

Welcome in the Picarde Region of Wallonia, Mr. Ambassador

*Article in the local edition of the Vers L'Avenir papers, i.e.
the Courrier de l'Escaut, on Saturday, April 24, 2010*

“Howard W. Gutman, the U.S. Ambassador to Belgium, was on a visit to Lessines and Tournai yesterday in the framework of the Via Via program of Ideta which aims at promoting economic cooperation between the Brussels, Flemish, and Walloon Regions.

“At the moment when linguistic tensions are reaching a climax - Walloon Minister President Rudy Demotte, who was supposed to be in Tournai, was forced to be present in Brussels – the Ambassador met with local entrepreneurs with the objective of creating ties with U.S. businesses located in our region.

“The United States is the second largest foreign investor in Wallonia behind France, and as many as 250 American businesses are based in Wallonia – including the famous Baxter, Google, Microsoft, and Johnson & Johnson – representing some 20,000 direct jobs. ‘And there will be more since about one hundred projects are developing,’ the representative of Rudy Demotte said.

“The U.S. Ambassador insisted on the importance of further developing these economic partnerships. ‘Many American businesses are present in Belgium, like Baxter, but Belgium is also investing in the U.S. All these partnerships can contribute to fight the economic crisis,’ the Ambassador said.

“At the end of the day in the City Hall, the Ambassador pleaded for intensifying U.S.-Belgian relations in front of a large group of law schools bachelors and business leaders.

“In the afternoon, Francis Vandeputte and the Canon Navez had taken the Ambassador on a visit of the Notre Dame Cathedral. The Ambassador then walked in the historic center of the city with his hosts before the official ceremony. ‘The Ambassador enjoyed our city so much that he assured me that he would come back next year for the Tournai Carnival,’ Mayor Christian Massy pointed out.”

In a brief sidebar under the heading “Brilliant Lawyer and Actor in Addition,” the journalist runs a short bio of the Ambassador. He writes: “Howard Gutman is quite a personality. A former special assistant for counter-intelligence to the FBI Director, brilliant lawyer among the most prestigious law firms, and very active during Barack Obama’s campaign, he also feels comfortable being an actor. He made a few appearances in the K Street series where he played – of course! – a lawyer, and in the recent version of Fame, he played the role of a high school dad.”

In a small sidebar next to pictures in Tournai and Lessines and under the heading “Health Care of Yesterday and of Today,” the journalist writes: “Before visiting Tournai, the U.S. Ambassador to Belgium stopped at two locations in Lessines, first visiting Baxter for a discussion on the company’s economic situation, before visiting the Rose Hospital where he met with the museum curator, Raphael Debruyne, and the mayor of Lessines, Jean-Marie Degauque.”