

HOW SWISS IS AMERICA?

swissroots.org launches - an interactive web community
that combines events, genealogy, pop culture and Ben Roethlisberger

New York, May 2, 2006 - Later this week, Pittsburgh Steelers Quarterback **Ben Roethlisberger** will embark on a journey of a lifetime, traveling to Switzerland to uncover his family's ancestry in the Bernese Emmental region (the cheese capital of Switzerland). Not only is Ben making a 'pilgrimage' to the land of his forefathers, but he'll also be promoting American football and officiating at a local Swiss league game. Ever since Ben became the spokesperson for **swissroots**, 'Roethlisberger fever' has hit Switzerland in a big way and the quintessential U.S. sport is suddenly generating a lot of attention.

You may think Switzerland's greatest exports are cheese, chocolate, fine watches, Saint Bernard dogs and army knives but if you look at contemporary U.S. culture, Swiss influences are everywhere. The Swiss have left their mark on the food we eat and the people we admire, like Superbowl 2006 MVP quarterback Ben Roethlisberger, automobile pioneer Louis Chevrolet, and Adolf Rickenbacher, the inventor of the electric guitar. Actress Renée Zellweger, prolific film maker George Lucas, singer Jewel, chocolate maker Milton Hershey, President Herbert Hoover, museum magnate Meyer Guggenheim and singer Cyndi Lauper all have Swiss Roots.

The **swissroots** program, headquartered at the Consulate General of Switzerland in New York is a cultural phenomenon designed to engage people with 'Swissaffinity' to learn more about the country and to make contact with Swiss citizens. It also serves as a platform for an exchange between Switzerland and the U.S. in areas such as politics, economics, culture, education, research and tourism. The program's flagship is an innovative community website - www.swissroots.org - developed in association with IgoUgo and Swissinfo.

Launched in March 2006, www.swissroots.org combines technology with icons of pop culture (like Ben Roethlisberger), cutting edge events and genealogy to create an interactive web community, bringing people in the U.S. and Switzerland together to share their interest and passion for Switzerland. Join Ben (virtually) as he gives www.swissroots.org users a daily account of his travels and experiences in Switzerland.

Different from other countries whose websites may help trace ancestry, only **swissroots** allows you to delve into the world of the Swiss, find out if your name or the name of the town you live in has Swiss origins, learn about exciting Swiss events taking place and how to connect with other Swissophiles. The **swissroots** website recognizes that it is human nature to seek out people with like minded ideas and backgrounds and even for non-Swiss, this offers the opportunity to explore Swiss culture and heritage and forge friendships. Easy access is available online to all who have a passing interest, a strong fascination or a cult obsession with all things Swiss.

There's no neutrality when it comes to loving Switzerland. There are over one million Americans of Swiss heritage, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of Americans who live in 5,000 American cities and towns with Swiss names like Berne, Indiana and New Glarus, Wisconsin.

In 2006, **swissroots** is participating in and hosting events such as the current Swiss Old Timer Postal Bus road show through U.S. states with the highest concentration of Swiss immigrants (California, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin), the North American Swiss Saengerfest (June 15-18) with its yodeling competition in Toledo, Ohio, the William Tell Festival - *Tell-Spiele* (September 1-3) in New Glarus, Wisconsin and the Green County Cheese Days (September 15-17) in Monroe, Wisconsin. The Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia is presenting a cultural program in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and other cities that highlights contemporary Switzerland and the contribution of Swiss-Americans in the fields of music, film, architecture and visual arts. This program opened with "Reprocessing Reality," a contemporary art show at PS1, the Queens affiliate of MoMA, New York and is on display until May 29. Two major events will include "Small Numbers-Big Impact" - a Swiss immigration exhibition opening on July 29 at the Ellis Island National Monument, New York, and the display of the Swiss Federal Charter of 1291, known as the *Schweizer Bundesbrief* at Philadelphia's National Constitution Center as part of "The Sister Republics" exhibition opening June 10. This is the first time that this historic document will be shown outside Switzerland. For further details and updates on these events please visit www.swissroots.org/events.

"The vision of swissroots is to motivate all Americans who feel an affinity with Switzerland to connect with our country and to network with the Swiss people," said Ambassador Raymond Loretan, co-Chairman of swissroots and Consul General of Switzerland in New York. "Through the website, visitors will have the opportunity to exchange ideas with like-minded people and ideally will feel inspired to visit Switzerland."

Share your 'Swissaffinity' with others and learn how the Swiss have influenced contemporary U.S. culture at www.swissroots.org.

swissroots is organized by the official Swiss representations in the U.S under the leadership of the Consulate General of Switzerland in New York and in cooperation with numerous local Swiss associations. **swissroots** is supported by entities such as Swiss Helvetia Fund, Swiss International Air Lines and Swiss Post and also by Switzerland-promotional agencies such as Presence Switzerland, Switzerland Tourism and Pro Helvetia. The **swissroots** website was developed by IgoUgo, based in New York and Swissinfo, based in Switzerland.

About swissroots:

swissroots brings the United States and Switzerland closer together through communities that foster dialogue, understanding, and both online and offline exchanges. The program's centerpiece, www.swissroots.org is a state-of-the-art website that serves as a gateway for the one million Americans of Swiss descent to discover their ancestral roots and for those with Swiss affinity to discover and communicate with people in Switzerland. Additionally, swissroots nationwide events for 2006 will showcase the best in Swiss innovation, culture, art, education, and history.

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