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Welcome Mister Ambassador

US Ambassador Howard Gutman and his wife Michelle visit the Royal Werk Ibis.

By Hannes Hosten

Ambassador Howard Gutman and his wife Michelle visited The Royal Werk Ibis on Wednesday morning. The students of the third and fourth grade maritime techniques and their teacher Frank Borrey had written a letter to Ambassador Gutman during the winter, inviting him for a visit. "It is the best letter that I have received while in Belgium. I couldn't say no," said Gutman.

Howard Gutman, US Ambassador to Belgium since August 2009 is a confidant of President Obama. He is the first ambassador to be known in all levels of Belgian society. This is because of his numerous appearances, also in the media. Gutman once announced on television that he wanted to visit all communes in Belgium. In his office, he has a map of all the places that he has already visited. If he wants to visit all communes, he will have to hurry, because Gutman's appointment will end this summer.

Letter

But he has already been to Bredene. This is thanks to teacher Frank Borrey, who teaches English, geography, and graphic arts. Together with his students in the third and fourth grade maritime technique, he wrote a letter to the American Ambassador over the Christmas period. They also added a New Year's card. "I am very interested in US culture. Some of my family lives in the US and I myself speak with an American accent. It should also come from that direction some times," said Frank.

Everybody can a Question

"Our boys are used to welcoming special guests, but this is something else. A likeable ambassador, who appears on television, a man of the people. In our letter we wrote about Ibis, about my interests in US culture and also about the map with all the locations in Belgium that he has already visited. We invited him to come to Ibis. To our surprise we received a call two weeks later that he would come."

Ambassador Gutman and his wife Michelle were welcomed on Wednesday by Ibis-director Philip Declercq, the Chairman of the Royal Werk Ibis Admiral Willy Herteleer, and the Bredene Alderman Erwin Feys. After a presentation by Admiral Herteleer, the group visited the living quarters. The primary school students formed an honorary hedge and all had the opportunity to shake Ambassador Gutman's hand.

Ambassador Gutman spent some more time with the students and teacher who invited him. The room was decorated with American flags, typical American food, and some American gadgets. All students had the opportunity to ask Ambassador Gutman a question, to which he responded fluently and eagerly. 'Mister Ambassador', this is how the eight students one after another started their question.

American Dream

Gutman among other things talked about his bond with Barack Obama and how difficult it is to learn Dutch, despite the fact that he takes language lessons for an hour five days a week, one day Dutch, the next day French. He also knew the local basketball club but thought wrongly that Johan Vande Lanotte owns BC Ostend. His wife Michelle said that she thinks Belgian French fries are a lot better than the American ones because they are baked twice instead of just once. She does miss the Chinese food in the United States, because she thinks Chinese restaurants in Belgium use too much Curry.

The Ambassador also answered the question why he decided to come to the Royal Werk Ibis. "Your letter was likely the best letter that I have ever received in Belgium," he said. "I could not say no to your invitation. You guys are really the best. Work for it and you will achieve something. I also started as a dish washer. The American Dream not only exists with us (ed. In the United States), but everywhere."

Howard Gutman could not get enough, because while it was not planned, he also visited the second year maritime techniques. There students were also allowed to ask a question and he was able to captivate the class. The Ibis has gained a friend.

"Ambassador says that we are the best."

David (14), Jens (15), Michael (16) and Jordan (15), all students in the third year maritime techniques were very happy with the ambassador's visit. "He was very relaxed," they thought. "Other visitors do not spend as much time with us. We had all prepared one question, and we thought that the Ambassador would provide a short answer, but he took the time to extensively answer each question. "

"His Dutch accent was cool," said one of the boys. But what exactly an ambassador does was not clear to everybody. "To ambassador?" someone tried. "To bring people together," says another student, while a third student states that it is all about the relationship between Belgium and the United States.

Ambassador Gutman is not unknown to the Ibis youngsters. Some have seen him on the television, in Villa Vanthilt. "It is special that he said that we are the best," they say. "It doesn't happen every day that an ambassador says this."

We all wrote the letter to the ambassador together. First we all had to write a separate part, then we turned it into one letter. We did not expect that he would think it was a good letter and even less that he would come to visit us in the Ibis. The principal came to tell the class as soon as he knew. And we received a box of chocolate to celebrate."