

Introduction

November 2022 marks the end of my first year as President of AFSC, a year during which I hope I have learnt a lot (although there is much I still plan to improve on) and I shall be forever indebted to long-standing members of the committee as well as ex-officio members for their kindness and support. I am looking forward to serving for another year and am delighted to see many long-standing members of the committee remaining with us, at the same time as we welcome new members to our energetic and enthusiastic group.

Committee

I particularly want to pay tribute to Clémentine for her dedication to the role of Vice President following her 3 years as Présidente of AFSC as she steps down to take on the most fulfilling challenge life can ever offer us. We look forward to seeing you as often as you are able to join us Clémentine and wish you all the very best.

And to Jean-Pierre and Ellen, for agreeing to continue to support me through another year as our Vice Presidents - many, many thanks.

Our Secretary Emilia is an ever-present face at our Café Conversations and other cultural events, and your smile really does light up the room. Thank you for the wonderful job you do with our minutes and for making sure that nothing is overlooked.

Nicky - your work with Cécile in keeping our finances carefully in check is just superb and it is to your credit that our books never seem to give the auditors any problems! The job of Treasurer is one you accomplish with such professionalism and we are very grateful. (*Can we add something about Nicky's recent wedding here?*)

I'm thrilled to welcome 2 new members to our committee, Chris and Jill, and we look forward to working with you over the next year. Fresh faces are so important to a group like ours as we keep moving forward with new ideas and enthusiasm - Welcome!

Teaching

That takes me to our wonderful teachers, Cécile, Verity, Émilie and Marine, who are of course ex-officio members of the committee. Your teaching standards are second to none, and as a student myself for the past 2 years, I appreciate your dedication and professionalism and the skills you use to keep every class interesting and worthwhile.

Student enrolments are encouraging, whether classes are held face to face or online, and to each one of our teachers I convey my deepest thanks for all your hard work throughout the year and for the highest standards which you constantly maintain.

It is especially encouraging to see the high retention rate of our students, both young and old, during times when economic constraints can cause people to think twice about discretionary spending. We, of course, are in no doubt about the value of learning and maintaining another language!

Membership

Our membership numbers remain strong (233) and are on a par with last year despite the challenges facing organisations generally, particularly as we move forward out of the Covid era.

Website and Social Media

Yet again we have Cécile to thank for maintaining our website so professionally- we feel that the visuals used are very appropriate for our Sunshine Coast location and keep everyone up to date with our classes and upcoming events. As anyone who has ever attended a Café Conversation, a French Film, a class or a workshop will know, the AFSC website contains everything you could possibly need to know.

Clémentine continues to keep our Facebook page up to date, for which many thanks Clémentine, although as a dinosaur I have to confess to being less than active in this area! Social media is an area of modern life I don't subscribe to, but I try to make up for this deficiency in other ways.

Cultural Activities.

During this year, we have continued to hold our Café Conversations on the 1st and 3rd Saturdays of each month, alternating between The Loose Goose and La Maison du Pâtissier. Numbers of attendees are encouraging and we average between 25-30 members each time.

We have introduced a Lucky Door Prize at each event and we also acknowledge the birthday celebrations of our members each month. The themes of the Café Conversations, ably led by Cécile, and supported unfailingly by J-P and Émilie, have been very entertaining and informative and I pay a special debt of gratitude to Cécile for her leadership and seemingly endless knowledge in devising the quizzes and handouts.

It has been encouraging to see members of the Sunshine Coast French Club, based in Buderim, joining us for our Café Conversations, which fit perfectly between meetings in Buderim taking place monthly on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays. The rapprochement between the 2 clubs, both of whom share the same delight in all things French, is something I value highly and look forward to nurturing in the future. We have also extended AFSC members' discounts to members of the SC French Club - a gesture which has been very much appreciated by them and which has the benefit for us of increasing traffic on our website.

The Sunshine Coast French Film Festival was a great success once again this year and Alliance française de la Sunshine Coast is proud to continue to sponsor this significant cultural event. With films being shown in Noosa, Caloundra, Nambour and Maroochydore, the quality of French cinema is undisputed. Many of the screenings were sold out, causing some films to be shown an unprecedented 4 times. Other Alliances who struggled to sell seats would have been very happy to have had as many attendees as we did. By making the decision to continue our sponsorship of the Sunshine Coast French Film Festival, we have been able to leave the monumental task of film selection, ticketing and promotion to Murray Power whose profile on the Sunshine Coast is of great benefit to us and his professionalism in organising the FFF relieves us of a task for which we simply have neither the time nor the expertise.

