

October 2020 Bulletin

October brings with it many celebrations in France and the US. We hope you are enjoying them!

La Toussaint

La Toussaint, a contraction of “tous les saints”, is All Saints Day. It is a Catholic holiday starting on the evening of October 31 and continuing into the next day, November 1st, which is a public holiday in France. Children get two weeks off from school, as it falls halfway between la Rentrée and the Christmas break.

La Toussaint celebrates the named saints, but also all the unknown people who have lived lives of merit in service to others. The French visit the graves of their relatives, bringing flowers. Chrysanthemums are the most popular, which is why you probably don't want to bring them to dinner at a friend's house or give them to your beloved.

This year, France went back into lockdown (le reconfinement) just before the holiday weekend, potentially stranding many people who were traveling, but the government made an exception for those returning home and for la Toussaint. Churches will hold services and people will buy flowers at the flower shops and visit the cemeteries. This year the celebration has a special poignancy for those who have lost loved ones during the pandemic. Le reconfinement also led to huge traffic jams (énormes bouchons) in Nantes as people fled the city for seasonal homes.

Halloween



Halloween, which originated as a Celtic festival marking the end-of-year harvest and the start of the dark and scary winter, evolved into All Hallows' Eve. Americans decorate their houses with all things creepy, as do businesses. Children dress up and go trick-or-treating for candy (and preferably not the new toothbrush that the dentist down the street gives out). In 2020, people are building candy chutes to deliver the goods from a distance (google it – these are amazing) and car washes are turning into drive-through haunted houses. Halloween is not that big in France, but many communities organize concours de déguisements or costume contests and parades, “en ligne” this year.

Dia de Muertos

Dia de Muertos (Day of the Dead) is a Mexican celebration that occurs each year on November 1st & 2nd. In Mexico, there is a long-standing and very unique tradition, rooted in both pre-hispanic and catholic traditions, of honoring and remembering the memory of departed loved ones in a festive, celebratory, and even humorous way. This is quite different than in other parts of the world where death is often confronted with mourning, pain, suffering, and fear.

People form a spiritual communion by creating an altar to the memory of their dead. In a fun and colorful way, with photos, smells, and flavors, the offering includes decorative "papel picado" (paper cut outs), fruits, the favorite foods of the departed loved ones, cempazuchitl (marigold) flowers and Pan de Muerto (special sweet bread, often in the form of a body), among other special items. In Mexico, families go to the cemetery with a picnic and music, eating and celebrating with their deceased. There are large community celebrations with music, dance, face painting, and art displays that celebrate life's beauty by embracing death.

Dia de Muertos is celebrated every year in Seattle by people from all over who want to experience this beautiful tradition. There are many community celebrations in Seattle, but you can join the biggest, virtually, on November 1 at 12pm at <https://diademuertosseattle.org/es/>

Harvest Festivals

Crisp, cooler air heralds the arrival of fall as people reap the harvest of the summer growing season. Markets brim with fresh produce, ready

for heartier fall and winter cooking. Grape harvests in France come to a peak in September and soon after there are the Fêtes des Vendanges (wine festivals) throughout the wine regions. In and near Nantes, festivals such as Les Muscadétours take place, showcasing Muscadet wine. Muscadet is the chief appellation of the Pays Nantais, made from Melon de Bourgogne grapes. Interestingly, one of the few vineyards in the US that grows this grape is on Bainbridge island, near Seattle. Muscadet de Sevres et Maine is a popular choice from the region which goes well with oysters and other seafood caught locally off the Atlantic shores.



If the climate of the Loire Valley sounds familiar to that of Seattle, it is! With oceans nearby, both climates are maritime with noticeable seasons perfect for the harvest of plenty of fine produce. Seattle and outlying areas celebrate the fall harvest by opening up farms and filling produce stands with pumpkins to pick and purchase, apples, apple cider, and the occasional scarecrow and corn maze! Eastern Washington is a major wine grape-growing region and cellars there offer many options for wine tasting and wine-based events for adults as part of the fall celebration. Enjoy the bounty of the season!

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Reminder – the AGM is only 2 weeks away. Join us on Nov 15, 5:00-5:30pm. Look for the Zoom link in email. We will open the Zoom room at 4:45 and leave it open afterwards, so that you can socialize before and after the program. A lucky attendee will win our raffle prize - a Native-American print. Raffle tickets are being delivered to all members, but there is still time (barely) to renew your membership and get a ticket. Contact us seattlenantesSCA@gmail.com.