The Antoine de Saint-Exupéry Youth Foundation, named after the father of The Little Prince and the real-life hero of the history of aviation, is ensuring that the voices of the next generation get the chance to be heard. Prince J-Yean Mon-Delsalle, President of the Foundation and his brother, Nicolas Del Salle, Secretary-General, remarks: “The Foundation puts the needs of youth around the world at the forefront, particularly those who have been isolated, forgotten and ignored. We aim to reintegrate youth who have been excluded from society and provide them with the skills required to regain a sense of dignity.”

Established in Paris in June 2009 by the Saint-Exupéry-d’Agay Estate (the heirs of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry), the Foundation’s mission is to support by helping them build better futures for themselves so that they participate actively in society and contribute to enriching the world.

The Foundation’s activities are based on the universal humanist values of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, award-winning author and World War II reconnaissance pilot best known for writing The Little Prince, a pocket-sized book of poetic and philosophical significance with planetary appeal (having been taken into space by French, American and Russian astronauts and credited as the most widely-known French work of literature) that has been translated into over 250 languages and dialects, and for being a pioneering aviator in the early days of international postal flight, discovering new flying routes in canvas-skinned biplanes lacking instruments, while confronted by the forces of nature, technical difficulties and poor communication links. Born in 1900, he disappeared in 1944 over the Mediterranean while on an Allied flying mission. Internationally-renowned during his lifetime, he became a legend after his death. Saint-Exupéry’s life reads like an adventure novel. He started as an airmail pilot on the France-Spain route, then later on to Morocco and Senegal, before crossing the Atlantic to South America. He piloted legendary early-model aircraft, like the Breguet XIV, and lived out incredible experiences in the Spanish Sahara as station chief of the Cap Juby postal stopover, as well as in Argentina, where he set up the first functional airmail service over the snow-capped Andes from Buenos Aires to the southernmost tip of Patagonia and inaugurated night-time flights to beat ships and trains in the race against time. Called up by the French Air Force in 1939 he resumed active service before his exile in the US from 1940 to 1943, where he set about trying to convince the Americans to enter the war against Nazi Germany. At the same time, he interwove many of his personal experiences and flying adventures into his literary works. Today, such is his enduring fame that there are two private museums dedicated to him in Japan and Korea, with another set to open in a few years’ time in his childhood home near Lyon, France.

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Text: J-Yean Mon-Delsalle | Photos: Antoine de Saint-Exupéry Youth Foundation

Above: Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Below: Le Petit Prince remains one of the world’s most famous and best-selling novels.

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The Foundation relies on an important international charity network already working on the ground carrying out local projects, which comprises hundreds of committed members, often volunteers, in approximately 30 countries, who have assembled spontaneously around the emblematic figure of Saint-Exupéry and his humanist thinking, which has the interests of mankind at heart. Saint-Exupéry believed that people shared common ground and addressed everyone regardless of nationality or religion, including the young – the citizens of tomorrow. His values – responsibility, hard work, camaraderie, a spirit of sharing and respect for the other – are revealed in his books and actions, providing guidelines for adolescents on their journey to becoming socially-responsible adults. “When you give yourself, you receive more than you give,” wrote Saint-Exupéry.

An example of the projects the Foundation has championed is the launch of the Cap Juby Sports Academy, a training centre for young underprivileged Moroccans selected within the framework of the Courier-Sud Atlantic race that follows the traces of Saint-Exupéry in Morocco, organised by the Cap Juby non-profit organisation since 1995, which will train and accompany them in careers in tourism and sports. In France, the Foundation advocated the development of Centre Ressources Théâtre Handicap (CRTTH), which contributes to the social and professional integration of marginalised individuals. Last year, it supported the final construction work of the learning spaces of O Clair de la Lune, CRTTH’s theatrical training school and an exemplary venue for cultivating social harmony among youth, especially disabled youth, through theatre and culture.

