

French Accent

The Magazine of Learn French at Home

The Bilingual and Audio Online Magazine for Expatriates in France, French Students and Francophiles

Starting a Business in France

The Various Types
of Businesses

SOHO SOLO:
A Unique Project
for Expats
in the Gers



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SOHO SOLO : A Unique Project for Expats in The Gers

Situated in the heart of Southwest France, near the Pyrenees and not far from the Atlantic Ocean, the Gers is one of those special places where many people dream of living, as you will see from our photo report page 28. Those who settle in this very pleasant department often fall in love with the traditional stone farmhouses that dot the large open fields and gently rolling hills. People come to the Gers in a quest for the "real France" and often encounter leisure and relaxation.

The Gers Chamber of Commerce has recently created a particularly interesting and dynamic initiative designed especially to help new foreign, self-employed entrepreneurs in the Gers Department to start their business through the use of information and communications technology. The project is also geared to-

ward helping the English to feel most welcome in the department.

What does SOHO SOLO mean? As Franck Cazalas, coordinator of the project, explains, "Soho" stands for "Small Office Home Office", covering a wide category of self-employed people (including free agents, e-lancers, telecommuters, or other independent professionals) who work at least partially from home – or somewhere else. An example is the woman pictured on the cover of this issue of *French Accent*, a British expatriate who lives in the small village of Aignan, in the Gers, and who took advantage of the project. And the English who live in London will also appreciate the allusion to the Soho part of London...

"Solo", of course, refers to self-employed people of all nationalities. Thus, SOHO SOLO appeals to self-

employed people who can work from home in the country.

The concept

Opting for a better quality of life and greater independence, an increasing number of people are choosing to move to and work in the countryside... Thanks to modern technology, these individual entrepreneurs are able to work partially from their homes. They are SOHO SOLO workers.

SOHO SOLO was a European project co-financed until 2006 by INTERREG IIB 'Atlantic Area' whose main objective was to attract new working population to rural areas using information and communications technologies

in their work. Bringing with them new skills and technologies, the SOHO SOLO workers contribute to the wealth of the local economy and help to revitalise rural areas.

With the support of the General Council of the Department of Gers and the Midi-Pyrenees Regional Council, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the CEEI (European Business and Innovation Centre) of Gers have been directing the project to encourage this new generation of entrepreneurs who run their businesses independently from their customers' locations to settle in the countryside, and facilitate their integration through support services.

The services provided

All British and other foreigners working in "solo" and who are already established in



The welcome committee of the village of Aignan.

© Franck Cazalas



It is a whole department which mobilizes to welcome SOHO SOLO entrepreneurs. The village of Beaumarchès started by installing ADSL in the whole community.

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SOHO SOLO (cont'd)

the Gers and would like to promote their activity, or who are planning to settle in the Gers and become a SOHO SOLO worker, can benefit from any or all of the following services:

- An experienced team to assist their start-up or help develop their business: consulting, mentoring and information services.

- “Welcome committees” in more than thirty villages to facilitate their relocation and integration in the Gers, where they can find information on

available accommodation and local services.

- Access to the SOHO SOLO intranet: more than 185 people are registered in its network (www.soho-gers.net).

- The SOHO SOLO Passport, providing easy access to a service network.

- Free access to 8 telecentres and their facilities (computers, broadband, telephone, fax, photocopier) – the telecentres can also be used as meeting rooms.

- Free inclusion in the SOHO SOLO online directory tar-

geted at local and national businesses.

- Participation in regular SOHO SOLO meetings (Club SOHO SOLO) and regular newsletters.

“Welcome to Gascony, your new working space!”

If you are interested in relocating to the countryside, in finding a better way to work and a

better quality of life, far from urban stress, don't hesitate to contact the SOHO SOLO team! The Gers really wants to help individual entrepreneurs in their businesses and in their lives. This is not always the case everywhere in France, as some of our readers know. No doubt that the Gers deserves a special “bravo”!

A.S.

More information at: www.soho-solo-gers.com
 Contact: Franck Cazalas
 Gers Chamber of Commerce:
contact@soho-solo-gers.com
 Tel: 05 62 60 16 12 or give us a toll-free call at:
 0800 000 132 – and you will be able to talk in English!

“Brocanthé”: a belle histoire of integration

“What do we like here? Everything! The beautiful countryside, the trees, the good food, the fact that life is still not too expensive.” Nancy Kruyver, a Dutch mother of six, decided several years ago to settle in Aignan, Gers. She met her second husband there, a Dutchman too, Inge In't Hout; “It was love at first sight,” she says. Three years ago they opened “Brocanthé – La belle histoire”, a coffee and tea shop where they also sell antique objects and furniture, like in any other *brocante* shop. All the teas, coffees and fruit juices that Nancy and Inge serve to their visitors are organic, and/or imported from fair trade producers. “You won't find any alcohol or Coca-Cola here!”, says Nancy. “And more and more French customers are coming, and

they like the idea of drinking tea instead of wine,” while admiring the very nice selection of used and authentic items on display in the little shop.

The family lives in an old house in the countryside, “surrounded by horses and vineyards”, and they grow their own organic fruit and vegetables.

As this is her second shop (the first one was only a *brocante*), Nancy is very much aware of all the necessary formalities required to open a business in France, and after 20 years in the country, she speaks excellent French. But she knows how difficult it is to start one's own business in France, and



Nancy and Inge opened the shop three years ago.

has been helping out a bit with the SOHO SOLO project, as she thinks the idea of “helping expatriates to work from home” is excellent. It offers them “the chance to settle down away from big cities.”

She notices that more and more English and Dutch people are coming to the Gers, and “more and more young

people,” which is encouraging for the future of the region.

If you should happen to travel through the Gers, don't hesitate to stop by! Nancy and Inge are most welcoming, and the quiet and warm atmosphere of the shop in itself is an invitation to visit it. And their example is a *belle histoire* of integration.

A.S.

Brocanthé – La belle histoire, Place du Colonel Parisot, 32290 Aignan. Tél. : 05 62 08 15 26.
brocanthe.bellehistoire@orange.fr