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YOUR CORNER.....

Society Member's Profile

This month we have our first 'Society Member's Profile'. We would like this to become a regular feature and hope to profile Society Members from all over New Zealand.

This profile is about **Josef and Helen Staheli**, members of the Hamilton Swiss Club and well known amongst the Swiss community. It was in early 1957 that Josef (known as Joe) and Helen decided to emigrate to another country.

Joe had completed his apprenticeship and master-diploma exams in saddlery and upholstery and had worked in various places in Switzerland. Whilst working and living in Weinfelden in 1952 Joe married Helen, and they had two children, Herbert in 1953 and Anita in 1955. A crisis in nearby Hungary and talk of another war were one of the reasons Joe and Helen started to think of moving to another country. Another reason was the difficulty of starting one's own business where there were already a lot of established furniture businesses. Their first choice of country was Canada but they were told by Immigration that it was hard for families to move to Canada as there was already some unemployment there. They then thought about the U.S.A. but when they talked to Helen's brother Paul, who lived in America, they found things were much the same there.

Neighbours of theirs, Henri and Leoni Oettli moved to New Zealand in approx. April 1957 and Joe and Helen made the decision of also moving to New Zealand. One of the hardest things they found about making a move to the other side of the world was saying 'Good-bye' to their families, in particular Helen's parents who were farewelling their only grandchildren. Joe's Father was very supportive of their decision and when Joe told his brother Ernie of their plans he decided to accompany them.

It was at the end of October 1957 that Joe and Helen, their two children and Ernie sailed out of Rotterdam on the SIBAJAK.

There were 35 Swiss people on the boat, the majority going to Australia.

They arrived in Wellington on 1st December. They had been given a Wohn-Guarantee (Guarantee of accommodation) by Fritz Scheidegger who lived in Waharoa. Ernie had brought a car with him so they made their way to Waharoa. They stayed there for approx. 2 weeks and then decided to go to Hamilton to have a look around. At that stage, a friend of theirs, Charlie Waldvogel, kindly helped them to find a suitable place to live, and they bought a small house in Grey Street for 3,200 pounds and moved in shortly before Christmas. At that stage they spoke very little English.

It was then that their friend Charlie told them about the recently formed Hamilton Swiss Club and Joe went to their Christmas function at the Catholic Centre in Grey Street. There he met other Swiss Immigrants and decided to join the Hamilton Swiss Club.

It was in the year of 1958 that Joe looked for work and started cleaning part-time at the Riverina Hotel in Hamilton East. At the end of January he started work as a Motor Trimmer, more in his line of work. Eighteen months later he changed to Rosco Ice-cream which paid better. He was hoping to set up his own business as an upholsterer some time.

Joe and Helen had two more children, Doris in 1960, and Christine in 1963. Mid-year of 1961 they rented an old workshop in Galloway Street and started up their own business recovering lounge suites. They were fairly busy and Helen helped with the sewing. A couple of years later they employed a young boy to help them and then purchased an old house in Colombo Street. They knocked out some of the interior walls and used it as their first workshop. A few years later they formed Swisscraft Upholstery, employing a seamstress, a qualified tradesman and an apprentice, and started to produce new lounge suites. Fairly quickly the premises became too small and they built a new workshop behind the old house. Three years later they pulled down the old house and built another new factory. Their business continued to grow and at one stage they employed approx. 22 employees. They are now retired, and their son Herbert, and his Wife Willetta manage Swisscraft.

Joe and Helen both joined the Com-

mittee of the Hamilton Swiss Club and served for approx. 13 years, Joe being the Vice-president.

They took their first trip back to Switzerland in Dec. 1967 and have had about 7 enjoyable and memorable trips since.

Joe and Helen never really felt homesick - they were kept busy with their young family. They started with very little but managed to make ends meet. They had generous neighbours and friends and never had any regrets about their decision to move to New Zealand. Over the years they have seen Hamilton grow from a small town to the City it now is.

When asked for their thoughts about people wanting to emigrate to New Zealand now, Joe and Helen feel it would be a lot harder as New Zealand is now an established country and people would need more money to start up a new venture. They feel that the youth of today are a lot more spoilt than they were and would find it a lot harder to start with little, as they did.

However, New Zealand is nowhere near as overcrowded as parts of Switzerland, and other European countries, and still offers opportunities to those prepared to make a go of it. A big advantage is that in New Zealand you are more likely to be able to own your own home.

Our thanks go to Joe and Helen for giving up their time to pass on their life experiences in New Zealand to us, which I'm sure will be of particular interest to their 10 grandchildren.

Regards; Doris and Trudi.

Contact Addresses:

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Wanted for Switzerland

Au pair girl to take care of two boys (ages 11 and 9) from August 1998 to July 1999. For more information please contact:

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