



CENTER FOR BELGIAN CULTURE of Western Illinois, Inc.

1608 Seventh Street, Moline, Illinois 61265

(309) 762-0167

www.belgianmuseumquadcities.org



November, 2022

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Gift Shop

Calendar of Upcoming Events

Wed, Nov. 2nd	Museum Open (Mary)	1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
Sat, Nov. 5th	Waffle Breakfast	8:00 to 11:00 a.m.
	Museum Open (Mary)	1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Wed, Nov. 9th	Museum Open (Bonnie/Mary Lou)	1-4 p.m.
	Annual Meeting, Fall Fest Wrap Up and Election of Officers	5:30 p.m.
Sat, Nov. 12th	Museum Open and Belgian Lacemakers	1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Wed, Nov. 16th	Museum Open ((Laurie or Patrick)	
Sat, Nov. 19th	Museum Open (Mary)	1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Wed, Nov. 23rd	CLOSED for Thanksgiving	
Sat, Nov. 26th	Museum Open and Small Business Saturday Sale	1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Wed, Nov. 30th	Museum Open (Mary)	1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Visit the Center for more information and to stay updated on current events.

A Letter from the CBC President

As President of the Center for the Belgian Culture I want to thank all of you for your continued support. I urge all of you to attend our Annual Business Meeting to be held on Wednesday, November 9th starting at 5:30PM at the Center.

The CBC is faced with some tough challenges ahead. Currently our monthly obligations are much higher than the income that is being generated. So, we are forced to dip into our savings each month.

Bold and difficult decisions will need to be made if we want our charming Museum and Center to continue to exist.

We used to pay our bills from the monthly attendance at our monthly famous waffle breakfasts. But now, due to poor attendance at the breakfasts,

continued on page 2

**OPEN Wednesday and Saturday 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Waffle Breakfast 1st Saturday of the month.**

A Letter from the CBC President

continued from page 1

reduction in memberships, and fewer volunteers, we are lucky if the income from the breakfasts meet a third of our monthly expenses.

All the members of the board are deeply saddened by the loss of the Ultimate Volunteer in our friend, Dave Coopman. He gave so much to our Quad City community and most certainly to the CBC.

I can only hope that the loss of our friend Dave, might serve as a rallying cry for our members to step up and volunteer to be more active within the CBC.

We need you more than ever. We need new board members. We need waffle makers. We need help with our festival and keeping the doors open at the center.

Lastly, we need your financial support. Remember the Center for Belgian Culture in your annual giving. Remember the Center in your Wills and your Estates. After all, it's our heritage that we are working to preserve.

A very delicious way to support the CBC is to come to the Waffle Breakfast each month. And bring a family member or a friend with you. You do not have to be a member to come to the breakfast each month.

I thank you. Together, hopefully we can turn this around. We need you.

Bill Cornelis
(309) 781-0040

News of the Membership

Thank You to **Paul Callens**, VVF Regio Tielt, for his donation to the Scholarship Fund. Paul noted the importance of teaching our youth about their heritage.

Thank You to **Kathie Van Echaute** for the donation of a tapestry owned by Irene Roelens O'Donnell.

Thank you to the family of **Delores Bultinck** for their donation of the Belgian lacemaker figurines and framed watercolors.

Condolences to member, **Grace Fisher**, on the loss of her sister, Clarice Castelein Johnson.

Also, our sincerest sympathies to family and friends of **Dave Coopman** on his recent passing.

A Point of View from Two Generations
Learning about the Past, Making Connections and Looking to the Future

Over the next few months we will share with our members an essay co-authored by Clare Van Speybroeck and her uncle Chris Van Speybroeck. In prior newsletters, our dear departed friend and newsletter editor, Dave Coopman, shared with you the fascinating story of jazz musician Omer Van Speybroeck. We asked them to provide their perspective on their family history, their grandfather and great-grandfather's career and how they - representing two different generations - view that history and how they experienced making the connections in Belgium. We hope it encourages other members of the Belgian communities to make those connections across the Ocean and across generations. Remember, your Center for Belgian Culture has numerous publications from Familiekunde Vlaanderen - Tielt and Het Land van Nevele to help make those connections.

