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## Catherine Jolivet Takes Francophilia To the Next Level

By Sophie Braccini



Catherine Jolivet featured in Langeac Newspaper as she visits a school Photos provided

For years Catherine Jolivet has been known in Lafayette and beyond for the French immersion school, French For Fun, she created and manages. The energetic and passionate woman decided to revive the old sister-city partnership between Lafayette and Langeac, the French city located in the central region of Auvergne where the Marquis de Lafayette was born. Jolivet is organizing a party at the Lafayette Plaza Sept. 6 for the Marquis' birthday and she spent her summer vacation in Auvergne, looking at possibilities and meeting people.

"I was struck by the friendliness and genuineness of the Auvergnats (people from the Auvergne region)," says Jolivet with her sweet French accent. She went to Langeac in July, taking along a book about the city of Lafayette, signed by the mayor as a friendship gesture. In Langeac she met with Marie-Thérèse Roubaud, the mayor, and had a cordial and constructive conversation about

the towns' twinning. Then Jolivet started to explore the unfamiliar region.

"This is a beautiful untouched area, rich in historical sites, with gorgeous natural locations, that is not yet overflowing with tourists," says Jolivet. "It is still affordable. It is still rural France as it used to be, with great food, charming bed and breakfasts, and an abundance of opportunities for active vacations." Jolivet raves about the Auvergne, a region of eroded ancient volcanoes - no activity has occurred there for the past 6,000 years. It is a series of emerald green rolling hills, volcanic lakes, gorges and rivers, and kilometers of walking trails marked for exploration. Thermal springs and mineral waters are also an outcome of the geological past; the Auvergne has been known as a medical spa center for centuries.

The village of Langeac itself is about one hour from Clermont-Ferrand (the closest airport), and surrounded by other historic and interesting small towns such as Le Puy-en-Velay, well known for its unique promontory rocks, topped by a Romanesque chapel. "Auvergne is an area where you find the most Romanesque art in France," comments Jolivet. "It was a region armies passed through to go invade somewhere else, so there was little destruction there." The teacher and businesswoman obviously fell in love with the region. "It is really France as it was," she says, "and people there practice all forms of outdoor activities: hiking, climbing, horseback riding, canoeing and rafting (there are some beautiful gorges), salmon fishing, and biking, of course. There is even a local bike race organized every summer."

Jolivet's dream would be to take a group of people there on vacation, just like she did for a few years in the South of France with her students. "A perfect time would be at the end of July of 2016, when residents there organize 'La Belle Journée' (the beautiful day), as a celebration of the day in 1786 when Lafayette reclaimed his Marquis title in Langeac. People can rent 18th century costumes and be a part of the two-day-long reenactment. She believes that Langeac is a treasure and that people there will respond positively to possible connections.

In the meantime, the Lafayette businesswoman is preparing for the little ones who will return to class at French For Fun in the beginning of September, just after the Marquis' birthday, and she is continuing plans for the birthday event in Lafayette.

"We are very proud to have the support of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce for our

celebration," says Jolivet of the Sept. 6 event. "We will have music, activities for the kids, a cake to share and people should bring their picnic."



Nature of Auvergne, next to Langeac



La Belle Journée in Langeac

Reach the reporter at: [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

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