Our profile on the Coast, with the opportunity for committee members to interact with the audience at every film, was heightened considerably and I am particularly conscious of the fact that our sponsorship contributes towards the fulfillment of our cultural obligation, as we proudly share some of the very best French cinema with our fellow Queenslanders. I would like to thank all the committee members who volunteered their time to attend the screenings and for the valuable interaction with members of the public at every venue.

My sincere thanks to our Vice President Jean-Pierre for attending the Grand Opening Night of the AF French Festival in Brisbane with me in March - it is always a delight to be accompanied by someone with such elder statesman dignity and J-P represents our SC Alliance with distinction. The evening was affected by floods in Brisbane, necessitating some last-minute rescheduling, but ultimately went off without a hitch.

Diplomacy

April was a busy month diplomatically!

I was pleased to attend the Round Table meeting in Brisbane organised by the French Consulate and chaired by Lady Jane Edwards, the Honorary Consul for France in Queensland. Lady Jane was her customary elegant and enthusiastic self but announced to us all that this would be her last year in the role of Honorary Consul. She will be greatly missed. French groups from around SE Qld attend the Round Table annually and I was pleased to be able to present a summary of our activities here on the Sunshine Coast to the assembled invitees.

Also in April, we were approached by a local Federal MP Andrew Wallace, to host an evening with His Excellency Jean-Pierre Thébault, the French Ambassador in Australia. At extremely short notice, we were able to gather over 30 Francophone and Francophile members to welcome the Ambassador to the Sunshine Coast for a relaxed, informal evening at the Kawana Surf Club. Once again, we were delighted to have the company of some of the members of the Buderim French Club who enjoyed the opportunity to meet with the Ambassador and to share an evening with members of Alliance Française.

Alliance Française network

2022 saw the introduction of Intr'Alliances, which allows more of a focus on petite and regional Alliances throughout Australia and the world. Cécile has been a strong driver of this initiative and is held in very high esteem not by just members of our SC Alliance, but by AF groups throughout the country. It is always a joy to see her leading discussions, organising Zoom meetings and encouraging participation from groups who previously might have felt a little isolated due to their small size and geographic location. Hats off to you yet again, Cécile!

A Zoom meeting of all Alliance Française groups in our region, the Asia-Pacific Zone, was well attended in March and hosted by Jean-François Hans. This was my first (and eye opening) experience of seeing first-hand just how wide-reaching the AF network is, as over 80 delegates from all across our region joined together in discussion. It felt humbling to realise how far the insight of our founders 139 years ago has spread across the globe to touch 131 countries on every continent, with 834 active groups.

Following a suggestion by one of the delegates at this meeting, it was decided by the committee to introduce a small charity contribution to various charities representing either Australian organisations offering help following bushfires and floods, or international organisations offering help with the war in Ukraine (which had broken out very recently) or other internationally relevant charities. To date, we have donated \$1,050 from our profits, divided between the internationally well known Médecins Sans Frontières and a very special maternity hospital in Tanzania, run by Chase one of our AFSC students. Our bank balance remains healthy as you will see from the Treasurer's report, but it is heartwarming to think that our members are contributing to these worthwhile causes each time they renew a membership or buy a book...

In early November, Cécile and I attended the reunion of the Australian AF Network which was held in Canberra at the French Embassy and also at the Alliance Française building. Due to the Covid crisis since early 2020, this was the first time this event has been held for 3 years and it was interesting to see the solidarity of the petite and regional Alliances gaining momentum as the conference progressed. Understandably, the majority of attention from Paris is directed to the Capital Alliances, but by combining ideas, resources, initiatives and enthusiasm we are able to make the voices of our smaller groups increasingly relevant. This will hopefully lead to an improvement in funding for our regional AFs and you will not be surprised to hear that Cécile received a standing ovation from all the delegates as she articulated our collective concerns and represented several Alliances who were unable to travel to Canberra for the conference. We are indeed very fortunate to have Cécile on the Sunshine Coast.

Worthy of Special Note!

An event which has just taken place in the past week has highlighted the impact of AF Sunshine Coast on the national stage - all Alliances around the country were invited to the national challenge which took place via Zoom, with the winner to represent Australia in the world wide challenge at the end of November. We are incredibly proud to announce that one of Émilie's students, Aidan, took out first place in the national competition and will go on to represent Alliance Française de la Sunshine Coast in the global final. We wish Aidan every success in the final and are delighted to welcome him here, with Desley, to enjoy lunch at La Maison du Pâtissier as one of the rewards for beating every other Alliance around the country and representing AFSC so confidently. Bravo Aidan!

In Conclusion

As 2022 draws to a close, I look forward to another successful, if challenging, year ahead. I know that with the continued support of a dynamic committee and the best teachers and administrator in the country, Alliance Française de la Sunshine Coast will be unstoppable.

Allons-y!

I extend my most grateful thanks to you all.

Caroline