

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 26 (1999)
Heft: 2

Rubrik: Mosaic

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People



Ex-Federal Councilor **Fritz Honegger** has died in Zurich at the age of 82. Elected to the Zurich Cantonal Council in 1957, the Liberal Democrat economist represented the Canton of Zurich in the Council of States from 1967. In 1977 he was elected to the Federal Council as successor to Ernst Brugger, and headed the Department of the Economy until 1982. In his last year of office he occupied the post of President of the Swiss Confederation.

Well-known flying Swiss doctor **Anne Spoerry** has died in Nairobi. Over 80

years old, "Mama Daktari" was already a legend in her lifetime. She learned to fly at the age of 45 and would travel wherever people in the bush needed assistance or medicaments. Spoerry grew up in Alsace, in Lake Zurich and in England.

Banker **Rainer E. Gut** is resigning as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Credit Suisse Group in the year 2000 to take up a post as President of Nestlé. He will be succeeded by Lukas Mühleemann, who will head the Executive Board as well as the Board of Directors.



Bernhard Luginbühl, the most popular metal sculptor in Switzerland, has

celebrated his 70th birthday. To mark the occasion the Bernese artist burnt one of his monumental sculptures on Zurich's "Sechseläuten" grounds. Since recently Luginbühl's massive works have been on show in his private garden. ■

Point of view

"The future of the Swiss economy exists – but abroad."

Beat Hotz-Hart, Vice Director of the Federal Office of Economic Affairs

"Just as you cannot stop a child learning, you cannot stop Switzerland opening up sooner or later."

Gret Haller, Ombudswoman for Human Rights in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Avalanches claim deaths

In February winter set in with a vengeance in several parts of Switzerland, giving rise to talk of the hardest winter for avalanches this century. Areas that had never before been known as avalanche risks were also hit.

The heavy snowfalls claimed numerous victims. In Wengen (BE), for example, a husband and wife died when an avalanche swept their restaurant away during the night. In the village of Evolène in the lower Valais, a dozen Swiss and French nationals lost their lives in the heavy falls. In the Maderan

valley a farmer was carried off together with house and barn; and in Obergoms an avalanche thundered down on a house in which a man was fast asleep. An avalanche in Lavin (GR) buried the driver of a car that stood in its way. Small and large cattle and farm animals also fell victim to the avalanches, and emergency troops were deployed throughout Switzerland.

Air bridge set up

In several alpine villages avalanches swept away unoccupied houses as well as trees, causing major damage to

forests. The snowstorms crippled power and telephone lines, and many locations were completely cut off. Residents were unable to travel to work, and children had to stay home from school. In many places residents and hotel guests were evacuated as a precaution against the "white death". Helicopters were used to transport thousands from locations at risk and fly in provisions and other necessities. Fog, heavy snowfalls and strong winds impeded the supply flights and made life more difficult for the residents. Often the only functioning communications medium was the radio.

Damage to infrastructures and Nature

Fallen wood and huge snowdrifts damaged cable car and ski-lift installations. Pistes and cross-country tracks were barred, schools closed, and numerous railway lines and roads blocked. For the first time since the construction of Switzerland's national road network, three motorways were simultaneously closed. The Gotthard tunnel was impassable. Because the railway line, motorway and cantonal road along Lake Brienz were closed, access to several locations was by boat only.

Meanwhile heavy rainfalls caused chaos in the lowlands. Many cellars and apartments along the River Rhine were flooded. Steeper terrain suffered from landslides, and dams were burst. ■



Snippets

Tickets for Expo.01: The most economical option for those wishing to visit the national exhibition in 2001 is to buy the «ImagiNation» three-day pass this year, when it costs CHF 99. Next year the same ticket will cost CHF 110 and in the exhibition year CHF 120 (all tariffs excluding transport). Unlike its pricing policy, the content of Expo.01 has still not been defined.

Speedy Switzerland: Switzerland is the fastest country in the world, according to American psychologist Robert Levine. He measured the average speed of randomly-selected pedestrians in 31 countries, as well as their working speed at their place of employment. Thirdly he studied the accuracy of randomly-selected bank clocks. His findings are contained in a book entitled "Eine Landkarte der Zeit" ("A Map of Time"), published by Piper Verlag, Munich.

School for gifted children: A primary school has been opened in Wietikon near Zurich for children of above-average intelligence. The pupils presently number five girls and four boys aged between seven and ten.

Places for foreign students: Last year 93 388 students enrolled at Swiss universities, of whom 19.2 percent were foreign nationals. Most guest students came from Germany, while France, America, Africa and Asia accounted for ten percent each.

Economic recovery in the Ticino: The economy of Switzerland's southern region, long beset by crises, has stabilised. Strong growth has even been reported in the industrial sector.

Federal Council elections: Victory for women, youth and Fribourg



Ruth Metzler and Joseph Deiss were the surprise winners of the elections for successors to Federal Councillors Arnold Koller and Flavio Cotti. In a Hitchcock-type final round the 35-year-old attorney and auditor and 53-year-old professor of economics and social science were chosen over their fellow CVP contenders. Although Metzler comes from the Lucerne hinterland, she is domiciled in Appenzell Innerrhoden, where she has served for three years as

a government official in the finance department. Deiss lives in Barberêche in the Canton of Fribourg, is completely bilingual and for three years acted as Switzerland's price watchdog.

Their departments have already been assigned: Ruth Metzler takes over at the Federal Justice and Police Department (EJDP), while Joseph Deiss has been appointed to head the Foreign Ministry (EDA). All other Federal Councillors retain their current post. ■

Press news: The "HandelsZeitung" is now under German ownership: publishing magnate Axel Springer of Berlin, owner of newspapers, magazines and publishing houses and stakeholder in TV and radio corporations, has taken over the majority of this business publication, heralding an end to the prestigious newspaper's 137-year-old history of independence. ■

10th Schaffhausen Jazz Festival

Between 26 and 29 May Schaffhausen will again be transformed into a city of modern jazz, when the Schaffhausen Jazz Festival celebrates its tenth anniversary. Big stars on the Swiss jazz scene, such as drummer Pierre Favre, composer Georg Gruntz and orchestra conductor François Lindemann, will be appearing. Since its beginnings over 500 musicians have appeared on the stage of the Kammgarn Cultural Centre, the venue for the festival. Created with the aim of providing a workshop to promote Swiss jazz creativity, the jazz festival on the Rhine has become the most important platform for Swiss jazz and improvised music. ■

Text: Alice Baumann

Photos: Keystone, Michael Stahl

Around the world in 20 days

Following two unsuccessful attempts, Swiss psychiatrist and balloonist Bertrand Piccard and his British co-pilot Brian Jones succeeded in being the first to complete a non-stop circumnavigation of the world in a balloon. The intrepid adventurers announced their safe landing in the Egyptian desert to flight control centre in Geneva with the following words, "The eagle has landed." This was how the crew of the American Apollo 11 mission announced the first landing on the moon in 1969. Piccard described his pioneering feat as a team effort and a symbol of world peace. ■

