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Society News

New Honorary Consul Appointed

Recently our new Honorary Swiss Consul, Adrian Blaser, was appointed and Hans Vetsch, Swiss Society President, Anna Blaettler-Bogt Vice President of Swiss Society and her husband Leon as well Anita Zuber, Swiss Society Secretary and I, Heidi Wehrle, Editor of your Helvetia had the pleasure of attending his inauguration. Many other guests, such as members of the Consular Corps of Auckland attended and the Auckland Swiss Alphorn Players opened the official proceedings. It was nice to catch up with some Auckland Swissies whom I had not seen for a long time. On behalf of the Helvetia Team I extend our best wishes to Adrian and his family as he takes on the role that Peter Deutsche ably held for 25 years. Below is Adrian's inaugural speech.

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa. Welcome, Guten Abend, Bon soir, buona sera, bun di, as haerzlechs Gruessech mitenang.

Dear Ambassador, dear new colleague consuls, colleagues from politics, academia, dear friends of Switzerland, family and friends. It is a great pleasure for me to be here and to introduce myself. As you heard and read, my name is Adrian Blaser and I want to give you a bit of insight of who I am.

I was born in 1972 in Switzerland in a small village of less than 1000 inhabitants 20 kms north of the capital Bern. Napoleon fought a battle in this village and stayed in the local hotel. I attended the local primary school and then moved on to Baccalaureate school and University in Bern. In 2001 I completed my PhD in Organic Chemistry. Along the way I met my wife Pia and we both visited New Zealand independently in the nineties. In 2000 our first child was born and after my PhD we decided to come to New Zealand for my PostDoc studies. I joined the Chemistry Department and the research group of Dame Margaret Brimble. Our second child was the first Kiwi in our family and was born at the very end of 2001.

In 2002 I joined the Auckland Cancer Society Research Centre under Distinguished Professors Bill Denny and Bruce Baguley where I worked on multiple cancer and tuberculosis projects. Currently I am looking after the Analytical Services for the Medicinal Chemists at the centre with a particular emphasis on the NMR Facility. The NMR spectrometer is a Swiss product.

To finish the family history, in 2006 our youngest was born. Cedric is present tonight and I am sure if you ask him, he will tell you that he is the best looking. We have settled in Massey, West Auckland and enjoy Auckland and New Zealand with all the outdoor activities it has to offer. In December 2017 our family walked from Queen Charlotte to Wanaka, part of the Te Araroa trail. These 2 months were the best in our family life so far.

From 2007 until 2017 I was a member of the committee of the Auckland Swiss Club and lead it as the president for the last 5 years of this period. Over that time, we developed a great collaboration with the Embassy in Wellington. Since 2013 I also serve the NZ population as Justice of the Peace.

In taking over from Peter Deutsche - I am fully aware that I have very big shoes to fill. Peter did an outstanding job working for all of us. His work strengthened the link between the Embassy and Swiss in Auckland and I am sure you all agree that Peter now deserves a lifestyle that allows him and Penny to travel the world. We wish them always safe travels.

In my role as Honorary Consul I will continue to be there for Swiss Citizens in need and will represent Switzerland and the Embassy to the best of my capacity. It is a privilege to serve the Swiss community. We all know the risks in New Zealand are always present. With earthquakes, wildfires, floods and potentially volcanic eruptions, we never know what could be next.

I am looking forward to working with you all in the future and I promise I will remember your names over time – just maybe not all of them tonight.

I would like to thank the Ambassador and his Embassy staff for the opportunity and the trust they put in me. Thank you also for the great function tonight.

To my family, Pia and Cedric (and Fiona and Tobias who can't be here tonight), thanks for supporting me in yet another role.

Now I would like to remind you of the day today. It is Valentine's Day. If you haven't thought about it, don't forget on the way home.

Thank you very much for attending tonight's function and enjoy the evening.



Blooming Swiss narcissus season approaches

That small window where the hillsides turn white with narcissus is upon us again and one of the best places to see these stunning flowers during their short season of late April into May is in the mountain area of Les Pléiades above Vevey in Vaud. It can be reached by car or the mountain railway from Blonay.

The narcissus (often referred to in English as the white daffodil) derives its name from the narcissistic youth of Greek mythology, Narkissos. Although a poisonous plant and not useful in agriculture, it can be used to make medicine for whooping cough, colds, and asthma. It is also sometimes used in medications to treat wounds, burns, and joint pain.

The narcissus has been the symbol of Montreux for over a century. An early form of eco-tourism began in the 1890s when thousands flocked there to admire the white flowers, dubbed "May snow" by locals. The Narcissus Fair, began in 1897, became a highlight of the Swiss calendar and decades before the idea of jazz festivals, international orchestras, ballet troupes and opera ensembles were invited to perform at the Fair. Parades of floats decorated with narcissus brought thousands to the streets and several tonnes of the flowers were cut, packed up and sent around the world to promote tourism. However, the Festival fell into decline shortly after WW2 and the depleted fields stood largely forgotten.

It was only in 1999, following the formation of the "Association for the Protection and Promotion of Riviera Narcissus", that a new brand of eco-tourism was launched. Flower gazing tours organised by the Association incorporating rides on donkeys, funiculars and trains start in early May. There is a walk of around one and a half hours, which starts in the Motalles parking area near Les Pléiades taking you in a loop past fields thick with narcissus. It has a few energetic climbs so you need to be reasonably fit to complete the circuit.