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Letter from the President

By Susan Kegel

Dear Friends,

With this newsletter we are introducing a series on the history of our association. Thanks to some of our long-time members, we are capturing all kinds of information about the early years, including the personal reminiscences you will read in these pages. In future issues we will add to this with a look back in time on several specific events.

We have also uploaded to our website almost all of the newsletters since the very first one in 1980. There are a few gaps, so if you have one of the missing ones, please send it to us. We have also listed all the scholarship recipients back to the first year we offered scholarships in 1989. It's an impressive record.

In other news, our French conversation group meets every first and third Saturday at 6-7pm. The link is on the website. The group is very informal – no theme, no homework. Anyone is welcome to join any session. The Zoom is set up with no wait for a host, so you can start the conversation as soon as someone else joins you.

We are planning our annual Bastille Day picnic for the afternoon of July 11. It looks like we will be able to meet in person by then, safely and enjoyably. Look for more details in your email in the next few weeks.

Our Nantes Park project is moving forward. The next step is to get in there and do some much-needed weeding. We will send an email once the city has given us the go-ahead. We are waiting for them to relocate a bee swarm in one of the major flower beds ☺

Finally, here is the latest draft of the label for our Seattle-Nantes sister city beer, which we are calling *8000Km Collab*. Available soon in both cities.



Memories of SNSCA's Early Years

Sometimes, a group of like-minded individuals has a desire to come together and share their passion for a common interest. The Seattle-Nantes Sister City Association was born of such a desire. Early members, Misa, Michael, Paula, Joanne, and Mary Ellen all fondly recount their time with the association.

The SNSCA has bound the two rain-prone coastal cities since 1980, but its origins lay in a 9-month festival in 1979 called Bonjour Seattle that was organized by Professor Howard Nostrand. Professor Nostrand and his wife, Fran Nostrand, both worked for the French department at the University of Washington for many years. Misa, a native of France who at the time co-owned a French restaurant in the U-District called Le Pigalle, recalls, "Professor Nostrand contacted me for Bonjour Seattle. He asked me if I was interested in doing something, so we had a dinner at my restaurant, full house. We did a cooking demonstration, and we also had Jean-Jacques Malo, a native from Nantes, and a colleague at the University, both assistant teachers, who played the guitar and we sang songs."

Howard Nostrand was determined to establish a Sister City relationship with France, and he started forming committees to research the possibility. Councilmember Randy Revelle, who had once lived in France, got involved and traveled to Nantes in February 1980. After several ceremonies, meetings, and a four-hour lunch with Nantes' political leaders, Randy successfully negotiated an agreement to pursue the twinning. From here, Bonjour Seattle blossomed into the Seattle-Nantes Sister City Association.

Nantes was a natural choice for Seattle's French sister city: they are both found on the West coasts of their respective countries; they both have high quality wineries and a love of seafood; they each have major universities and research centers; they are both located at roughly 47 degrees of latitude; and they both receive over thirty inches of rain annually.

Paula, a French teacher, recalls first hearing of the association, "I was teaching [French] at my very first school... and we got a newsletter with a little blurb saying 'we have a desire to start a French sister city relationship in Seattle.'" This led to a meeting at Professor Nostrand's house to lay out their goals, one of which was acquiring funding. Paula was tasked with going around to French restaurants to ask for donations, as well as getting the word out by mail. Paula remembers once in 1979 that Fran Nostrand asked her to send out a mailing to about 500 people. It was right before Christmas, when students like to have parties at school, so Paula told her students they were going to have a mailing party. "They were like an assembly line putting on the address labels and stamps. We had it all done by noon!"

The SNSCA was officially founded in 1980. Paula remembers, "There was a radio announcement about the founding of the association, but they mispronounced Nantes!" The first board meeting was in January of that year in the mayor's council chambers. "You could nearly feel the energy in the room. It was exciting that we had reached the point where we would actually have a hand with connecting Seattle and Nantes," says Joanne. "At the beginning we were a room full of teachers and civic people and it was fun with there always being an element of not knowing what to do next because no one had done this sort of thing before."

From the beginning, the SNSCA has organized events with the goal of bringing together the people of Nantes and Seattle, starting with reciprocal museum exhibits. Joanne explains, “Basically, we had 6 months and no money to pull off from complete scratch the installation of two simultaneous museum exhibits with accompanying public receptions, a multi-media show in the Omnidrome of the Pacific Science Center, publicity for all exhibits, and promotion of the Nantes’ delegation arrival.” To be followed by two exhibits of comparable quality to be sent to Nantes. Jules Verne was born and grew up in Nantes, and a museum dedicated to his legacy had just been opened in Nantes in 1978. Seattle of course was known for its airplanes and the futuristic Space Needle, so a Jules Verne exhibit was a natural. The Jules Verne exhibit opened at the Pacific Science Center in September 1980 with the arrival of the first delegation from Nantes. That same year, Nantes also sent 100 items related to the city’s history that the Museum of History and Industry (MOHAI) in Seattle formed into an exhibit on a month’s notice. By 1981, curators from the two cities had gone back and forth to assess what sort of exhibit Seattle should send in return. The first such exhibit was poster art from local Seattle artists, followed in 1982 by the “Eyes of Chief Seattle” exhibit that opened at MOHAI and then was shipped to Nantes. This exhibit was made possible with the help of the Suquamish Tribal Center, which now houses the pieces in their museum.

