
◆ Belgium Today ◆

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AMBASSADOR SPEAKS AT HOOVERFEST

Ambassador Dominique Struye made his first trip to the Midwest in early August when he was invited by the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, Iowa, to participate in Hooverfest, an annual celebration of the 31st president's birthday.

The August 4 all-day event, which attracted thousands of people, was capped by an evening Memorial Service at the Hoover Grave Site. Part of that service was devoted to the 57 Iowa soldiers who lost their lives in Iraq: Iowa Governor Chet Culver spoke of their spirit of service, citing Hoover as an example of dedication to serving others.

Ambassador Struye elaborated on this last point, paying homage to Hoover as a great humanitarian who, as organizer of the Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB), masterminded an operation that brought three million tons of food and clothing to Belgium when it was occupied during World War I. Hoover is credited with saving millions of Belgians from starvation.

The Ambassador also related that, after the War, surplus funds generated by the CRB were used to further Belgian higher education. Some funds went to rebuilding the library at the Catholic University of Leuven; others were used to establish the Belgian American Educational Foundation, which since 1920 has funded the study/research of 2,853 Belgians in the U.S. and 866 Americans in Belgium.

In connection with this visit, organized by Belgium's Honorary Consul Patrick Van Nevel, the Ambassador stopped for two days in Moline, Illinois, home to descendants of a large number of Belgian immigrants to the U.S. In Moline, he met with community and business leaders, sampled waffles at the Center for Belgian Culture and attended Sunday Mass at Sacred Heart Church.

BELGIAN MILITARY SUPPLY OFFICE AT 50

Belgium's size and need for interoperability with EU and NATO forces will always make it somewhat dependent on foreign procurement to meet its military goals. These goals include active, effective and efficient participation in building European and Euro-Atlantic stability and security. Some of Belgium's defense materiel comes from the United States and Canada and most purchases made in these two countries by the Belgian Ministry of Defense go through its Belgian Military Supply Office (BMSO).

For fifty years the BMSO has been an extremely effective conduit for providing information to the Defense Ministry and for procuring and freight forwarding materiel which runs the gamut from screws to large components of armored vehicles to complete aircraft. Located in Landover, Maryland, since 1992, the BMSO currently has a staff of 14.

Two to three times a month, on average, the staff loads hundreds of purchases onto pallets and ships them to Belgium via military plane or sea container. While all four components of the Belgian military (Air, Land, Naval and Medical) are BMSO customers, the bulk of the shipments have to do with parts needed to equip the Belgian Defense's Air Component. Back in 1957, the aircraft supported by the Supply Office included the Republic F-84's, the Douglas DC-3 and DC-4 and the Lockheed T-33. Today the BMSO mainly supports the Lockheed-Martin F-16 and C-130.

The administrative side of the work has become more challenging over the years. Since 9/11, the U.S. has been imposing more Customs and end-use related checks on all military shipments and BMSO staffers have to provide complete traceability of everything they purchase, describing where the materiel is going, how it will be used and how it will be disposed of.

The BMSO performs a vital service to Belgium and it has become an important link in Belgian-American relations.

BELGIANS ABROAD ACTIVELY PARTICIPATED IN JUNE'S FEDERAL ELECTIONS

On June 8th, Belgians living abroad could participate for the third time in the elections of the Belgian Federal Government. In 1999 the administrative requirements for voting abroad were so complex that very few Belgians living outside the country actually got to cast a ballot. In 2003, the electoral procedures were simplified and worldwide more than 50 % of the Belgians who were eligible to participate in the elections voted.

Last June, more than 60 % of Belgians older than 18 years living abroad cast a ballot in the federal elections. Most of them sent their ballots by mail to the provincial election centers. In these centers the ballots from all over the world were mixed which guaranteed their anonymity and secrecy. In the United States, about 6,000 Belgians participated in the elections. 20 % of them voted in person at the Embassy in Washington, DC or at the Consulates in New York, Los Angeles and Atlanta, where polling stations were set up.

Generally, there was great satisfaction with the organization of the elections abroad. Some minor problems occurred with the mailing of the ballots to the Belgians abroad. These problems were immediately identified by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the necessary measures will be taken to prevent their occurrence in the future.

BELGIANS IN THE NEWS

◀ On July 10, **Thierry VandenDriessche**, a researcher at the VIB (Flanders Institute for Biotechnology), received the Hemophilia Research Award for his research on hemophilia, a hereditary disorder affecting coagulation of the blood. The research grant, in the amount of \$200,000, was presented by Bayer Health Care at a meeting of the International Society of Thrombosis and Hemostasis in Geneva. Thierry VandenDriessche and Marinee Chuah are investigating the possibilities of improved treatments for hemophilia, including gene therapy.

