

# Diamond women mark 60 years of making Europe great for Americans

THE Association of American Women in Europe (AAWE), based in Paris, is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year.

President Beth Austin said she is proud of their thriving community of American and other English-speaking women in France: "Our aim is to share support and a network for a bicultural life."

"Women who join stay for many years – some have been in the association for 50 years."

"The past year has been different, as our usual activities were replaced with new pandemic-friendly undertakings. We stayed open last summer instead of taking a break."

"We have used Zoom to host coffee meetings, yoga and Pilates classes, and have run sessions with authors and specialists speaking on subjects useful for life in France, as well as creating two new groups, one for 25-50-year-olds and one for 45-65-year-olds."

"Our work on bilingual education helps members from the US, and also from the UK, Europe and elsewhere, raising English-speaking families."

When there are no health



Membership of the Association of American Women in Europe is not restricted to Americans

restrictions, the club celebrates American holidays with members' children and friends so they will know both countries' cultures. It runs social events, shares information, and helps members build professional networks and make friends.

Its annual AAWE Winter Festival is the longest-running bazaar in Paris, held in the American Church. Organisers hope they will be able to run it again in November.

AAWE ([aaweparis.org](http://aaweparis.org)) was founded in 1961 to address issues American women were experiencing living abroad, including the right to vote and learning how to navigate the French education system. It

started with a classified ad published in the *New York Herald Tribune* on April 22, 1961, by Phyllis Michaux. She was married to a Frenchman and wanted to see if there were other women like her, facing the challenge of adapting to a foreign culture, without shedding their American identity.

Fifteen came to a first meeting at the American Church in Paris. In the October, an article in the *Tribune*, "Americans with French Husbands" attracted new members. By November, there were 50; today, there are 500.

The AAWE has had many successes in improving rights for American citizens abroad, including winning the right for

children and grandchildren of overseas Americans to become American citizens and the right to vote in the US.

Ms Austin said more single professional women and English-speakers from the UK, Ireland, Canada and other nations now join. "It is still hard for people arriving here to settle in to their new life and, currently, we have many young professionals who are still juggling those same cultural differences and challenges in their lives that women faced 60 years ago."

"Our association includes second-generation members and we look forward to welcoming their children and grandchildren in the years to come."

# Charity seeks volunteers to wear orange et bleu

VOLUNTEERS of the Protection Civile wear orange and blue uniforms on first aid and humanitarian missions.

The charity is less well known than the Croix Rouge, but does similar work. It has 32,000 volunteers and branches in all but three departments of France.

It is one of the charities the government calls on in an emergency, such as a natural catastrophe, including flooding, or the current health crisis.

National co-ordinator Pauline Ricard said: "We have a growing number of missions and we know in the future there will be an increasing number of people in need of help, due to poverty and more natural disasters."

It carries out operations under three headings: *aider*, help to those in need; *secours*, first aid; and *former*, training.

"As well as our presence in medical centres for coronavirus, we have organised hand-outs for students, as they are having a particularly bad time during the pandemic."

"We have specialist equipment, and for example during the intense flooding in the Alpes Maritimes in 2020, we were able to reach stranded villages with provisions because we have special military tactical support vehicles which can get to places normal trucks cannot reach. We also get called to help in international disasters."

"We were present in Asia in 2004 after the tsunami."

First aid includes being on hand at big events and demonstrations: "Organisers have to have first-aiders present and we are one of the recognised



Photo: Victor Deyres3

groups they can call on.

"We were present for the Women's World Cup in 2019 and we are always at the Vieilles Charrues music festival in Finistère and other events around the country. Our training mission is to give first aid courses to all sections of the general public as well as to our volunteers."

She said the charity ([protection-civile.org](http://protection-civile.org)) is always on the lookout for volunteers.

"During the first confinement, the numbers of people asking to join exploded."

"We always need more members. Anyone who wants to join can find details of their local branch on our website."

"You can choose what type of help you would like to be involved in and will be given the required training, and you can do as many or as few hours as suits your availability."

As well as the volunteering, there is a strong social side.

"We wear a uniform which shows we are part of one big family. There are several activities and meals together and there is always an agenda showing what is going on at every branch, so members can see what they can sign up to."

# Theatre group heads online to carry on performing

THE ENGLISH Theatre Company, which puts on plays in south-west France, has started a YouTube channel to perform while theatres are closed. It has recorded three short plays and plans others.

Confinement struck last year just as the 30-strong company, founded in 2016, was beginning rehearsals for *Allo, Allo*.

They usually put on three or more performances a year in Gers, Haute-Garonne and Hautes Pyrénées, so 2020 was frustrating. "We miss it so much," said vice-president Nancy Robathan.

"Treading the boards is what we do and we have a lot of fun. We are determined to show we are still around."

The YouTube plays ([tinyurl.com/aa4tvcc](http://tinyurl.com/aa4tvcc))



Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Dead, an ETC production before Covid-19

were the idea of musical director David Allcock, who set up a studio in a spare room. He had playwright friends in New Zealand looking for a European audience and so recording began.

"It was a huge learning curve for all," said

Ms Robathan. "Talking in front of a microphone and remaining static is not the same as moving about on stage. We have recorded plays called *Where There's a Will*, *Housewifely Duties* and *Dissembler*."

"We aim to record more plays, monologues and musical events to add a new element to our repertoire, providing something to offer on a regular basis between our stage performances."

So far the recordings are accompanied by photos of the characters but not film, as that requires different skills.

The company ([englishtheatrecompany32.fr](http://englishtheatrecompany32.fr)) would welcome anyone with experience in video to join them in their new venture. Email [info@englishtheatrecompany32.fr](mailto:info@englishtheatrecompany32.fr).

## Have your group featured

The Connexion regularly features news and events from community groups all over France. We would be pleased to publicise your association (non-commercial) – it's a great way to bring in new members and it is free! You can submit events via [connexionfrance.com/Community](http://connexionfrance.com/Community) To have your association/group featured email details to [news@connexionfrance.com](mailto:news@connexionfrance.com)

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