

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2024

### Introduction

2024 has been yet another successful year for all of us at Alliance Française Sunshine Coast and our 16th year saw us achieve some wonderful milestones, none of which would have happened without such a great team and such wonderful members. Thank you for taking the time to be here today.

### Committee

I extend my gratitude to our Committee, who have been so supportive throughout the year. We have been led by the one and only Cécile, our Responsable Administratif and Directrice, who has ensured the smooth running of the Alliance as well as the introduction of extremely detailed documentation through the Démarche Qualité - a 4 year plan which is already well in place thanks to her diligence.

Our Vice Presidents, Clémentine and Ellen, need no introduction from me and I am always so grateful for their sage advice and support - never more so than in the situation in which I now find myself.

To our long-serving Secretary Emilia and to Chris who has taken on the role of Treasurer so ably, I express my deepest thanks.

Our general committee members have been active throughout the year in many different situations and I would like to acknowledge the contributions made by each - Christophe, Jill, Marg, Fiona and Alexandra. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for all you bring to AFSC.

And as the current committee stands down as is customary at the AGM, I would also like to take the opportunity to welcome the new committee members who will join us for the challenges ahead in 2025 - your fresh ideas are so very welcome and valued by us all.

### Teaching.

Our teachers also form a vital part of our Committee and our Alliance as a whole, and to Verity, Marine, Morgane and Juliette (as well as to Cécile of course!) I extend my gratitude and admiration for the excellence of your teaching which is at the heart of the raison d'être of AFSC. Each of you brings your own didactic style to your lessons - whether online or in a class situation - and you adapt so well to the ages and abilities of your students. From playgroup and pre-school to octogenarians, you represent the pinnacle of teaching excellence for which Alliance Française worldwide is justly renowned.

Inevitably, the past year has presented its fair share of challenges to our teaching staff with the advance of AI and the competition from cheaper, less accredited online options, yet your expertise is widely recognised and your skills continue to attract students of all ages and at every level. I personally know how much my level of French has improved since becoming involved with AFSC about 5 years ago, and never cease to encourage all those I meet to join our classes.

## **Memberships.**

Every organisation is only as strong as its members and here at AF Sunshine Coast I am thrilled to be able to report that our membership continues to grow strongly. Our paid up members today number 308, an increase of 50% in just 3 years which I believe is almost unprecedented. You continue to come from far and wide to our cultural and social events as well as to attend classes, and I have come to know so many of you personally over the years - friendships for which I will be eternally grateful. Your smiles and warm greetings have made my job so very fulfilling and please know that we will never take your continued membership for granted. I believe we provide wonderful value for the small fee we charge annually and we try always to implement your suggestions and ideas for ways to improve.

## **Cultural and Social Activities.**

Where do I begin!? Of course, the Sunshine Coast French Film Festival continues to be at the heart of our Cultural activity and this year we can proudly tell you that over 4000 seats were filled as Murray's superb selection of films were shown in Caloundra, Noosa and Maroochydore. During the Festival, which ran from April to June, I travelled literally thousands of kilometres between the 3 cinemas, frequently seeing 3, and sometimes even 4 films in a week, and was privileged to be able to talk to so many of you before or after every single film.

We all share the love of the very best of International cinema and my admiration for Murray's professionalism in bringing these award winning films to us across the Sunshine Coast cannot be underestimated. Our sponsorship of the FFF is, in my humble opinion, the most valuable contribution we can make to spreading the culture of France throughout the Coast, and (keep this a secret because it's not common knowledge yet!) next year Murray will also bring us a short film Festival from New Caledonia! So watch this space!

Our Café Conversations received another boost in June, with the introduction of a 4th venue for our weekly meetings, this time in Noosa Junction at Jungle and Co. This means that we can now offer Conversations on 4 Saturdays each month in areas as diverse as Meridan Plains, Coolum, Noosa Junction, and the original (and resounding favourite from the surveys we carry out) here at the Loose Goose in Twin Waters. May I take this opportunity to thank all our hosts, but particularly Erin and her wonderful staff for the warm welcome they offer us on the first Saturday of every month. By varying the venues, we try to make it as easy as possible for all our members, no matter where they live, to find a convenient place to join us for a regular dose of French language and culture.

In addition to Café Conversations, we started a Club Déjeuner in August - a monthly, mid-week Lunch get together at different crêperies, pâtisseries and cafés across the region and these are proving exceptionally popular with you all. We began the déjeuners in response to a request from members that we try to offer something during the week, rather than just on weekends, so this is just one way to show that your requests and suggestions are closely listened to. It is YOUR Alliance, so please remember to keep the feedback coming - we can't do any of this without you. There are more plans in the pipeline next year for picnics, canal cruises and pétanque, so make sure you keep checking all the newsletters which Cécile regularly sends to us all so that you will be the first to hear what is happening.

In July, several of us attended a wonderful concert in Coolum, where Sunshine Coast local Franco-Australienne Pauline Maudy enthralled us with her musical life story entitled "Take Me To Paris". The evening was a resounding success and Alliance Française was thrilled to be mentioned during the course of the soirée for the support we offer to Francophones and Francophiles alike.

