

Chengdu report



PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Former Mayor Helene Mandroux at a ceremony to celebrate the relocation of the Home of Montpellier in March. It was her fifth visit to Chengdu.

Strong bonds with Montpellier

SISTER CITY HAS A BIG PRESENCE IN A RANGE OF SECTORS

By FU CHAO

fuchao@chinadaily.com.cn

Nestled in a quiet community in Montpellier, France, a primary school often catches the attention of passersby due to its unusual name.

Chengdu Primary School is the first school named after a Chinese city in France.

Thousands of miles away in Chengdu, capital of Southwest China's Sichuan province, another school is also remarkable. Montpellier Primary School is scheduled to be completed by the end of July and enroll some 1,600 students in September.

The schools are the same in appearance and both offer bilingual classes in Chinese and French.

To Helene Mandroux, former mayor of Montpellier, the twin schools are an everlasting symbol of the friendship between Chengdu and Montpellier.

During a visit to Chengdu in March, Mandroux said she would continue to boost cooperation between the two cities after she leaves office.

"This is my fifth time visiting Chengdu and my last visit as Montpellier mayor," she said. "I will tell my successor that relations with Chengdu play a very important role in Montpellier's international cooperation."

"As an honorable citizen of Chengdu, I will continue paying attention to cooperation between the two cities and seek more opportunities to boost ties. It is my duty to do so."

The schools are just the latest fruit of friendship between the two sister cities.

The eighth-largest city in France and the most important business and industrial center in the southwest of the country, Montpellier also has one of the world's largest vineyards and largest wine output.



A rock and jazz band from Montpellier performing in Chengdu.

The two cities became sister cities in June, 1981, then the first pairing of friendship cities in France and China.

When Mandroux became mayor of Montpellier in 2004, the sister-city friendship entered a 10-year golden era, with cooperation in education, healthcare, sports, culture and trade making great strides.

Ge Honglin, mayor of Chengdu, said Mandroux had contributed greatly to friendship between the two cities in the past decade through frequent visits and exchanges with Chengdu.

"I hope Mandroux will continue to pay attention and support cooperation between the two cities," he said.

Over the past decade, Montpellier became the first city in Europe with a college diploma in traditional Chinese medicine.

In sports, with support from Mandroux, Chengdu will become one of the host cities for the international Extreme Games series in October.

On the business front, the city's foreign trade with France reached \$687 million in 2013, according to statistics from Chengdu customs.

The city government of Montpellier also encourages local wine makers to attend trade expos in Chengdu where deals are sealed.

'Home of Montpellier'

During her visit in March, Mandroux attended a ceremony celebrating the relocation of the Home of

Montpellier — an organization sponsored by the two city governments — to the high-tech industrial area in Chengdu.

She supported the organization when it was set up in 2006 to offer a place in Chengdu where people can read original French books and get information on Montpellier.

It also offers information for French people in Chengdu, helping them get work and residency permits and offering consulting services to French investors who want to set up businesses.

In addition, the organization holds cultural activities such as French movie screenings and arts exhibitions.

"The Home of Montpellier is a window through which Chinese people can touch French culture and also a bridge where a range of exciting exchanges between the two cities can happen," said Liu Jinghong, head of the organization.

After the severe earthquake in Wenchuan county, Sichuan province in 2008, the Home of Montpellier became the clearinghouse for French reporters to get updated information.

The first international financial aid from Chengdu came from a Montpellier resident traveling in Chengdu.

Later the Montpellier government and its surrounding regions donated 500,000 euros (\$681,600) to build two schools and rebuild a village in the quake zone.

MILESTONES

Government visits

- 1981: Mayors of the two cities sign an agreement for establishing sister city relations, the first of its kind in China.
- 2006: Montpellier Mayor Helene Mandroux attends the opening ceremony for the Montpellier Home during her visit to Chengdu in May. The city governments sign a five-year cooperation plan starting from 2006.
- 2008: A delegation headed by a Montpellier deputy mayor donates 100,000 euros (\$136,320) to Chengdu for rebuilding a school, the first visit from sister cities after the severe earthquake in May.
- 2011: The Chengdu government visits Montpellier for celebration of the 30th anniversary of the sister city relations. The delegation also attends a groundbreaking ceremony for Chengdu Primary School in the French city.
- 2013: Montpellier deputy mayor attends the groundbreaking ceremony for Montpellier Primary School in Chengdu and discusses building medical research centers with local authorities.

Economic exchanges

- 2007: A wine trade delegation from Montpellier participates in Chengdu's first international agricultural expo.
- 2012: Montpellier delegation holds a wine tasting of its home products at the Chengdu sweet food and alcoholic drink fair.

Educational cooperation



Montpellier residents with a pupil during their visit to a primary school in the southwestern city.

- 2007: The Chengdu healthcare administration cooperates with a medical school in Montpellier to create Europe's first college diploma in traditional Chinese medical treatment.
- 2013: Chengdu Primary School opens in Montpellier, while a Confucius Institute is unveiled in the French city.
- 2014: Montpellier Primary School scheduled to open this autumn.

Cultural promotion

- 1991: French Movie Week in Chengdu celebrates the 10th anniversary of the sister city relations.
- 2012: Chengdu hosts an international tourism alliance meeting with its 11 sister cities; Montpellier is voted the host of the following year's session.
- 2013: A Montpellier group joins the China International Youth Music Festival in Chengdu.

Sports and healthcare

- 2013: Chengdu sends two teams to the Montpellier international teenage football championship. Chengdu wins the bid to host the 2014-16 international extreme sports games, an event that originated in Montpellier.
- 2014: After an agreement is signed in January, a research center for mental health and diabetes prevention is scheduled to open in October.

I will tell my successor that relations with Chengdu play a very important role in Montpellier's international cooperation.

HELENE MANDROUX

FORMER MAYOR OF MONTPELLIER