◀ **Annette Choynacki** has been named Director of the Belgian Tourist Office for North America, succeeding Frederique Raeymaekers. Choynacki is a 25-year veteran of the organization, which she served for 15 years as Deputy Director. Highly respected by her colleagues and clients for her professionalism and follow-through, she has significantly contributed to the increase in travel to Belgium through innovative advertising and marketing programs for all industry segments.

◀ **Alain De Coster**, Food and Beverage Director at Inwood Country Club (South Shore of Long Island, New York), and **Steven De Bruyn**, Executive Chef of the Garden City (New York) Hotel's Polo Restaurant, were both inducted into the *Maîtres-Cuisiniers de Belgique/De Meesterkoks van België*. The elite group of Belgian Master Chefs now has eighty members; of the nine who were added in 2007, Decoster and De Bruyn are the only ones working in the United States.

◀ At the Belgian Embassy, **Elie Loos** assumed the function of Consul at the end of August, arriving in Washington after a posting in Seoul, Korea. Loos replaced **Leo Cortens** who, after four years of effective dedication to the Belgian Community in the United States, has returned to Brussels to take up responsibilities as counselor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he will be providing judicial assistance to Belgians abroad.

INBEV-BAILLET LATOUR HEALTH PRIZE

“Cancer” will be the theme of the 2008 InBev-Baillet Latour Health Prize, awarded to a scientist active in biomedical research and/or its practical applications for human health. The Prize, with a value of 200,000 euros, is open to scientists of all nationalities; it is intended for biomedical scientists in the active period of their career.

Each nominee must be proposed by a person qualified to appreciate the nominee's work, using a form provided at www.inbev-baillet-latour.be

Nominations for 2008, labeled “confidential” and post-marked no later than September 17, 2007, should be sent to: Secretary General of the Fund for Scientific Research-FNRS, rue d'Egmont 5, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium.

BELGIUM, COUNTRY OF... LOW TAXES

Thanks to globalization, it has become much easier for capital to cross national borders, and investors naturally prefer lower-tax jurisdictions.

This trend has increased tax competition among nations, and has led to a wave of corporate tax cutting in Europe since the early 1990s. In the past five years, 16 EU nations have cut their corporate tax rates. And according to a recent survey by KPMG, the average corporate tax rate in the EU has fallen from 38 percent in 1996 to 24 percent in 2007.

Belgium's economy is dependent on international trade like few others, and the Belgian Government has made sure tax rates have stayed competitive. In fact, data from the C.D. Howe Institute in Toronto suggest that no country in the world has more drastically reduced corporate tax rates than Belgium. According to the institute's Tax Competitiveness Report, Belgium has the lowest effective tax rate on capital of 81 countries scored.

'Effective' tax rates differ from statutory rates, in the sense that government rules for the inclusion of receipts, the rules for expenses such as depreciation, and other items may result in 'effective' tax rates being higher or lower than statutory rates. Another issue is the compliance burden of the corporate tax, which varies substantially across countries.

Every year the C.D. Howe Institute scores 81 developed and developing countries according to their tax treatment of business investment. C.D. Howe estimates that the Belgian effective tax rate on capital declined from 23.5% in 2005 to -4.4% in 2006, resulting from the introduction of a notional deduction for equity financing. With both bond and equity financing deductions, Belgian companies are able to claim a higher tax value of deductions compared to the tax levied on income earned from investments, the study noted.

Belgium's neighbors all have effective tax rates around 20% (Netherlands, Luxembourg), or around 30% (UK, France). In the U.S., with the addition of state-level corporate taxes, the average corporate tax rate has remained at almost 40 percent over the last decade.

BREVIA

Belgium has experienced the greatest population growth in 40 years. As of January 1, 2007 the country had 10,584,534 residents, according to the Ministry of the Economy. The figure is up by 73,152 from the same date last year. The **population grew** by 38,840 in Flanders, 21,901 in Wallonia and 12,411 in Brussels. The increase is due largely to immigration, which accounts for 50,772 persons. In 2006, 45,518 persons left Belgium whereas 96,290 others moved in. Also, the number of births has increased every year since 1998 while the number of deaths has decreased during the same period.

