

The U.S. Ambassador on a Visit

Article by Alice Marichal

In L'Avenir of March 16, 2011

The sun was shining on the occasion of the visit of U.S. Ambassador in Belgium Howard W. Gutman to Leuze. It was 10.30 a.m. at the clock of the tower of the church next to the Leuze-en-Hainaut's city hall when a black limo, preceded by three police motorcycles, arrived.

The Ambassador was nominated by President Barack Obama to be U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium and was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on July 24, 2009. Since then, he has undertaken to visit the country, beginning with big cities but also visiting smaller communes.

'My role is to rebuild partnerships with Belgium, which means with Governments and with the business world but also with citizens,' the Ambassador pointed out. 'The relationship between Belgium and the United States is very good. Together, we try to solve world problems and to restore the economy. Since my arrival, I have already visited 240 Belgian cities and villages,' the Ambassador added. 'The objective is to give a positive image of the United States to people who were perhaps skeptical, not only to Ministers.'

As a welcoming ceremony, the local authorities offered their guests to sample a few local products. Before that, the Mayor of Leuze, Lucien Rawart, made a few remarks. 'Mr. Ambassador, your collaborators told me that you gave yourself the challenge of visiting a maximum of Belgian cities and communes. It is a great honor for us to welcome you in Leuze-en-Hainaut, which has close to 14,000 inhabitants, half of whom are in the nine villages composing the entity. Leuze is a small city compared with Brussels and Tournai, and it is the reason why appreciate even more that you came to visit us early in your tour,' the Leuze Mayor said.

The delegation then hit the road to visit the famous plant of Lutosa. The Ambassador was invited to a general presentation of the plant by the Director General, Erwin Wuyts, before actually visiting the site, where potatoes are turned into French fries. ‘After a brief presentation, we visited the fabrication line Nr. 3 and the Ambassador was very interested. It is not with the United States that we work the most, but having the visit of Mr. Gutman is a very good thing and a great honor,’ the Director said.

Let us hope that this brief visit to Leuze-en-Hainaut has contributed to leaving good memories of the region in Howard Gutman’s mind. In any case, a tasting of Lutosa products undoubtedly pleased the visitors, whether Belgian or of another nationality. And it is with this remark that the Ambassador concluded his visit: ‘Today, I saw a 17th century church and an extremely modern plant. It is that kind of contrast that makes Belgium magic.’