

## Guest Column

# Keeping Belgian heritage alive

By MARY CHAUDOIR  
SPECIAL TO THE ADVOCATE

Getting in touch with ancestors can be difficult, but if your relatives live in Belgium, it's quite easy. To reach out, just connect with the web at [www.rootsweb.com](http://www.rootsweb.com).

You can even join the club — the Peninsula Belgian American Club — if you fit the description and feel heroic enough to take a great voyage through your ancestral roots. Once you get to the other side all your fears fall by the wayside.

Going back to family roots in Belgium is what the Peninsula Belgian American Club has been doing since 1972. This year marked the 30th anniversary of loyalty and commitment for the club mission to keep the pathway alive for this generation and the next of Belgian-Americans and their Belgian cousins. The club is centered in the Southern Door County area, home to the largest Belgian settlement in the United States.

A small group of Belgian-Americans left on June 12 to "Keep in Touch." Stepping into the old world of our ancestors, where relatives can be the guides is a gratifying experience according to Kim Potier Davis, who is secretary/treasurer of the club.

"On a personal level, it's important for me to stay connected with my Belgian heritage because my father was 100 percent Belgian," David said. "I grew up hearing the Walloon language, and enjoying some of the food customs. Now that he is no longer here, I try to keep my heritage alive by visiting Belgium, serving as an officer of the club, communicating with friends I have in

Belgium and continuing my search for Belgian ancestors."

Walloon is the dialect, a French patois, spoken in southern Belgium and most prominent in the Door County settlement. Natives of northern Belgium belong to the Flemish tradition, which is more in tune with the Netherlands.

In Belgium, the corresponding type of club (the Walloonie-Wisconsin Club) was created in the early 1970s to match the work of its

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American cousins. In 1975, the Walloon visitors came to America for the first time. A husband and wife — Jacques Jacqmot, president, and Jacqueline Jacqmot, secretary — now lead the Walloon club.

"For us, it is very special to see that after so many years you still want to know where your ancestors came from, and that you are still interested in coming back to the old country. We appreciate that very much," Jacqmot told the American visitors during the trip this year.

On the second day of the trip, the Belgian-American group and their host families were invited to dinner at the King's Palace in Brussels as guests of the King Baudouin Foundation. Dinner was held at the Bellevue Hotel which was

built in the late 18th century on the ruins of an ancient castle. The hotel was used as a palace by the Dukes of Burgundy and then by Emperor Charles V. The hotel now is the home of the Bellevue Museums, which are managed by the King Baudouin Foundation.

The visiting Belgian-Americans were given an informative presentation about the ancient ruins, the history and makings of the dynasty. The welcoming speech was

enable men and women of talent from both sides of the Atlantic to learn from their respective experiences through study trips or longer-term exchanges," Berghe said. "By stimulating better understanding between the United States and Europe, we hope to contribute to a strong trans-Atlantic alliance, which will have the capacity to assume its special responsibility in making the world a safer and better place.

"The second objective in the U.S. is to facilitate trans-Atlantic philanthropy. We enable U.S.-based individuals to support people and causes throughout Europe by supporting Americans who choose to study in Belgium; or assist Belgian and American entrepreneurs in their support of cultural or heritage projects," he concluded.

Looking back over 30 years of activities to bring together the people of Old World and New World Belgium is a matter of pride for Harry Chaudoir Jr., the president of the Peninsula Belgian American Club. Chaudoir is among a handful of Americans who have been knighted by Belgian kings for their working in celebrating the two cultures.

"I raise my eyes upon (the Baudouin) foundation as a great future for the Peninsula Belgian-American Club," Chaudoir said. "We must keep this connection alive so that the roots of our very foundation, and our ancestors who spoke the native language of Walloon, will never be forgotten."

*Mary Chaudoir is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Chaudoir Jr. and a member of the Peninsula Belgian-American Club.*

given by Baron Herman Vanden Berghe, president of the Baudouin Foundation.

"The focus is in the spirit of these pioneers who sold their land in Grez-Doiceau as early as 1853 to settle in Wisconsin somewhere between Green Bay and Sturgeon Bay," Berghe said, describing the goals of the foundation. Grez-Doiceau is the home city or region where the ancestors of many Door County Belgians came from.

Berghe admitted that the foundation had a slow start (after being founded in 1997) to cross the waters and help keep great ideas alive in the United States. But now the foundation is blossoming and has a solid mission statement.

"Our first objective is to