

Articles on Ambassador Gutman's Visit to Namur
By Pierre Wiame in *Vers L'Avenir* of February 2, 2010

Namur, the Garden of Brussels

'Nice to meet you, Mr. Mathen.' In spite of winter conditions, His Excellency Howard Gutman, U.S. Ambassador to Belgium since last August, arrived right on time with his wife Michelle Loewinger and his advisors. The Ambassador is a distinguished man who was immediately smiling and talkative. For security reasons, the Belgian State Security was discreetly present.

The representative of the Star Spangled Banner in Belgium, who was curious about our country and the way our institutions work, had a private conversation with the Governor, who responded to the questions of his prominent guest in English and pointed out that 'it seems that he understood me.'

Howard Gutman, who takes French lessons, wants to see all Belgian cities by himself and to shake hands with each Governor in order to get to know them. This Tuesday, he will be in Ghent.

Denis Mathen wanted the living strength of Namur to participate in this meeting and he therefore invited business leaders, university professors, the Namur prosecutor, firemen, military, including the Commander of the 2nd Tactical Wing in Florennes, Luc Gennart, as well as Province officials. The sole representative of the federal Government was Sabine Laruelle.

The breakfast table included, in addition to pastry, cheese from Maredsous, sausages from the Gaume region, and ham from the Ardennes region. It was a selection of the best Walloon food products.

As usual, Namur officials warmly received their visitors. Each member of the U.S. delegation received a folder with economic as well as tourist information, in addition to some local products.

In his private quarters, the Governor talked about the province of Namur, listing its economic and human assets. 'If Brussels was the Castle of Versailles, the province of Namur would be its garden,' the Governor said.

Several businesses that have common economic interests with the U.S., which is the leading country in terms of freedom for entrepreneurs to do business, were present at the reception, such as BioXpr, Cullen International, 3 GSP, BioXDiagnosics, Linalus Equins, and Coris Bio-Concept.

The Governor underlined that there are Belgian troops in Afghanistan, i.e. in Kabul and Kandahar, where F-16 pilots participate in missions. He also pointed out that the man who invented the saxophone was born in Dinant, and he emphasized that the region is a perfect destination for business tourists.

The Governor offered a very appropriate gift to his American guest, i.e. a reproduction of a rather soft painting by the famous painter from Namur Felicien Rops, dubbed ‘the sulfurous.’

Wonderful People

‘The message to Namur is the same as the one to Belgium, i.e. that we must rebuild a partnership together and that a city like Namur seems to be the perfect place to do so because it embodies the beauty of the past while being turned to the future. The message is both economic and political: let’s build together, let’s create ties between people and our Governments to build the future.’

Q: Did you know Felicien Rops before your visit?

Ambassador Gutman: ‘No, I did not and it’s new for me (laughter.) But outside of Namur, everywhere I have been, I have seen landscapes that are as nice as paintings, as if they were telling me about a country I have always known.’

Q: What do you like in Belgium, where you have been living since August?

Ambassador Gutman: ‘Belgian cities have a particular magic, they have a history. And Belgian people are wonderful.’

Q: Yes, but Belgium and Namur are so small....

Ambassador Gutman: ‘There are no small countries when they have big leaders. We have a saying in our Embassy that, ‘if you want to be heard, say it in Belgium. When Belgium speaks, everyone listens.’

At the Namur City Hall and at the Parliament

After the Provincial Palace and before his visit to the university, Ambassador Gutman and his spouse were received at the Namur City Hall by the mayor, Jacques Etienne. The latter offered the Ambassador a book on Namur as well as a CD of the Choir of Namur in order to encourage him to learn more about the Walloon capital.

The Ambassador also received a Walloon translation of the comic strip ‘The Jewels of the Castafiore,’ in reference to a community of people from Namur who settled in Wisconsin 150 years ago and who continues to speak Walloon. Later on, the U.S. Ambassador met with researchers at the university, where he took his lunch, before meeting with the President of the Walloon Parliament Emily Hoyos in the afternoon and visiting the Kraft plant in Rhisnes.”