Clare Van Speybroeck, age 22, is currently studying on a State Department Scholarship in Rabat, Morocco. Before leaving for Morocco this fall, she had an experience of a life time.

Chris Van Speybroeck, age 58, is well known in the Quad Cities through his work, his volunteer activities and as a member of the Happy Belgians family band performing at our Belgian Fest and numerous places around the Quad Cities.

CHRIS – Spey Comes Back to Life

Belgian immigrants from Flanders arrived in the Quad Cities at the turn of the century. Within a short time, a Belgian Parish was created, a new church was built, land for a Belgian cemetery was acquired and an honorary consulate was opened. In May of 2019 honorary consul, Patrick Van Nevel contacted Andre Bollaert with Het Land van Nevele and Paul Callens from Familiekunde Vlaanderen Tielt inviting them and members of their organizations to attend the 100th anniversary of the opening of the honorary consulate and the commemoration of the cornerstone laying of Sacred Heart Church in October. Seven representatives of Het Land van Nevele and Familiekunde Vlaanderen Tielt visited all things Belgian in the Quad Cities during the week of October 14th and participated in the events. The Sacred Heart Church commemoration on October 20th included a historic exhibit, local and Belgian guests and entertainment that included music from the Happy Belgians. After finishing our session, we struck up a conversation with a group of Belgian people from Deinze who had traveled to Moline as guests of the church and the Center for Belgian Culture. One of the visitors we became acquainted with was a man named Andre

continued on page 3

A Point of View from Two Generations*continued from page 2*

Bollaert who was a member of the historical society of Nevele, Belgium. Andre was curious as to how our musical group came to be. We talked at length, exchanged contact information and traded many emails during the pandemic.

During our discussions, I told Andre about the influence Spey had on our family band. He was interested in his early life as a musician and he began to ask many detailed questions about his life. As it turned out, by chance Andre had met a local Belgian historian, Leslie Verpoorte, who had extensive knowledge of the history of jazz in Belgium and France. Verpoorte remembered reading about a famous musician born in Nevele who moved to the states as a child who was named Van Speybroeck. Together the two made the connection and realized our 'Spey' was the same musician as the famous 'Spey' of the 20's. Andre started to assist Verpoorte as he wrote a detailed history of Spey's life that was to be published in a local Belgian historical journal in early 2022 to coincide with the Stoet van Canteclaeer. The Canteclaeer is a parade held every five years in the town of Deinze (which is very close to Spey's hometown of Nevele) that honors notable locals who were of historic significance in the area. While researching Spey's life, Andre and Verpoorte came to the conclusion that Spey was the most famous Belgian American jazz musician in the roaring 20's. We all knew our grandfather made a living from music but we didn't realize how famous he was. Grandpa Spey would occasionally tell us stories about his first career but he never bragged. Over the course of two years I sent Andre old photos of Spey during his playing days and relayed stories from his life that my family remembered. Gradually we began to assemble the details of Spey's life and career and as we pieced it together, it became more and more interesting. During the project Verpoorte fell ill but Andre was determined to finish the story. In the spring of 2022 the job was finished. Our family photos and stories combined with his research created a fascinating story that brought Spey back to life! At the same time Andre relayed some other exciting news. He informed me that he had approached the Stoet van Canteclaeer parade organizing committee with an idea. In conjunction with *The Story of Spey* being published, Andre requested that an entry be included in the parade honoring the locally born jazz great, Omer 'Spey' Van Speybroeck. The committee liked the idea and it was approved. Upon hearing this I decided to try to recruit some of my family to attend the parade that would honor our grandfather. Despite the short notice, eight Van Speybroeck's were able to attend.

CLARE – Shared Visions between the CBC, Quad Cities and Land van Nevele

The Center for Belgian Culture and Het Land van Nevele share organizational visions and missions that align closely. The Center for Belgian Culture seeks to “preserve and share proud heritage, forming a social and professional network to

help Belgians residing in, or visiting the Quad Cities area” and the Local History Circle of the Land van Nevele aims to preserve the history and legacy of the region as it rapidly changes.

