the 15 million guests expected in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region during the upcoming year. Nord-Pas-de-Calais already spends 13 percent of its budget, or about 156 million euros, on culture, a higher proportion than any other French region, according to its president, Daniel Percheron.



Panoramic view of Lille's Grand'Place

(Courtesy: Sam Bellet / Lille Tourist Office)

The event, sponsored by Lille, the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region as well as the E.U., aims at making culture accessible to everyone. A series of exhibitions, concerts and festivals have been scheduled over the whole year. Martine Aubry, the mayor of Lille, declared that this experience would provide a tremendous opportunity to learn about new ways of living together in an urban and multinational environment.

Lille also plans to spread its good fortune to its smaller neighboring cities by lending some of its most famous works of art to them. Rodin's *Porte de l'Enfer*, for instance, will visit 12 cities. In addition, the national orchestra of Lille will travel to 15 cities in the region during 2004, making Lille a pioneer in cultural decentralization.

Lille has long been one of Europe's hubs. One hour by train from the U.K. and Belgium, it attracts millions of business people and tourists every year. 

Bicentennial of Berlioz's Birth



Hector Berlioz

(Courtesy:

www.metronimo.com)

DECEMBER 11 MARKED the bicentennial of the birth of Hector Berlioz, the world-renowned French composer. Berlioz was born in La Côte St. André, in the department of Isère, on December 11, 1803, and died in March of 1869. Recognized for his musical innovation, Berlioz is best known for the *Symphonie Fantastique* opus, considered to be one of the first defining pieces of musical Romanticism.

While Berlioz himself did not formally play an instrument, it was his ability to "view music abstractedly" and, as he writes in his *Mémoires*, to "free himself from the tyranny of fingers and ordinary sonorities to compose freely and in silence," that

allowed him to produce superb masterpieces and to influence subsequent composers. Berlioz's use of *idée fixe*, a mode of unification of an entire work through the use of a specific theme and story, inspired artists such as Wagner and had lasting implications on operatic form. Berlioz eschewed the schematic standards of his time to produce ultimately original musical works that were infused with elements of poetry, literature, religion and drama. Among his most famous are *La damnation de Faust*, *Requiem*, and *Les Troyens*.

In honor of the bicentennial of his birth there will be numerous celebratory events, including a series of performances at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York (until January 1, 2004) and at the Symphony Hall in Boston (starting on January 8), and a concert at Washington D.C.'s Kennedy Center on January 23. For more information, please visit www.hberlioz.com. 

Louvre Reform Marks New Era

FOR AS LONG AS the Louvre has been in existence as a museum (since 1793), the French Ministry for Culture has run its operations, making the important decisions concerning its staffing, facilities, acquisitions and \$134 million dollar budget. But beginning on January 1, 2004, Henri Loyrette, the Louvre's president-director since 2001, will have full responsibility for managing the world's most visited museum. This reform has been in preparation since spring 2002, when Jean-Jacques Aillagon, a former museum director himself, became France's new minister for culture and made decentralization a priority. "We have now reached the right balance between exercising autonomy and complying with national policies," said Loyrette.

An art historian and a curator by profession, Loyrette is looking forward to his new duties of managing the budget and finding commercial sponsors to pay for temporary exhibitions and gallery renovations. Their contributions would

supplement the \$93 million received in subsidies from the government. Japan's Nippon Television has already agreed to contribute \$3.5 million to help create a new "Mona Lisa" gallery and \$2 million for the renovation of the "Venus de Milo" gallery - the museum's two most frequently visited sites. Loyrette also

plans to oversee the completion of the 20-year-old Grand Louvre Project, which has already seen the construction of the Louvre pyramids, the reorganization of the museum's collections, and the creation of the Richelieu wing. Above all, Loyrette is dedicated to allowing greater access to the Louvre's collections for its numerous foreign and domestic visitors, who number six million every year. 

HANDBALL CHAMPIONS!

France's women's handball team was crowned World Champions on December 14, after beating Hungary 32-29 in overtime.

YOUNG FRANCOPHONE WRITERS' CONTEST

Are you between 15 and 27 years old and a budding French-language *auteur*? Then consider submitting your work to the *Prix du Jeune Ecrivain Francophone*! This annual contest recognizes unpublished, original and imaginative works written in prose by young francophone writers (French citizens are not eligible). The 2004 jury will be composed of famous French literary figures, and winners will see their essays published by the publishing house Le Mercure de France. Runners-up will receive writing classes or books.

