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'Swiss Roots'

help build bridge from America to Switzerland

Ben Roethlisberger, quarterback of the Pittsburgh Steelers, will travel to Switzerland in May 2006, tracing the roots of his ancestors who lived in the Bernese Emmental. Additionally, the Swiss Federal Charter, known as the "Schweizer Bundesbrief," will be shown in the US for the first time ever at the Constitution Center in Philadelphia. These and other events such as a Swiss immigration exhibition at New York's Ellis Island Museum are part of "Swiss Roots," which aims to bring America and Switzerland closer together.

Like Renee Zellweger, Bob Lutz, Johann August Sutter, and Louis Chevrolet, there are more than one million Americans of Swiss origin and many more with a keen interest in Switzerland. Since the early 18th century, thousands of Swiss citizens have immigrated to the US - motivated by curiosity, hopes for a better future, or economic hardship in Switzerland. There are more than 5,000 US cities with Swiss names and countless Americans intrigued by the culture, diversity, and beauty of Switzerland. Moreover, there are many Swiss who are fascinated with American tradition and the American way of life.

"The vision of 'Swiss Roots' is to motivate all Americans who feel an affinity with Switzerland to connect with our country and to network with the Swiss people," Ambassador Raymond Loretan, Co-Chairman of "Swiss Roots" and Consul General of Switzerland in New York said. "This vision is in particular realised by the 'Swiss Roots' Web site, www.swissroots.org, which offers users the opportunity to explore their Swiss roots and ancestry in just a few mouse clicks."

The "Swiss Roots" Web site - launched at the end of March 2006 - includes features such as a genealogical search engine and

community site, interesting and surprising information on Switzerland, profiles of famous Swiss immigrants, and a "Swiss Roots" events calendar. Visitors will have the opportunity to exchange ideas with like-minded people in both countries.

Americans who feel inspired to visit the land of their forefathers can use the Web site's resources to book their trips.

Various events will be organised to promote "Swiss Roots," including Roethlisberger's visit to his ancestor's home town in Bernese Emmental and the exhibit of the Swiss Federal Charter, the "Schweizer Bundesbrief" of 1291, in Philadelphia's Constitution Center. The presentation of the "Bundesbrief", the first time it has ever been displayed outside of Switzerland, takes place within the framework of the "Sister Republics" exhibition, showing the close historic links between the US and Swiss constitutions.

Other Swiss Roots events include a vintage Swiss Postal Bus road show through the US states with the highest concentration of Swiss immigrants - California, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin - and the exhibit "Swiss Numbers Big Impact," presented on New York's Ellis Island and chronicling the immigration of Swiss nationals to the US. This exhibit is planned to be opened by Federal Councilor Pascal Couchepin, Member of the Swiss Government, at the occasion of the Swiss National Day Celebration on July 29, 2006.

"Swiss Roots" will also participate in "Tell-Spiele" in New Glarus, Wisconsin, Basel Carnival Days in Los Angeles, a Swiss "Sanger Fest" in Toledo, Ohio, and the "Green County Cheese Days" in Monroe, Wisconsin. Furthermore, the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia will present a cultural program in Washington DC, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and other cities that highlights contemporary Switzerland, including the contributions of Swiss-Americans in music, film, architecture and visual arts. The cultural program starts with an exhibition on Ticinese architecture at Virginia Tech's Washington-Alexandria Architecture Center, followed by "Reprocessing Reality," a contemporary art show taking place at PS1, the Queens affiliate of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York.

"Swiss Roots" brings the United States and Switzerland closer together through activities that foster dialogue, understanding, and both online and offline exchanges. The program's centerpiece, www.swissroots.org, is a state-of-the-art Web site that serves as a gateway for the one million Americans of Swiss descent to discover their ancestral roots and those with Swiss affinity to discover and communicate with people in Switzerland. The "Swiss Roots" Web site was launched officially on 29 March at the Embassy of Switzerland in Washington, DC.

Additional "Swiss Roots" events will showcase nationwide the best in Swiss innovation, culture, history, education, and business. The project is organised by the Consulate General of Switzerland in New York and official Swiss representatives in the US, in cooperation with numerous local Swiss associations. "Swiss Roots" is supported by Switzerland promotional agencies such as Presence Switzerland, Switzerland Tourism and Pro Helvetia. "Swiss Roots" is also supported by private sector companies such as Swiss Helvetia Fund, Swiss International Airlines and Swiss Post.

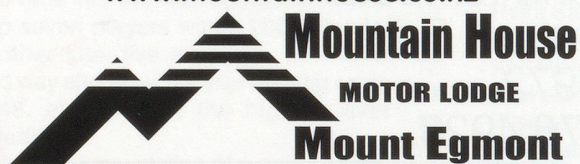
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