

## **U.S. Ambassador Gutman's Partnership Tour**

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Under the heading “The U.S. Ambassador in Fourons” and the subheading “Exceptional,” Christian Laporte in *La Libre* writes: “There are Ambassadors who are more than Ambassadors and who take their mission so seriously that they end up being part of the national landscape of the country that welcomed them. Soon after his arrival in Brussels, Howard Gutman, who was a business lawyer and someone close to Obama, had launched a somewhat unbelievable challenge, i.e. visiting each and every one of the 589 Belgian cities, communes, and villages.

“His U.S.-Belgian Partnership Tour began with Ambassador Gutman's appearances in Charleroi and Mechelen in September 2009, i.e. a visit to a city in each linguistic community. This visit to Charleroi, a perfect example of local democracy, was conceived with the goal of rebuilding the Belgian-American partnership and of reinforcing the strong historic and enduring ties between the U.S. and Belgium by engaging directly with the Belgian people.

“On May 5, the Ambassador who will leave this summer will complete his Partnership Tour with a visit to his 589<sup>th</sup> commune, i.e. Fourons.

“It seems that, if this city which was in the past famous for its linguistic disputes is the last one the Ambassador visits, it is not because the Ambassador feared being accused of any interference in local politics. Indeed, the arrival of many Dutch people has reinforced the local Flemish majority and even the fact that Jose Happort is back in Fourons is not expected to lead to any problems.

“So after having visited that remote commune in the morning, Howard Gutman will celebrate the end of his tour in Belgium by hosting a reception at his Residence to which 600 very special guests will be invited, i.e. the 589 Mayors, ten provincial Governors, and Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo.

“It will be the opportunity to discuss many memories because, while these visits obviously involved some protocol, Ambassador Gutman also wanted to experience the rich cultural history beauty of Belgium. This is why the Ambassador threw nuts from the balcony of the Bastogne town hall and helped carry the Meyboom in Brussels. Nothing stopped him, not even having his head “baked” in Eeklo. But it

is true that that he was only following the example of Minister of Defense Pieter De Crem. Howard Gutman was also a frequent guest of Flemish talk shows.

“On May 5, there will probably not be too much protocol but Howard Gutman will undoubtedly be deeply gratified to see that the renewed emphasis on transatlantic cooperation under the Obama administration, coupled with the warm and welcoming spirit of Belgians throughout the country, have led to a stronger U.S.-Belgian partnership.”