The January 17, 2004, deadline is fast approaching! Entries must be written in French and range between 5-25 pages (numbered and double-spaced). Two typed copies of the text must be post-marked before January 17, 2004, or sent by e-mail, to the following address: B.P. 55-31601 Muret Cedex, France Tél/fax 05 62 23 20 29 E-mail: pje@pje.net

Entries must have titles and should not bear the author's name or signature to ensure anonymity (names can be included on a separate sheet). Contestants must also send a photocopy of their identity card, translated in French, which attests to their date of birth. For more information, please visit www.pje.net.

1580 EDITION OF *ESSAIS* SOLD FOR 300,000 EUROS

An original collection of Montaigne's *Essais*, dating from 1580, was auctioned on November 27 by Sotheby's France and was sold for 300,000 euros. The works of Montaigne constitute some of the most significant texts in world literature. Among the most renowned scholars of the 16th century, Montaigne was one of the first philosophers to raise the issue of racial equality. The edition that was sold is one of only three or four known to be in private hands.

NEW ART BOOKS ON PARIS

Two new books dedicated to Paris, one of the most beautiful and beloved cities in the world, have arrived just in time for the holiday season. *The Art and Spirit of Paris*, a two-volume set by Michel Laclotte et al., is a monumental tribute to the city, with 1,654 pages and a \$385 price tag. Weighing more than 30 pounds, Volume I runs from the Roman era through the city's transformation in the 19th century. Volume II spans the wars of 1871 to today. *Paris: City of Art*, by Jean-Marie Perouse de Montclos, packs maps, floor plans, timelines, and art close-ups into its engaging \$85, 720-page single volume.



Kennedy Center Kicks Off New Year With "Festival of France"

Happy holidays and a happy New Year to all of our readers! As in previous years, *News from France* will be taking some time off for the holidays, with the first issue of 2004 coming out on February 4. We hope to see you again then, and to spend another excellent year in your company!

THE JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., will kick off the new year *à la française* by presenting the "Festival of France," a four-month long extravaganza of French culture. The festival will feature traditional and modern works of music, film, dance, as well as literature readings and art exhibits, all to be presented at the Kennedy Center's concert halls and theaters. According to the Center, the festival is a celebration of the impact of French arts on the world and a reaffirmation of the cultural and historic bonds between France and the United States.

One of the most anticipated events at the festival is the U.S. debut of the Paris Opéra Comique - Théâtre Populaire, which will "bring [to Washington] a troupe of actors, singers, dancers, and musicians steeped in the tradition of French *opéra comique*, a form of opera that integrates dialogue, operatic singing, and dance into a unified musical stage play," according to the Kennedy Center. The Opéra Comique company, well-known for its boisterous productions of

Jacques Offenbach's musical comedies, will be presenting seven performances of "La Vie Parisienne," from February 17 to February 22. Artistic director of the Opéra Comique, Jérôme Savary, "set the production of 'La Vie Parisienne' in the original period, with all the trappings of authentic cancan."

"La Vie Parisienne," composed in 1866, is perhaps the best known and most popular of Offenbach's works. Offenbach (1819-1880) composed 40 full-length operettas in his lifetime, and is considered to be one of the most prolific composers of French musical

theater in the 19th century. "La Vie Parisienne," conceived by librettists Charles Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, recounts the story of "a group of cads, a Swedish baron and baroness, a Brazilian millionaire, and a few of the legendarily alluring women of Paris," according to the Kennedy Center. It reflects the "café society, a tribute to the soul of that city, and an expression of the excitement and giddiness it inspires in its visitors."

Other exciting events to take place at the Kennedy Center include the Lyon Opéra Ballet's presentation of a new work by Philippe

Decouflé, performances of French orchestral and chamber music by the National Symphony Orchestra, a program by opera star Renée Fleming and Susan Graham entitled "The Art of French Song" and three theatrical productions for youths presented by the Velo Theater, the *Théâtre en Ciel*, and the *Troupe de Mademoiselle Clairette*. In addition to these and many other performances, the Kennedy Center's Education Department will present lectures and demonstrations for



French frou-frou - a scene from "La Vie Parisienne"

(Courtesy: Kennedy Center)

all ages, while the Center's Restaurant Associates will offer special menus featuring gastronomic delights and wines from France.

For those on a tight budget, or who are unable to come to Washington, D.C., the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage will also feature French performance groups and musical works, with live Internet broadcasts. The Millennium Stage is a long-running program that provides music and dance performances every day at no admission charge at 6 p.m.

For more information, visit <http://www.kennedy-center.org>.

News from FRANCE

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Nathalie Loiseau

EDITOR

Emmanuel Gagniarre

MANAGING EDITOR

Amaury Laporte

SENIOR WRITER

Aude Rabault

WRITERS

Michael Anuskiewicz, Jonathan Bacon, Nicolas Blarel, Carmel Evangelista, Katherine Fuller, Hallie Hassakis, Franciscka Lucien, Loralie Noutong, Susan Swihart

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