The Quad Cities area has drastically changed since an influx of Belgian immigrants settled in the early 1900s seeking economic opportunity. My uncle, Chris Van Speybroeck, wrote, in beautiful detail, the history of my great-great grandparents and great-grandfather's immigration story. He described how they traveled to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century and built a life for themselves, their children, and their children's children to come. The childhood my uncle recounts differs from mine as local Belgian businesses and use of the Flemish language have dwindled throughout four generations.

Just as East Moline, Illinois, has transformed and is a part of the Quad Cities area (Moline and Rock Island, Illinois and Davenport and Bettendorf, Iowa), so has Nevele. Nevele, the village and birthplace of my great-grandpa, Omer Van Speybroeck, was recently incorporated by Deinze, a nearby city and municipality in East Flanders. Despite regional changes in infrastructure, development, and social practices, each organization recognizes how important it is for residents to connect to the history of their hometown. Although separated by approximately 4,227 miles across the ocean, the histories of the Quad Cities and Het Land van Nevele are quite intertwined. The story of my family, the Van Speybroecks, is proof of what can come from bringing light to these histories.

CLARE – Collaboration between CBC and Het Land van Nevele

I witnessed what incredible experiences can come forth from collaboration between those with Belgian lineage in the Quad Cities and Het Land van Nevele. I had the chance to visit Belgium, and specifically Nevele and Deinze, for a very special reason in May of 2022.

The city of Deinze has held a historical parade, “Stoet van Canteclaeer,” every five years since 1961. It is attended by 25,000 local residents with over 1,000 community volunteers. The parade celebrates the city's past with hundreds of elaborately costumed participants representing the unique aspects and agriculture of the city and its neighboring villages as well as famous past residents. The parade also includes two-story-high, costumed figures called “Giants” that represent either fictitious or historical characters from each village, large-scale reenactments of folklore like “Reynard the Fox,” and numerous representations of chickens as the poultry industry is central to Deinze's economy.

Through the dedicated research of Andre Bollaert and others in Het Land van Nevele, we learned that my great-grandfather, Omer Van Speybroeck, born in Nevele in 1901, was the first Belgian jazz musician in the United States. The Land van Nevele historical group brought forth the idea to

continued on page 4

A Point of View from Two Generations

continued from page 3

have a float in the parade to recognize Omer's heritage and many accomplishments in the music industry. When we heard this news, my family knew they had to be at the parade to witness this honor. Little did we know we would actually participate in the parade. Omer taught my father, John, how to play saxophone, and he was able to play the same songs he learned from his grandfather on Omer's very own saxophone throughout the streets of Deinze!

Unfortunately, my great-grandpa Omer passed away before I was born, but I've heard stories told of him from each of his grandchildren and my grandparents. Seeing this moment come to life for them during the parade filled me with so much pride and joy. Carrying the Van Speybroeck name in the United States never felt so special.

On May 20th, my family had the opportunity to visit Nevele and see Omer's place of birth and baptism with tours led by Andre Bollaert and Chris Fermon, spokespersons of Het Land Van Nevele. Afterward we traveled to Deinze to meet Deinze's Deputy Mayor, Johan Cornelis. He spoke about Omer's legacy in both Belgium and the U.S. and the two countries' joint ties and histories.

We were able to speak with wonderful fellow Quad Citizens, Patrick and Barbara Van Nevel. Mr. Van Nevel is the Honorary Consul of Belgium in Moline, Illinois. He and Barb shared happy stories of the life they live, spending time twice a year in Belgium with family and living in the Quad City Area.

We enjoyed a traditional Belgian lunch over two hours of discussion, laughing about the differences of life in Belgium and the U.S. Andre, Chris, Patrick, Barbara and so many others we came to know during our visit gave us such a warm welcome we felt like they were a part of our family or long-time friends.

