

The American Friends of Versailles Bring the Spirit of the Chateau to New Orleans

MARCH 4, 2026



The Grand Chateau of Versailles and the Historic Cabildo of New Orleans: Two architectural monuments separated by an ocean but joined by a shared history of diplomacy, the Louisiana Purchase, and a centuries-old Franco-American alliance.

TRAVEL • BY: SHARON HOGE

While residing in the **Grand Trianon**, a retreat pavilion in the garden of Versailles, **Napoleon** was making great plans for revamping the official palace, the majestic royal **Grand Chateau**. Elaborate plans were drawn up, paintings depicting his great battles were commissioned, yards of silk were ordered. But funds ran out before the work could be achieved.

While architectural historians are relieved that the Chateau remained unaltered, America also benefitted from the shortfall as Napoleon bolstered his coffers by negotiating the **Louisiana Purchase** with its vital Mississippi port of New Orleans. Those enduring links between Versailles and America were recently celebrated when the Director of the National Museum of the Palace of Versailles was invited to New Orleans on a tour hosted by the **American Friends of Versailles (AFV)**.



Versailles Director **Laurent Salome**, **Jennifer Lauscha**, AFV President **Alicia Bryan**, and **Bruno Bardasi**.

On a trip organized by New Orleans residents **Mr. and Mrs. James Morrison**, longtime supporters of the AFV, and accompanied by AFV President **Alicia Bryan**, Versailles Director **Laurent Salome**, was introduced to the citizens, culture, cuisine, and hospitality of the Crescent city, exploring aspects of the complementary Franco-American alliance.



Alicia Bryan, President of the American Friends of Versailles, and event organizer and AFV member **Pat Morrison**.



AFV Supporters Pat and James Morrison of New Orleans.

At meals and receptions, Director **Laurent Salome** met with local dignitaries and presented lectures on the Chateau's lore and preservation. Louisiana Lieutenant Governor **Billy Nungasser**, Deputy Mayor **Kevin Ferguson**, and dozens of guests greeted him at a reception held in the historic Spanish colonial **Cabildo**, which had been a pivotal site in the transfer ceremonies for the Louisiana Purchase.

At a private club in the Garden District, Salome spoke to luncheon guests about Versailles preservation. Arranged by the **Ochsner History of Medicine Society**, aspects of science at Versailles were the focus of a session which was held among historic artifacts in the museum-like gallery of **M.S. Rau**, a premier dealer in fine art, antiques, and rare jewels.



At the Cabildo reception, Louisiana Lieutenant Governor **Billy Nungasser** welcomes Versailles Director **Laurent Salome**.



Guests at the **Cabildo** reception.



L. to r.: Cultural Attaché **Bladek Thibault**, Lt. Gov. **Billy Nungesser**, La. State Museum Dir. **Rebecca Mackie**, **Laurent Salome**, **Alicia Bryan**, and Villa Albertine Dir. **Gabi Grenier**.



Dottie Belletto, Pres. & CEO of NOCCI, and Justin Boone, NOCCI Sr. Project Manager.



Dr. Steve Slaton.



Irene Lutkewitt and Meg Charbonnet.



Jennifer Morrison, Kent Morrison, and Caroline Morrison.



Louisiana State Museum Board Member **Suzanne Perlis**, Louisiana Museum Foundation Executive Director **Kristin Shannon**, **Dr. Hank Bart**, and Louisiana State Museum Board Chairperson **Wendy Lodrig Bart**.



Craig and Weesie Riley.



