

MEET THE CONSUL



CLEMENT LUKEN

CINCINNATI, OHIO

BY JULIAN STEINER

What is your connection with Austria? I read you are married to an Austrian; is that the reason why you became our Honorary Consul here?

That is the official connecting reason, but I had already been working with several of the Austrian Consuls General in Chicago on some matters involving the Cincinnati area, dating back to 2007. The first was Robert Zischg, followed by his replacement Thomas Schnöll. It included the first chapter of the European American Chamber of Commerce and as part of that, we were doing some outreach efforts with Austria. That relationship grew from that point in time and when Vienna decided the Chicago Consulate General would have to be shut for good, Thomas asked me, “would you be interested to become Austrian Honorary Consul?” Of course I was - So here I am.

How often do you travel to Austria?

Once in about a 10-year window of time, the honorary consuls from around the world meet in Vienna, last time in May of 2015. After that, we had a family gathering planned as well so I went back in July of 2015. But in general, I am in Austria every other year on family related matters.

And what's your favorite part of the country?

Having done some research work in Austria, giving talks, family matters and alike, I have been pretty much to the width of the country; really from Tirol to Burgenland. My wife's from Burgenland, so that's one of my very favorite places in the world. I

do have to say that the mix of offerings in the summertime, which is normally when I'm able to get to Austria, is just so nice in Burgenland: *Lake Neusiedl, Rust, Mörbisch*. We had the opportunity to actually attend one of the summer performances on the lake in Mörbisch this past year, which is just a once in a lifetime type of experience.

Then of course there is food and wine. One of my wife's good friends is one of the top bakers in that area and her homemade cookies are divine. So it's a very nice part of the world. One can't say too many negative things about Vienna either. I've always had a good time there, as anyone would normally. We also had the opportunity to visit Altaussee this past summer, near the James Bond site. We were actually walking very close to that, didn't realize it at the time.

The mix of mountains, lakes, and cities makes Austria a wonderful place. If I had to choose, I would probably have to say: If I want to get to the lakes, my favorite place is the *Altausseer* region but for everyday living, I really enjoy Burgenland.

What are your tasks as Austrian Honorary Consul in Cincinnati?

The tasks of an honorary consul will vary around the country. For example, my colleague who is in Chicago now is stepping into the shoes of a Consulate General as an Honorary Consul, and there is a big Austrian community to take care of. We don't have that kind of a base here in Cincinnati, but I still have to cover three states, namely Southwest Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana. So we will handle any number of authentication issues for documents and

alike, for example for Fulbright scholars who are involved in teaching programs in Austria. Those so far have been the bulk of my type of authentication work, but we've also done some work trying to shepherd and act as a liaison for incoming companies or individuals who are interested in developing some understanding about our area. The business component here in Cincinnati is probably the larger percentage of our work compared to Chicago or Florida, which keeps three honorary consuls busy because of all the vacation residents or Austrian tourists there.

Cincinnati traditionally is a Germanic town and I've noticed this once before when you had a Christkindlmarkt downtown. How many Austrians are there in the Cincinnati region and/or in your area of jurisdiction?

Tough question! In my area of jurisdiction, I really can't put a handle on it. The Austrian contingent here is probably not that large but I'm also finding that there are pockets in places like Indiana and in Kentucky. For example, there is a town in Indiana called Ferdinand, presumably because of affiliations with the emperor. A group of the Habsburg family actually travels to Ferdinand, Indiana, every few years for a weekend of festivities and alike. I think the last time they attended was in September of 2014. I've actually officially only been in my position for under two years so I'm still learning about these further groups or enclaves of people that I'd love to find and connect with and then see what we can do to help them out. There is also a place called Saint Meinrad in southeast Indiana,



CLEMENT LUKEN ON TOP OF HIS OFFICE BUILDING, THE CAREW TOWER IN CINCINNATI

and Saint Meinrad is not too far from Ferdinand. There was actually a story I heard, and it may be a lore, that a Bible that may have come out of Franz Joseph's line may have worked its way here. I'm not sure, it may just all be a lore but it is a great story.

You mentioned the business component and I know your colleague in Atlanta, for example, has a huge amount of work related to Austrian businesses here and U.S. businesses in Austria. How hard is it to put your name on the map to have the Cincinnati business world say: "Hey,

Austria is here"? Do people know about the opportunities?

