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Editorial

The third age....

Like some of you, that have already done so, my Wife and myself have recently joined the ranks of Senior Citizens. School friends in the 'old country', Switzerland, have done so as well and want us to join them in a reunion-celebration later in the year. It sure is a milestone to reach the magic age that allows us to call ourselves superannuitant, Pensioners or simply retired!

Should we be sad, since youth and middle-age are but a thing of the past? Should we accept this 'fact-of-life' with pride since we can now boast of 65 years of life-experience?

And just as we decided on the latter, our youngest daughter declared that looking in the mirror the other day she found a white hair on her head.

And that reminded me of a nostalgic song I used to sing with the first lines; *Darling I am growing old, silverthreads among the gold, shine across my brow today, life is fading fast away.....!* -

According to a recent article from Switzerland we should never think of fading life when reaching the 'golden age of a Pensioners'. It states the following;

*The age between 65 and 79 is not old age anymore, it is **the third age**, and a positive time for most people. A new survey by the Swiss National Research Foundation says a quiet revolution has been taking*

place among the lives of retired people.

The survey looked at the situation of older people in cantons Geneva and Valais between 1979 and 1994 and found that increasing numbers were living healthy active lives until the age of 80.

"We're living in amazing times", said Francois Hoepflinger, coordinator of the survey. "40 per cent of people born in 1940 can expect to celebrate their 90th birthdays." The survey found widespread improvements in the quality of life for older people. Those under 80 are healthier, wealthier and more active than 15 years ago. "The fact is, the aging process is being postponed," said Professor Christian Lalive d'Epinay of Geneva University's department of gerontology. (The scientific study of aging) "Biologists believe human life is possible up until the age of about 120, and we're getting close and closer to that limit."

The survey found that life for the over 80's in Switzerland had improved too, but not so radically as for younger people. Around 20 per cent of people in advanced old age live in special homes, and suffer from serious illness. But the outlook for the next generation of people reaching the age of 80 is positive; Hoepflinger and d'Epinay expect their quality of life to improve, reflecting the healthier, more active lifestyle they will have enjoyed in their 60s and 70s.

The big question is how big a financial burden the increasing numbers of retired people will place on the working taxpayer

Franncois Hoepflinger believes the Swiss should not be too concerned. "Firstly we are a rich country with the resources to deal with this, and secondly many retired people play roles that benefit the economy: they look after grandchildren so that parents can work, or they are active in voluntary organizations." Overall the survey shows that there is less to fear from getting older than many people had imagined. Although old age comes to us all eventually, in the year 2000 the problems of old age are arriving later, and more and more people are enjoying active healthy lives up to the age of 80.

Most of these statements from our 'country of origin will also apply to Kiwis and Swiss/Kiwis in NZ, al-

SWISS SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

PATRON: Mr Walter Simmen, Chargé d' Affaires of Switzerland

PRESIDENT/TREASURER: Beatrice Leuenberger, 44 Montgomery Crescent, Hamilton, Ph.(07) 843-7971 Fax (07) 843-7941 bea.leun.rachel@xtra.co.nz

VICE PRESIDENT: Bert Flühler, 1 Bettina Rd. Hamilton, Ph. (07) 855-4308

SECRETARY: Ruth Waldvogel, 89 Crosby Rd. Hamilton, Ph. (07) 855-3417

RIFLEMASTER: Peter Rust, Bayley Rd. R.D.3. Te Awamutu, Ph. (07) 872-2636

DELEGATES TO THE SWISS ABROAD CONFERENCE IN SWITZERLAND

DELEGATE: Heinz Leuenberger, 33 Russell Terrace, Putaruru, Ph/Fax (07) 883-8537

DEPUTY DELEGATE: Marie-Therese Melville-Schöpfer, P.O Box 79-294, Royal Heights, Auckland 1230, Ph. (09) 833-4029

COORDINATOR IN NZ FOR THE SWISS ABROAD YOUTH EXCHANGE SCHEME

Mrs. Nicole Helsdon, 58 A Marellen Drive, Red Beach / Orewa, Ph. (09) 426-0927

EDITOR: Rinaldo Rust, 242 Te Pahu Rd. R.D.5.

Hamilton, Ph/Fax (07) 871-9946 E-Mail: rinaldorust@xtra.co.nz

CLUB REPRESENTATIVES

AUCKLAND

SECRETARY: Albert Ryter, 32 Sunrise Ave. Mairangi Bay, Auckland, Ph. (09) 478-8547

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HONORARY CONSUL: Peter Deutschle, P.O. Box 90-209, Auckland Mail Centre Ph./Fax (09) 366-0403. Email: deutschle@clear.net.nz