



French Spoken Here

LOCAL FRANCOPHILES MEET AND EAT TO SHARE THEIR COMMON PASSIONS.

By Kathleen Guthrie

The phrase “use it or lose it” certainly applies to language skills. If, like me, you studied French in high school or college, you probably realize how quickly all that book learning got lost once careers, family responsibilities, and just plain life interfered. But whenever I get a notion to plan a trip, or hear of a film festival, or a song or sip of wine stirs a memory, I simply desire to engage in the beauty, culture, cuisine, and sounds of all things French.

Just Say “Oui!”

After finishing his schooling, Shaun Sittinger found that the best and most enjoyable way to practice a second language was to participate in a French conversation group. “Our motivations were the desire to improve our skills and not forget our French,” he says. “Also, it’s a fun way of meeting all kinds of new people.”

When the Northern California native relocated to the 805 area, he couldn’t find an existing group, so in April he formed **Les Amis Français de Ventura**. This diverse and growing group meets two or three times each month at various cafés and restaurants in Ventura, Camarillo, Oxnard, and Thousand Oaks. What sets this free group apart is their sense of playfulness, for in addition to general conversation, the group plays games such as “Taboo” in French. “French speakers of all levels can easily participate,” he says. “It’s a great way to get everyone involved and have fun.” For more information, visit <http://groups.google.com/group/venturafrench> or e-mail Shaun directly at venturafrench@gmail.com.

Le Cercle Français de Santa Barbara, the free conversation group sponsored by the Santa Barbara French Festival, also provides a unique outlet for French speakers ranging from Americans who are beginners to native speakers. The group, which has included members from Belgium, Switzerland, Quebec, Tahiti, and beyond, meets every Wednesday from 5:30

to 7 p.m. at Pacific Crêpes (705 Anacapa St., Santa Barbara). Activities include guest speakers, travel slide shows, screenings of French films, and excursions—all great opportunities to practice the art of French conversation and make new friends. Call 805-569-1659 for more information.

Bon Appétit

If your palate longs for further exploration into French fare, consider a rendezvous with the members of **Club Culinare of French Cuisine** at one of their upcoming events. In any given month, members and nonmembers gather for picnics, wine tastings, and informal three-course bistro dinners. There are also special “Chef à Table” nights, where renowned chefs serve as hosts and mingle with the guests to share culinary insights. These evenings begin with a Veuve Clicquot cocktail reception, followed by a five-course dinner paired with wines.

“We have members from San Diego to Santa Barbara,” says Kora Kroep. She’s executive director of this nonprofit organization of chefs, pastry chefs, sommeliers, restaurant owners, and other professionals specializing in French cuisine and products. But don’t let their credentials intimidate you: They relish sharing their passion for food and wine, and all of their events are open to the public. You can learn more at the bistro dinner at La Koutoubia in Los Angeles on July 21; or at the Chef à Table with Chef Michel Ohayon (owner/chef of La Koutoubia) on August 18 at AK Restaurant in Venice. Visit www.clubculinaire.org or call 949-295-0506 for updates and more information.

Wherever in the world you are, you can connect with Francophiles via the Internet. Visit <http://french.meetup.com> and enter your zip code to find links to nearby groups, or consider starting a group of your own. And the next time someone asks, “Parlez-vous français?” you’ll be able to respond with an enthusiastic “Oui!”