



CENTER FOR BELGIAN CULTURE of Western Illinois, Inc.

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www.belgianmuseumquadcities.org



January, 2014

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PLEASE NOTE . . .

No doubt you many of you have seen the newspaper articles, the television news clips, and the survey regarding about the Center for Belgian Culture's pending move. **Because of recent developments, the CBC will not be open for regular business during the month of January. The January, February, and March waffle breakfasts are cancelled as well.** Our progress will be reported in upcoming newsletters.

What's Happening with the Center

Over the last year or so, your Board has been wrestling with the issue of the building that houses the CBC. Some of the basic infrastructure of the building needed attention and it wasn't getting it. Part of the foundation was sinking, there were leaks in the upstairs apartments that were causing issues within the confines of the Center, in the spring one could yacht in the building's basement, and visitors have long noted the entrance door problem.

The Board looked at several different properties to rent, but it had some basic issues to be concerned with. The first was paying higher rent combined with a declining membership base. Another issue was our waffle breakfasts.

On the subject of waffle breakfasts, we were told by the city inspections department that should the CBC move, or even purchase the present building, we would have to install a commercial kitchen to meet code. We have been the last food seller that was "grandfathered" and did not have to have the commercial facility. But if we moved, or if titled ownership changed, we would have to comply.

What is a commercial kitchen? It would include a three-compartment sink, hooding/venting over the cooking area, and some automatic fire suppression. While this may seem overkill for serving food once a month, the fact remains that city code now requires it. And a commercial kitchen is not cheap. Originally wanting to continue the waffle breakfasts uninterrupted was one of the reasons that the Board could not make a decision on what to do.

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HAPPY NEW YEAR!

What's Happening with the Center

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An even larger problem for the Board was the declining membership. The Center has had older, long-time members pass away, and new members were not exactly joining in droves. The Board felt that raising membership fees was not the way to solve an income problem. It knew something had to be done, but before anything major could happen, the Board needed to create a plan and a budget.

In the fall, the Board met with a representative from SCORE (the Service Corps of Retired Executives) to help us put together a five-year plan for the Center. Some very good discussions came from those meetings and the Board recognized that it better work to solve some of its issues. Due to the holidays, meetings were tough to plan for, but are to continue in the next month or so.

In the meantime, our landlord filed for bankruptcy. Because of that, the building was in limbo. Only one apartment upstairs was still occupied, as was the Center on the ground floor. One of the problems with that is heat and water is common to both the apartment and the CBC, and those utilities are in the Center's name. That is, the Center pays the bill. The upstairs occupant was only "semi-contributing" his share. With the Center footing the bill and winter on its way, something needed to be done quickly, so additional monies on the part of the CBC were not spent.

After a renewed look at several possible locations, it was decided that in the best interests of the CBC, waffle breakfasts would come to a temporary halt and the Center would

move to a vacant location on 7th Street, across from DeRoo Funeral Home. As this is written, it is a pending location awaiting a copy of a lease agreement. The rent will double, but the building offers a parking lot behind it, a handicap entrance at the rear, better parking along 7th Street, and a much more visible presence. Square footage is about the same.

There will have to be a few improvements made, such as painting and perhaps sanding and sealing the floor. Overall, the building is in much better shape than the Center's current location. And the move will also allow an updating of the displays and the Center's archival materials inventory. Waffle breakfasts will return in the future, but will be at off-site locations still to be determined.

Once the Center is in its new location, the Board will finish working on its five-year plan and long-term budget, and concentrate on growing the membership. Your newsletter editor is putting together some programs on Belgium, Belgium immigration, and the Olde Towne area for members, prospective members, and especially, the children and grandchildren of members to help foster an interest in the Belgian heritage.

For 50 years, the Center has been an archive of our heritage and the Board's goal is to keep that heritage growing for another 50 years. But we will need your help in promoting membership in the Center! It's time to step up and help us meet that goal.

News of the Membership

Congratulations to: **Paul Rumler**, executive vice president of the QC Chamber of Commerce, who has added director of economic development for the Chamber to his duties.

Thank You to all who provided baked goods for the Christmas Bake Sale. While I don't have an exact amount raised, I understand it was a complete success.

Get Well wishes are extended to **LeRoy DeBrabander** who is recovering from back surgery.

Sympathy is offered to the family of longtime former member **Juliette VanDeVelde**, 96, of Moline, who passed away December 16th at Hope Creek Care Center, East Moline, Illinois.

Newspapers for the Blind

With assistance from newspaper distributors, press database Gopress, and the government of Flanders, all Flemish newspapers are being offered in an audio format for the visually impaired.

