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de Gatineau in October—have sprung up, bringing in authors from around the world and putting them in touch with both an eager public and the growing network of creators here. (BD is French slang for comics; it's short for *bande dessinée*.) Local art galleries have picked up on the vibe and are starting to show exhibitions of cartoons and comics as works of art. Local governments and agencies, meanwhile, have stepped in to actively assist comic-book creators. *Premières Lignes* completes the picture.

"THE OUTAOUAIS HAS BECOME A HUB for comics activity in Canada and for all of French-speaking North America," says Paul Roux, the man who, more than anyone else, personifies the growth of comics in the region. A cartoonist and an author

Culture

training in drawing and narrative writing, seems to have provided critical mass. Not only is it bringing talent here, but a number of students who have graduated since 2002 have elected to stay in the Outaouais. *Premières Lignes* is a direct outgrowth of the university program, having been founded by graduates. St-Georges and Quesnel, cartoonists both, are among the five partners who make up *Premières Lignes* and both have published works here.

NOW, WHEN YOU THINK COMICS, don't imagine that St-Georges, Quesnel, Mongrain, and others are drawing French-language versions of *Archie*. Much of what is being produced is for adults rather than children. And it comes from a French tradition of comics that is slightly different from what's common

Just as the town of Saint-Jean-Port-Joli in the lower St. Lawrence is known for its wood sculptures, so could Gatineau one day be known for its comics

himself, the French-born Roux is one of the region's most vocal comic-book spokespersons. He says the Outaouais first landed on the cartooning map a decade ago, when the *Salon du livre*—a major French-language cultural event that draws more than 33,000 visitors each year—contacted him and asked him to include a comic-book element in the show. Shortly afterward, *Le Droit* called, offering Roux a chance to write a regular column on comics and becoming the only newspaper in Quebec to cover comics on a regular basis.

In September 1999, UQO, a branch of the Université du Québec, added a comic-book component to its three-year visual-arts and graphic-design bachelor's program, and the next year the City of Gatineau created the annual *Rendez-vous international de la BD de Gatineau*, which last year drew more than 10,000 visitors. Now when he calls authors in Europe to invite them to the Outaouais, Roux says, they immediately know who he is and why he's calling. They're also eager to come.

The university program, which graduates about a dozen people a year with

in the English-speaking world.

Here, a little history is in order. *L'ABCdaire de la bande dessinée*, a who's who of top cartoonists that's published by the French publishing house Flammarion, says comics-like stories appear as far back as the *Book of the Dead* in ancient Egypt. But it says modern cartooning grew out of the satiric drawings of William Hogarth in 18th-century England. By 1812, a British author had dialogue appearing in bubbles above the drawings, and by the 1880s, an improvement in printing techniques had led to the evolution of comics as we now know them. In 1889, *La Famille Fenouillard*, recognizable as a comic strip today, became an early classic in France, while in the United States at about the same time, R.F. Outcault created the immensely popular *Yellow Kid*.

By the start of the 20th century, comics as a form of expression had taken off, but they followed slightly divergent paths in different countries, leading to the varied approaches to comics still in evidence. Roux says that in the U.S., comics came to be associated with