More types of exchanges quickly followed: high school student exchanges, dance groups, theater exchanges, marathon runners, sailboat races, rowing competitions, Native-American art shows, jazz music, and ballet exchanges. Misa describes another type of event commonly promoted by the association: “from the beginning, we tried to come together for film screenings. The association sponsored films, so that was a way to support the community and get our name out there as well.” In 1985, the association brought an African film and filmmaker to Bumbershoot in coordination with the Mombasa and Limbe Sister City Associations.

Throughout, French educators at all levels and other Francophiles in the community and the local government were key to the success of the association, volunteering their time, expertise, and enthusiasm. Notably, Marie-Pierre Koban who was instrumental in this new venture and organized many student exchanges with her colleague Francoise Kearneis in Nantes. Many of SNSCA’s founding members had learned to love French and France on a study abroad program. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that a core part of SNSCA’s mission since 1989 has been to award scholarships to students studying French, to support new generations of Francophiles. According to Misa, “Seattle-Nantes does a great job with scholarships...I participated every year through interviews with the students and applications.” Scholarships acquired through the SNSCA have allowed more than 80 students to pursue their love for the French language and culture, both in the United States and abroad.

Food and drink has played a big role in the relationship. Michael admires the way the French enjoy the act of sitting down together, talking and enjoying food at leisurely meals. After that early get-together at Le Pigalle, the committee organizing the art exhibits started meeting regularly at The Brasserie, where Joanne remembers they would pour over Telexes, eat French food, and strategize about what to do next. The visit of a dignitary from Nantes solidified the fledgling relationship after a similar dinner at The Brasserie. There followed regular picnics, crêpe dinners, cooking demonstrations, and wine-tasting events.

Through events and scholarships, both local to Seattle and across the Atlantic in Nantes, the SNSCA has provided an opportunity for American and French people to learn about each other’s cultures. Misa, speaking of the value of knowing other cultures, says that the main purpose of the association was to “create an awareness and increase ties, making American people aware of another culture... We always see the differences [between cultures], but there are a lot of similarities too. Maybe we should focus on that more; it opens the mind and creates friendships.”

Michael learned a great deal from the French exchange students that he hosted, and the French students in turn learned a lot from the Americans. For example, in one exchange program with a French rowing crew, Michael and the American students were surprised to learn that many of the French rowers smoked cigarettes, whereas the Americans avoided such behavior because they thought it would affect their athletic performance. On another occasion, Mary Ellen hosted a French student who surely learned quite a bit about Americans when she was informed by her host family that it was not acceptable to let boys sneak into her room at night.

Learning about other cultures is essential because it allows one to reflect on one's own culture in a new way; in Michael's words, "there are some very interesting things in American history -- the US army wouldn't let black soldiers fly in airplanes but the French would. So, there were black Americans who went to France and flew planes during World War I." In this case, learning about French history allowed someone to reconsider their own culture in relation to another that has historically been more egalitarian in some areas. This is not to say that France is perfect in relation to the US; Michael goes on to describe having French exchange students who were deaf. "They really liked living in America because they were treated as normal students. In France, they were treated as disabled people. They met a lot of people who could communicate by signing, so they were happy. They took the bus everywhere, they found that Americans treated them more equally." Cross cultural education runs along a two-way street; the more one takes time to learn about how people from another country approach the same earthly predicaments we are all subject to as human beings, the more one is able to approach life's challenges through an open mind.

As wonderful as Seattle and Nantes are, does this association not embody so much more than just these two cities? Rather, it represents how much the spirit of cross-cultural cooperation can enrich the lives of so many people. Through supporting our sister cities, whether they be Nantes or any of Seattle's other 19 sister cities, anyone can contribute to creating a global-oriented consciousness that sees all humans as humans, replacing a nationally-oriented frame of mind that necessarily sees people from other parts of the world as something different. These sister city associations allow us to see different cultures as beautiful.

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Monthly Board Meetings

The Board convenes on the first Wednesday of the month. During these times of social distancing, we are meeting via video conferencing. If you are interested, contact us at seattlenantessca@gmail.com.

Membership Renewal

Reminder, if you have not already renewed your membership dues for 2020. Thanks to your contributions, which help to organize events and support exchanges.

Please do so by either sending a check to:

SNSCA
5108 1st Ave NW
Seattle, WA 98107

Or using the [DONATE](#) button on our website.