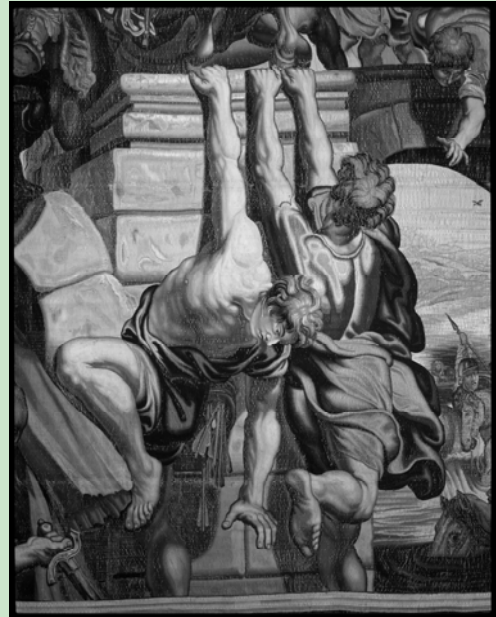
A survey released by the Ministry of the Economy indicates that the number of general practitioners in Belgium fell by 0.8% in 2005-2006, while the **number of specialists rose** by 2.1%. There were 21,625 practicing family doctors last year, marking a steady decline since 2003, while some specialist services increased. Dietitians and chiropractors are the fast growing health professions. The number of nurses in Belgium, now 65,952, has been climbing since 1995.

TAPESTRY IN THE BAROQUE: THREADS OF SPLENDOR AT THE MET

From the Middle Ages through the late 18th century, the courts of Europe lavished vast resources on tapestries made in precious materials according to designs by the leading artists of the day. Works in this spectacular medium were prized by the aristocracy for their artistry and also as tools as propaganda. *Tapestry in the Baroque: Threads of Splendor* — on view at The Metropolitan Museum of Art beginning October 17 — will offer the first comprehensive survey of high-quality 17th century European tapestry, and will demonstrate the importance of tapestry as a prestigious figurative medium throughout that century.

“This exhibition will provide one of the grandest displays of Baroque tapestry that has been seen since Louis XIV strolled through the galleries of Versailles,” said Philippe de Montebello, Director of the Metropolitan Museum. “As a visual experience, it will be without parallel for a modern audience.”

About half of the tapestries in the exhibition derive from Flemish workshops, reflecting the preponderant role of the Low Countries in the greatest tapestry production of the day. Highlights of the Brussels tapestry industry include the *Triumphs of the Church* designed by Peter Paul Rubens for the Archduchess Isabella in 1626, tapestries from the Austrian state collection designed by Jacob Jordaens and others in the 1630s and 1640s, and the *Victories of the Duke of Marlborough*, woven in Brussels in the early 1700s for Blenheim Palace in England. Migrant Flemish weavers also played a key part in the formation of new workshops elsewhere in Europe. The exhibition will include rare examples of this work, including a throne canopy made for the King of Denmark in 1584, and “The Battle of Milvian Bridge” (detail, at right).



Detail from “The Battle of Milvian Bridge”
from the *Life of Constantine* set
Design and cartoons by Peter Paul Rubens and
workshop
Workshop of Filipe Maecht, Paris ca. 1623-5
Wool and silk, 470 x 710 cm
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

NEW ON THE BELGIAN BOOKSHELF

Flora, I was but a Child

Flora Singer, who as a young Jewish girl during World War II was hidden in convents in Belgium, has written the gripping story of her experiences. Her book, *Flora: I was but a Child*, has just been published by the Holocaust Survivors' Memoirs Project, under the auspices of Yad Vashem (and is available, among other places, at Amazon.com).

Mrs. Singer came to the U.S. in 1946 and later became a language teacher in the Montgomery County (Maryland) public school system. In the early eighties, she collaborated with two fellow teachers in creating an in-service course for county teachers on the history of the Holocaust. She also became a speaker, often to young people in schools, for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, as she puts it, “telling my story as one who had been slated for annihilation, but managed to survive.”

She credits her survival to the selfless assistance and vigilance of two Belgians who are included in the *Righteous Among the Nations*, George Ranson and Father Bruno Reyners. Her book is a tribute to them and to other Belgians who took great risks to thwart the Nazis.

The Jewish Community Center of Washington and the Belgian Embassy will co-sponsor a lunchtime program in honor of Mrs. Singer's book on October 10; Ambassador Struye will participate. (See “Events of Interest” for more information.)

Searching for Flemish Ancestors

The authors, Karel Denys and Jozef Goethals, have prepared the first English-language guidebook for tracing Flemish ancestors from Belgium. A primary goal of this publication is to inform researchers about the Flemish sources that are accessible in the U.S. and how to interpret them.

