

Ambassador in Villers-la-Ville

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“Ambassador and ‘Belgium-Trotter’

A lot of agitation at the city hall of Villers-la-Ville on Tuesday morning. All local authorities had put on their nicest suit, local staff had been mobilized, and there were uniformed and plain-clothed policemen. The reason was that a prominent guest had announced himself, i.e. U.S. Ambassador Howard Gutman, who had notified local officials that he wanted to visit the ruins of the local abbey.

Was it a whim? The desire to see the abbey where a show as a tribute to the talent of Umberto Eco is taking place every night? Not at all. Actually, the Ambassador, who was appointed by Barack Obama in 2009, has set as an objective for himself to really know Belgium by visiting each commune. And according to his calculation, he has so far seen about 300.

Normally, he was supposed to come to Villers-la-Ville last Friday. But the city council politely asked him not to come because there were already prominent guests. Indeed, Queen Paola had said that she would attend the premiere of ‘The Name of the Rose.’ It was a valid excuse and it is why the former lawyer, former special assistant of the FBI Director, and former advisor of several Democratic politicians in the U.S. came on Tuesday.

He was rather relaxed. ‘My visits are easier now because I have visited almost all big cities and things go faster in small communes. There is a pub and a Post Office, so I go to the Post Office and I say ‘here I am! No, seriously, it is very interesting and I learn a lot,’ the Ambassador explained.

(He learned about) the Belgians’ character, the subtleties of their linguistic disputes, but also their taste for beers from abbey since, while visiting Villers-la-Ville, Howard Gutman talked about previous visits to Orval, Leffe, and Chimay. But on Tuesday, it is the wine from the Vineyard Brotherhood which he tasted and which he liked a lot. Admitting that he does not like dry wines, he particularly enjoyed this sweet and tasty wine, similar to a Beaujolais wine.

‘A sunny red wine in Belgium, it is a challenge, but we are the best,’ according to what Christophe Waterkeyn said with a smile.