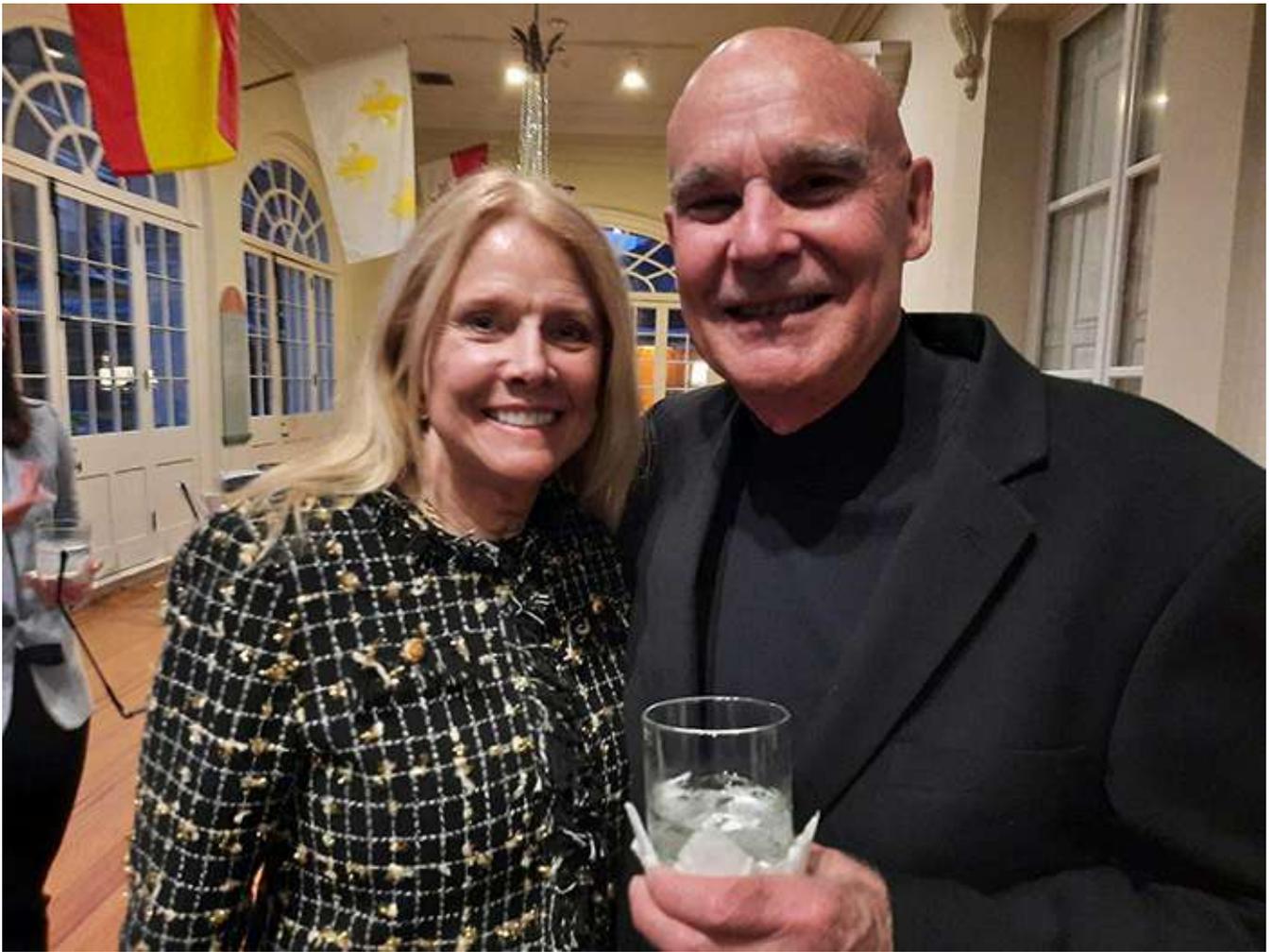
Gabi Brenier and Anelle Mattiea.



Myra Menville and Linda Smith.



Philip Youngberg, Kathy Youngberg, and Michael Harold.



Sandy Beier and Karl Beier.



Weesie Ripley, Craig Ripley, and Baty Landis.



A reception at M.S. Rau Gallery preceded Director Salome's talk.



Versailles Director **Laurent Salome**, **Bill Rau**, and **Alicia Bryan**.



L. to r.: Dr. Ed Bluth and Pat Morrison; Dr. and Mrs. Ian Carmody.



Dr. Hugh Collins, Claude Schlesinger, and Dr. Sheila Collins.



Elissa Bluth, Dr. Sheila Collins, and Dr. Ed Bluth.

Important aspects of New Orleans history and culture were explained on a walking tour of the city's French Quarter and Garden District and visits to **The Historic New Orleans Collections** and the city's renowned **World War II Museum**. At one picturesque stop, Salome encountered elaborate preparations for this year's annual Mardi Gras parade.



A tour commenced at New Orleans' historic **Cabildo**, a candidate for UNESCO World Heritage designation.



Distinguished architect and Tulane professor **Robert Cangelosi, Jr.** led tours through the iconic French Quarter and Garden District.



Studying details of the Napoleon House.



Robert Cangelosi, Jr. points out details of the **Beauregard-Keyes House**.



Dining room of the Beauregard-Keyes House.



Beauregard-Keys kitchen. Many homemakers fell victim to infected burns.



At the Historic New Orleans Collection, Erin Greenwald, Deputy Director, and Daniel Hammer, CEO.



Visiting the Library of the multi-faceted **Historic New Orleans Collection**.



Early maps in the Historic New Orleans Collection research center.



Native American baskets preserved in the Historic New Orleans Collection.



Studying a portrait of New Orleans founder **Bienville**.



The World War II Museum.



The Museum Director welcomes **Bruno Bardasi** and **Laurent Salome** to the World War II Museum.



Manufactured in New Orleans, LST boats for transporting tanks were crucial to the D-Day success.



Opening exhibits describe the war's early stages in the North Africa campaign.



A visit to a warehouse crowded with float preparations for the Mardi Gras parade.



“Bacchus Celebrates America 250” is the Krewe of Bacchus theme this year.



George Washington highlights a float for this anniversary year.