The pièce de résistance of our social and cultural events for the year was undoubtedly the Celebration in November of our Sweet 16th Birthday, combined with the unveiling of our Espace Nouvelle-Calédonie. This took place right here at the Loose Goose and was attended by 100 members as well as VIPs from Canberra and New Caledonia. I will merge the topics of social activities and diplomatic visits in the next section, under the heading of

### **Diplomacy**

From the heartwarming responses I received from so many who attended here on 9th November, I think it is fair to say that our Sweet 16th Birthday was a resounding success - both diplomatically and socially!

We were delighted to welcome His Excellency the French Ambassador, Pierre André Imbert, who joined us from Canberra with his delightful wife Sarah-Jane and 4 of their children. Given the busy schedule H.E. has to follow, it was an enormous compliment to our little Alliance that he took time out to join us for our special day. He was gracious, charming and fulsome in his endorsement of our activities in promoting the language and culture of France and we very much hope that his experience will encourage him to bring added Ambassadorial / Embassy support to our endeavours.

Dr Yves Lafoy, official representative of the Government of New Caledonia in Australia, and his wife Amanda joined us for the ceremony and it was with enormous pride that we accepted the generous gift from the Government of New Caledonia of a library of resources from that country which will benefit students of French across our region, as well as travellers wanting to travel to our nearest French-speaking neighbour. You can find out everything about this wonderful resource on our website and I encourage you to use it enthusiastically.

The Honorary French Consul, Alain Etchegaray, already a regular visitor to our Alliance, joined us from Brisbane along with the new President of AF Brisbane, Laila Williamson, and both were very complimentary about our achievements here on the Sunshine Coast. In addition, thanks to the persuasive abilities of one of our members, we were joined by our local Federal MP, Ted O'Brien, who has been very supportive of the links we continue to forge between our region and one of Australia's most important trading partners. To paraphrase Ted, "I never realised what an active organisation you have here on the Sunshine Coast...". I just love it when we can open the eyes of someone in politics to our quiet achievements!

The celebration was attended by many VIPs, including Nicholas Clarke our founding President who spoke about the challenges of inaugurating an AF 16 years ago and his pleasure in seeing its continued growth over the years. Some of our youngest students, ably assisted by their teacher Morgane, enchanted the audience with their performance and singing, and to my absolute delight they were joined by 2 of the Ambassador's children who enthusiastically sang along with friends whom they had only met a matter of minutes earlier. Ah, the simplicity of youth and the joys of coming together through music... We are also indebted to Oj who played the accordion so superbly and to Jean Pierre, recently arrived from Hossegor, who encouraged everyone to join in the singing! Next stop - our 21st birthday in 2029!

### **Alliance Française Network.**

Annually, the Directors and Presidents of AFs throughout Australia are invited for a conference - this year it was once again held in Canberra in mid-October and Cécile represented us as ably as always, while I was unfortunately unable to support her there due to ill health.

Cécile was the only representative of Regional Alliances in Australia who was asked to give a presentation, and, as usual, she inspired everyone present with her depth of knowledge and understanding of the challenges facing us all. In due course, the Embassy will send a report of the discussions and conclusions from the Conference, which will be shared with you all via our website. Unlike Cécile's efficient handling of everything, the wheels of the Network revolve very slowly, so we expect the report early next year.

There still remains a wide divide between the Alliances Capitales who receive funding (and direction) from Paris, and the smaller Alliances Régionales who receive absolutely no funding but who continue to exist thanks to the energy and enthusiasm of our wonderful volunteers.

The countless hours which go into keeping your AFSC running smoothly and going from strength to strength, can only be achieved because of the dedication of the members of your Committee who give up their time and their expertise to serve you without any thought of reward for their efforts. We offer our extreme gratitude this year to a most generous sponsor who has set up a fund which will enable our volunteers to receive reimbursement for some of the expenses they incur while carrying out their benevolent activities. He wishes to remain anonymous, but I know I speak for every one of you when I offer him our deepest gratitude for his foresight and generosity.

### **In Conclusion.**

It has been the greatest honour to be part of this wonderful Alliance Française as your President for the past 3 years. Sadly, I have to take a backwards step from today due to health concerns which prevent me continuing as I would dearly love to. In realising my own limitations, I know that I leave your AFSC in the very best of hands and by stepping down I make way for bigger, brighter and better things than I could have accomplished had I selfishly tried to remain in the President's rôle.

I vividly remember 3 years ago, when I accepted your nomination, that I asked you all to be gentle with me as I tried to live up to your expectations in this challenging rôle. You have been gentle, you have taught me so much, and together we are now part of what I believe is probably the most vivacious and enthusiastic small Alliance in Australia. I will remain as a member and look forward so much to joining you as often as I can at all our events and activities.

May you all have a safe and Happy Christmas, and may the New Year bring us all good health, happiness and abundant friendships.

With deepest gratitude to each and every one of you,

Caroline.