Buttressing the text itself are a number of useful appendices. In the first of these, the author gives a brief course on Flemish names and naming practices. Those traveling to Flanders will appreciate the features of the appendix that introduces the holdings of the State Archives there, as well as the names, addresses, and functions of the various Flemish genealogical societies. One of the most important features of the entire volume is the glossary of Flemish, French and Latin terms commonly used in Belgian genealogical documents.

The book can be ordered at www.genealogical.com (Click on “Browse the World.”) *Goethals-Tavernier-Vanmaele*, a family history by Jozef Goethals, can be ordered through the author at goetpat@comcast.net.

Flemish DNA & Ancestry: History of three families over five centuries using conventional and genetic genealogy

This new book by Guido Deboeck, which includes a discussion of the ancestry of Flemish people, is expected to be released on October 8. See www.FlemishDNA.com or www.e-maginativegifts.com. (Click on “Holiday Gifts/Unique books.”)

EVENTS OF INTEREST

Through November 4 — Roslyn Harbor, NY
Exhibition *Pieter Bruegel, the Younger: An Intimate Retrospective*, at the Nassau County Museum of Art. Info: 516 484-9338

September 22 & 23 — Mechanicsville, MD
Belgian team participates in the Motocross of Nations at Budd's Creek. (See article at right.) For tickets: www.BuddsCreek.com

September 29 — Roslyn Harbor, NY
A symposium on Flemish culture of the 16th and 17th centuries in connection with the (above-mentioned) Bruegel exhibition, at the Nassau County Museum of Art. Info: 516 484-9338

September 30 - February 10 — Los Angeles, CA
Exhibition *Francis Alys: Politics of Rehearsal* includes paintings, drawings, films, videos and photography, at the Hammer Museum, UCLA. Info: 310 443-7000 or www.hammer.ucla.edu

October 1 — Washington, DC
Dutch language classes — for beginners, intermediate and advanced speakers— resume at the Belgian Embassy. Registration and mandatory level testing for all new students (except beginners) is on Wednesday, September 26 at 6:00 p.m. Info: 202 625-5850

October 10 — Washington, DC
Flora Singer, author of *Flora: I was but a Child*, will be honored at a luncheon/book signing, at the Jewish Community Center. (See page 3.) To reserve a space, call 202 777-3250.

October 17-January 6 — New York, NY
Exhibition *Tapestry in the Baroque: Threads of Splendor*, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (See page 3.) Info: 212 535-7710

October 18-20 — Washington, DC
Thierry Groensteen will give keynote address at the International Comic Arts Forum, at the Library of Congress. Info:<http://www.internationalcomicartsforum.org/>

October 30,31 (and Nov 1) — Washington, DC
Magic Lantern Show — an original 19th century animated entertainment, with live music— performed at the Maison française, Embassy of France. Info and tickets (\$20): 202 944-6091 (10 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

TEAM BELGIUM PREPARES FOR MOTOCROSS OF NATIONS RACE

For just the second time in its 60-year history, the prestigious "Motocross of Nations," a competition of dirt bike teams from 30 nations, will take place in the United States. Budd's Creek Motocross Park, located in Mechanicsville, Maryland, about an hour from Washington, DC., will host this event on September 22 and 23.

About 500,000 people ride dirt bikes and motocross has become the world's biggest motorized participant sport. The term "motocross" — a contraction of "motorcycle" and "cross country" — was invented in Belgium in 1934. The sport is very popular there and the Belgian Championship has become Europe's highest rated national championship.

The MX of Nations is the top motocross event in the world. Belgium, with more podium finishes (51) than any other country, has 14 Motocross of Nations titles, Great Britain is second with 16 wins and defending champion U.S.A. (whose team, incidentally, is coached by a Belgian legend in the sport, Roger Decoster) leads with 17.

The 2007 Belgian team, managed by Joël Smets, was announced on August 5. The three riders will be Steve Ramon, Kevin Strijbos and Ken De Dycker. While both Ramon and Strijbos have had a couple of MXofN experiences, this is the first time De Dycker will ride for his country in this event.

An additional twenty Belgians will be on hand to support the riders. And, Team Belgium will be supported by a team-promoter: 2CMX will market and promote the event. The agency is expected to set up a Belgian tent, in which the country's cuisine and products will be highlighted, at Budd's Creek.

The Belgian community is invited to cheer on Team Belgium as they go head to head in friendly competition with arch rivals U.S.A. on American soil.

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Embassy of Belgium
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Phone (202) 333-6900
Fax (202) 333-3079

Email
BelgiumToday@diplobel.org
WWW
www.diplobel.us

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AMBASSADOR PAYS HOMAGE TO HERBERT HOOVER