A Record Year in Bruges

1,000,896 passengers took tour boats this year in Bruges – only the third time the one-million passenger mark has been exceeded. August was the best month for the boats with 178,000 tourists.

Soldiers Brought Christmas to Belgian Refugees

(Your editor subscribes to Reminisce magazine. In the Dec/Jan issue, John Jarvie wrote an article regarding his time in the Army in Belgium during 1944. I thought you would enjoy reading this reprint.)

My holidays were always filled with family and friends, over-decorated trees with many gifts under their branches, and an abundance of food. But I never really knew what Christmas was about until 1944 in Belgium.

My Army unit had moved through biting winds and snow into an area of doubtful alliances (it was a former SS resort). We scrounged around for anything to make us more comfortable – blankets, bedsprings, stoves, you name it. Me? I bound a box of Christmas ornaments and stowed them on the Army truck.

On December 16th, the Battle of the Bulge intervened and kept us moving in and out of action, obliterating all thoughts of the holiday. But by Christmas Eve, we stopped at a refugee camp that sheltered hundreds of mothers and children – all very sad and all very hungry.

My lights suddenly went on. This is the reason you kept those Christmas ornaments, I thought. Now find a tree.

I approached a friendly sergeant with my idea. He was all for it, so we jumped into a jeep and drove until we spotted our tree. Back at the camp, the sergeant and I suggested that each man in our company contribute a sock full of rations for the refugees. Word quickly passed through all the companies, and everyone gave.

The next day, the tree was up and fully decorated. We invited folks from the refugee camp, and they walked into a celebration they never would have imagined. Our guests looked at the tree in amazement. The branches were laden with found ornaments, packs of cigarettes, chewing gum, and radar tinsel.

We handed each kid a full Army sock, with reached to the floor. The youngest children clung to their mothers or bigger siblings. They seemed a bit overwhelmed, but the older kids enjoyed themselves. Some of the soldiers played carols on guitars while others sang. We talked to refugees with the help of some of our bilingual soldiers.

The U.S. Army feeds its troops well, and our Christmas dinner was no exception. We wanted to give our meals to the refugee mothers, but it wasn't allowed. All leftovers had to be thrown out. Starving mothers waited to pull the discarded food from the trash. I knew from the grins on my buddies' faces that those mothers rescued hundreds of complete dinners that day.

I'll never forget that Christmas, when all of us soldiers truly gave from our hearts.



Christmas Raffle

Winners of the CBC Christmas Raffle were drawn at the Center Christmas party, held December 4th at JakeO's in Rock Island. Fr. Jim DeBisschop drew the lucky numbers (all on the up-and-up). Louisa Ewert won the Saint Nicholas large doll, Kerry Ewert won the Belgian beer and "Chimay" beer glasses, and Fr. DeBisschop won the Isabel Bloom Christmas tree.

Various door prizes were won by some of the 51 attendees at the party. From the accounts heard by many of those who were there, everyone had a great evening.

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The Gazette is Changing, too

2014 will be the 100th Anniversary of the *Gazette van Detroit*. There have been many changes over those years. The language has evolved from dialect-heavy Flemish to proper Dutch to Dutch and English. The paper has grown from four pages to 24 pages and from a free paper to an annual subscription. Ownership changed several times over the years and the current publisher operates as a not-for-profit 501(c)3 entity.

Evolution is a constant in the world and even more so in the “internet age.” A shocking number of newspapers have completely shut down while others, due to falling subscriptions and rising costs, have gone entirely digital. Due to the same issues – falling subscriptions and rising costs – the *Gazette* will transition to a fully digital newspaper in 2014.

The transition will be staged over the course of the year. For the first six months of 2014, everyone will have access to digital or print editions of the paper. In June, Canadian subscribers will convert to full digital access, and at the end of September, U.S. subscribers will convert to full digital access. By January 2015, the *Gazette* will be accessible solely online.

The Kleine Winkel

Although the Winkel is closed due to the pending move, if there is something that you need to purchase for “that special gift,” please contact Celie Donohue at (309) 792-8246 and she will accommodate you.

And beginning with the new year, all memberships receive a 10% discount on any purchases made at the Winkel at any time. Volunteers to the Center will receive a 15% discount on their purchases. Just another reason to be a member at the Center for Belgian Culture.

Digitalization will bring new benefits. The paper will begin posting articles throughout the month instead of once each month. The number of articles will expand and there will be new contributors. From an economic point of view, the move will help reduce their biggest costs – printing and mailing.

The new, expanded digital format of the *Gazette* will enable it to survive and exist into its next 100 years.

(Thanks to the *Gazette van Detroit*)