Bags and boxfuls of souvenirs to throw to the crowd from the float.

French influences, along with Creole and Cajun, mark New Orleans' distinctive regional cuisine. Director Salome was introduced to this fare at a private dinner and at visits to renowned local restaurants. Oysters, brandy punch, Sazerac cocktails, grits, and other local specialties were sampled at eateries **Antoine's** and **Arnaud's**, **Commander's Palace**, **Herbsaint**, and **Galatoire's**. At their spacious home in the Garden District, the President of the New Orleans Saints **Dennis Lauscha** and his wife **Jennifer** hosted a gracious meal catered by Chef **Patti Constantin**.



The group was invited to dinner at the home of New Orleans Saints President **Dennis and Jennifer Lauscha**.



Versailles Director **Laurent Salome** and dinner hosts **Jennifer and Dennis Lauscha**.



Cocktails were served in the living room.



Dinner host **Dennis Lauscha** with **Susan Taylor**, Director of the New Orleans Museum of Art.



Jennifer Lauscha at the table set for dinner.



Table settings were decorated with Mardi Gras souvenirs.



Chef **Patti Constantin** described the menu of local delicacies.



Salad course of local greens.



The main course featured seafood.



A Garden District fixture, **Commander's Palace Restaurant** was established in the 1890s.



With glorious garden views, **Commander's Palace** aspires to treat all guests as family.



Iconic dinnerware in place settings at Commander's Palace.



Proprietors of the Royal Courtyard presented local specialties.



Local favorites King Cake and Muffaletta sandwiches.



New Orleans' celebrated King Cake.



Fried Oysters at Arnaud's.

Reciprocating the warm regional hospitality, Director Salome's talks addressed New Orleanians with aspects of Franco-American interaction, French history, and Versailles preservation.

More than merely an historic structure, Versailles is a center for scholarship in art and science. Among chateau archives are historic plans describing in explicit detail the palace architecture and building construction techniques enabling contemporary craftspeople to recreate palace features with authenticity.



Versailles Director **Laurent Salome** spoke on “Saving a Symbol: Inside the Major Restoration Campaigns of Versailles.”



Director Salome describing the AFV-sponsored restoration of the ceiling in the Queen's Guard's Room.



Guests at Director Salome's lecture on "Science and Splendor at Versailles."



At the historic **Cabildo**, Director Salome described restoration procedures at Versailles.

Restoration projects sponsored by the AFV adhere to those plans. The current AFV project, restoration of the ceiling of the **Salle de Diane**, will be unveiled this June with a weekend of exclusive events in Paris concluding with a gala ball and dinner at the **Galerie des Batailles** (Gallery of Battles) within the Grand Chateau.

Details of that weekend are posted on the AFV website for those interested in attending, celebrating and supporting restoration activities at the symbol of Franco-American friendship.



AFV restoration project: Recreation of the **Trois Fontaines Bosquet**.



AFV restoration project: The **Pavillon Frais** in the Gardens of Versailles.



AFV restoration project: The ceiling of the **Queen's Guard's Room**.



AFV gala balls are held at the Palace of Versailles.



AFV gala reception in the **Hall of Mirrors**.

PHOTO CREDITS: Norris Gagnet, Audoin de Vergnette, Sharon King Hoge, & Deborah Lechner.

RECENT POSTS



PALM BEACH

Mar 5

Palm Beach philanthropy takes center stage as Lighthouse Guild marks its 19th Annual Visionary Evening at Club Colette, followed by a community-wide "Night of Giving" at the Royal Poinciana Plaza benefiting 40 local organizations. [Read More...](#)



PALM BEACH

Mar 3

Lee Fryd heads to Café Boulud for Katherine Gage Boulud's Winter Hat Luncheon. In a sea of Palm Beach pastels and custom fascinators, the focus remained on "Spoons Across America" — a mission to transform the American diet, one school lunch at a time. [Read More...](#)



SOCIAL DIARY

Mar 2

DPC thinks back to the winter of '67/'68 — a vanished world of razed mansions and square dances at Mar-a-Lago where the pace was set by the tides, not the social calendar. It was here that a young Lilly Pulitzer sparked a resort revolution from a simple juice stand in a via, long before the quiet vanished for good. [Read More...](#)



PARTY PICTURES

Mar 5

New York's cultural season hits a high note with two spectacular Lincoln Center benefits. The New York Philharmonic rings in the Year of the Horse at David Geffen Hall, while the New York City Ballet honors the incomparable Megan Fairchild at the David H. Koch Theater. [Read More...](#)



TRAVEL

Mar 4

Sharon Hoge explores the enduring bond between the Palace of Versailles and the American South as the American Friends of Versailles (AFV) hosts Director Laurent Salome in New Orleans. From historic lectures at the Cabildo to Mardi Gras float previews and Garden District dinners,

the visit celebrates a centuries-old alliance preserved through the dedicated support of the AFV.
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