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President's Message

Late last year, after first speaking to Swiss Clubs in Singapore and Australia, our five Clubs were also visited by Ambassador Walter Thurnheer of the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs, accompanied by Bernadette Hunkeler Brown from our Embassy in Wellington.

Mr Thurnheer began with a very informative speech about Switzerland and issues relating to Swiss Abroad. This was followed by questions which, at least at the meeting I attended in Hamilton, were not in short supply! An abridged version of the speech is printed on page five. Anyone wanting a full copy of the speech is welcome to contact either myself or our Editor.

I would once again like to thank both Mr Thurnheer for making the journey to and around New Zealand to speak to us, and Bernadette for also visiting our Clubs.

Over the recent holiday period I have not received much news from Switzerland, with the exception of new information about websites which I'd like to pass on.

The first is in relation to the 100th birthday celebration of one of Switzerland's most well-known sculptors, Alberto Giacometti. A biography, a selection of his works, texts by and about Giacometti, details of exhibitions around the world and much more can be found at www.alberto-giacometti.ch.

Another website recently established by PResence Switzerland (PRS - an official division of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs) is at either www.schweiz-insicht.ch or www.switzerland-insight.ch for the English version. This multi-media and interactive site contains a large variety of topics and features about Switzerland and its people - such as landscape and environment, economy, culture, science, population and demography, languages, and the current political system. It can be accessed in German, French, Italian and English - as well as Russian and even Chinese! The site is quite easy to move around in and to read and understand. It is particularly suitable for Swiss Abroad children and young people to learn a lot more about Switzerland, with a variety of knowledge games built in as well. These

sites are definitely well worth a look! Besides these two sites, I have a list of 'Useful Links', provided by Mr Thurnheer, for anyone interested.

Whilst we here in New Zealand experience one of the wettest few summer months we can remember, also spare a thought for the tourist destinations in Switzerland who were struggling to attract people due to a lack of precipitation in the form of snow.

By mid January, resorts throughout the country were producing very expensive artificial snow, to replace what nature wasn't providing, so that the winter sports enthusiasts would continue coming. However, sunshine was very much in abundance - they probably had quite a bit more than we were getting!!

None-the-less, I hope everyone did have a happy and restful holiday season, and that we do still have some nice summer days ahead of us.

Beatrice

For Sale

BMW 735i auto, 1984, one owner, 139 000 km, Bahama Beige, with personalised plates "I SWISS", very presentable, good condition, owner returning to Switzerland, offers invited, Ph (09) 416 7168 or email tony.mathys@paradise.net.nz.



Swiss Federal President
for the Year 2002
Finance Minister Kaspar Villiger

Excerpts from an interview granted to Swissinfo by the Swiss President for 2002, Kaspar Villiger

Finance minister Kaspar Villiger takes on the one-year rotating presidency as Switzerland prepares to vote on United Nations membership, and gets ready for the national exhibition - Expo.02 - which opens in May 2002.

Question: Last year the international community, and especially Switzerland, was shaken by sad and tragic events. What lessons have you learnt from these events for the new year?

Answer: Recent events have affected peoples' emotions, but I think Switzerland is not in a bad shape and that the country has learnt a lot about politics and economics during the last recession. However, people still feel insecure and ministers are just as affected by these disasters as other people. And if I look at recent events in Switzerland, such as the Gotthard disaster, the plane crash, and so forth, I think we must keep in mind that as a country we are pretty well off, and that we can solve problems. I think it is important that we do not lose confidence and I will do my utmost to solve problems.

Question: What are your priorities for the coming year?

Answer: The president does not only represent the country abroad, he also acts as a representative at home. It is important to me to engage in dialogue with different circles and people. I will also try to make the cabinet's policies understood and explain the work of our institutions and, above all, I will try to listen.

My top priorities are the United Nations and (the national exhibition) Expo.02. I think the referendum on joining the UN (on March 3) is very important and I will do my best to convince the Swiss people that membership is important. As far as Expo.02 is concerned, I think it is an important meeting platform and I have placed great hopes in this event.

Question: What will you say to other countries if the Swiss reject UN membership?

Answer: I hope I will not have to explain this to other countries. My top priority is to make sure that the Swiss people vote in favour and are convinced about their choice. The UN deals with international problems, such as poverty, environment, peace, etc. It is important that we join such an organisation, no