Saint-Exupéry’s works of literature played an important role in the Foundation’s creation. “Au centre du desert” is the central chapter of Wind, Sand and Stars, one of his most important books that marked the first time he united major humanist themes with the human condition and was filled with some of his most beautiful writing depicting a decisive episode in his life – his crash in the Libyan desert in 1935 during the Paris-Saharan air race, his long walk in the desert and his rescue. By acquiring this 1936 original handwritten manuscript from the Saint-Exupéry-d’Agay Estate for €312,750 at a 2009 Sotheby’s auction, Gérard Lhéritier, President and Founder of the Museum of Letters and Manuscripts in Paris, as well as collector, investor and lover of history and objects d’art, allowed the Saint-Exupéry-d’Agay Estate to turn the idea for the Foundation, dreamt up two decades ago, into reality.

Lhéritier says: “The manuscript’s purchase represents not only an addition to the Saint-Exupéry collection owned by the Foundation, but also an important contribution for the Foundation. The general public of all ages may view it today at the museum. The Foundation is an excellent initiative; it is in keeping with all the great projects undertaken by the Saint-Exupéry-d’Agay Estate and its team. We not only stand behind [the Foundation] but play an active role. I was present at the Foundation’s official launch in the grand scale of the College des Bernardins. We are going to participate as a sponsor in the setting up of the future museum or, rather, of the Saint-Exupéry family home, in the coming months.”

As the Foundation’s development depends on partnerships with companies sharing the same values, it is hardly surprising that the Saint-Exupéry-d’Agay Estate teamed up with the world of horology in 2005 through a unique collaboration with Swiss watchmaker iWC Schaffhausen, known for its signature pilot’s watches. Both guardians of a distinct heritage, they were brought together by a mutual passion for aviation and both have played a part in its development. The partnership represents a tribute to aeronautics and IWC’s 75-year pilot watch tradition, having launched its first pilot’s watch in 1936. Fascinated with technology and engineering, Saint-Exupéry had registered around 15 patents for aviation-related inventions in his lifetime, echoing the hunger for technical innovation present at IWC.

The name “Antoine de Saint-Exupéry” thereafter appeared alongside that of IWC through a series of aviation-focused projects, which debuted in 2006 with the opening of the IWC Saint-Exupéry Space at the Museum of Air and Space in Le Bourget, near Paris, and an exhibition on time, aviation and pilot’s watches. Since then, IWC has paid homage to Saint-Exupéry’s life work as an aviator and writer by creating different limited-edition and single-piece pilot’s watches. The first four models were associated with his literary oeuvre and, each time, one unique example was created in platinum, then auctioned with an original manuscript, or autographed or first-edition copy of the book, whose proceeds went to finance a charity project jointly chosen by IWC and the Saint-Exupéry-d’Agay Estate.

In 2006, the first auctioned watch helped impoverished Argentine children who were the victims of violence and at risk of dropping out of school. The following year, the funds collected led to the construction of a school for Tuareg children in the middle of the Malian desert. The third piece benefitted SPAR, which combats malaria in Cambodia by providing 10,000 children access to reading materials and literacy activities every month, publishing books in Khmer (including The Little Prince), setting up libraries and educational centres, and operating mobile library buses serving remote areas. The 2010 model financed Enfants du monde/Mobibooks, a service to mankind in general in all its cultural diversity. We support an organisation that fully deserves our trust. No one buys an IWC watch because we are committed to social causes. But our commitments are credible and in line with our corporate philosophy.

Saint-Exupéry wrote in Wind, Sand and Stars: “To be a man is, precisely, to be responsible. It is to feel shame at the sight of what seems to be unmerited misery. It is to take pride in a victory won by one’s compatriots. It is to feel, when setting one’s stone, that one is contributing to the building of the world!” The Antoine de Saint-Exupéry Youth Foundation is following in the footsteps of this man who was as great a storyteller as he was an impromptu pilot, continuing on its path to empower youth across the globe, in all the name of Saint-Exupéry. For more information, visit: www.antoinedesaintexupery.com

LEFT Francois d’Agay, de Saint-Exupéry’s nephew and president of the Foundation.

ABOVE IWC Schaffhausen has teamed up with the Antoine de Saint-Exupéry Youth Foundation as a mark of their partnership and commitment to humanitarian work.