I think it tends to be. It's a little bit of a harder thing from two different perspectives. In my experience, working with and talking with various Austrian Company Executives can be tricky because they do not know too much about the Cincinnati area. So for someone coming into the area we try to get answers to questions that might otherwise go unanswered, through our various Chamber of Commerce contacts or just local and regional contacts. Austrians

also tend to be very low-key. I think, traditionally, it has not been a matter of high levels of publicity and flash and glamor. It is more "I'm interested in some area. I would like to work in a certain area and I'm looking at possibilities." If that happens to involve interfacing with a few different organizations, that's fine. But I really don't want to make a big deal of it.

On the other side, in fact, I believe the trade commission actually created a very nice video about things you don't know about Austrian business. One thing that came to mind were Silhouette eyeglass

frames, an Austrian company. Other companies involved in certain green as well as aerospace technologies and, of course, VOEST Alpine are very successful here. Very few people know about VOEST Alpine in the U.S. Their motto is “we are available to our customers and our customers know who we are, but we are otherwise not making a very big point of ourselves.” From my experience, it conforms with the Austrian heritage to just do your job well and not make a big point about it.

People say that the talent of Austrians has always been to adapt very well and very quickly to whatever country they move to. That definitely comes with problems. As you said, there is no really big pocket of Austrians, whereas other nationalities like Irish or Italians, even Germans, really identify with their heritage. Do you encounter this as well when you talk to people that have Austrian roots?

I’ve seen a rather high level of adaptability in Austrian nationals, particularly in this area, owed to in some part because there are, at least in Cincinnati, still so many German residents, at least with affiliations to Germany. Not that they’re German nationals; they are mostly U.S. citizens, but there are a number of German organizations in the area. For example, we have a *Kolping* society, we have a *Germania* society, we have a *Donauschwabens* society. And within those groups, you’ll find certain pockets of Austrians, who enjoy some of the traditions that they have seen being similar between Germany and Austria but they also still maintain their own uniqueness. So probably only the expert could ever tell the difference between a German and an Austrian *Tracht*.

Other than that, they enjoy that type of collegial atmosphere. They just seem to adapt very well. As a separate example, I have a good friend of mine who is working and teaching someone skiing who doesn’t have a lot of mountain experience. He is just absolutely wonderful, and we see him at various of the fraternal groups and he’ll come out in his *Tracht*, as will his wife, and they have a great time. They don’t lose any of their “Austrianness.” They just enjoy being around everybody else and having a good pork dinner and a beer or a glass of wine.

A more personal question. You said your connection to Austria began through

work. Did you grow up in the Cincinnati area?

Yes, born and raised. I think I’m now working about 8 miles from where I was born and grew up. So, I have been in many places around the world but haven’t moved very far from here.

What’s your take on the area and the city of Cincinnati? Has it changed a lot in the past few years? If so, how?

Mark Twain made a comment about Cincinnati that if the world was ever to end, he would want to be in Cincinnati because everything here happens 30 years later. That may have been a compliment, but I think the general thinking of a Cincinnati is someone who has a little bit of what I’d call that Austrian type of low-keyness. Once you have passed a threshold of, in essence, being viewed as a proper person to have a relationship with, everyone warms up. And so in Cincinnati, you have to get past that initial stage but once you have, it’s a rather warm and inviting area. A lot of people who like to work hard and do their job, not unlike what the Austrians have traditionally been identified with: To work hard and play hard. We do that here. Cincinnati has had and continues to have a very great cultural history and tradition and we are the home of the longest performing choral group in the Western Hemisphere with our May Festival Chorus going since the 1870s or 1880s. We are going through, right now, a major renovation of our music hall which was built for the *Sängerchor* in the 1800s. And today, Cincinnati still has a solid base of industry, a solid base of culture, a good infrastructure, a good transportation system et cetera. It’s actually a very nice hub should we be able to get some of those Austrian companies interested in coming here as you’ve got a lot of space in Kentucky and Indiana in particular, also in Ohio, to do your expansions.

You said you love Burgenland. So, I assume you’re a fan of Austrian wine. Is there any particular wine or any particular Austrian dish that’s your favorite and that you can’t leave without when you visit?

Well, other than my wife’s friend’s cookies, which are world-class, I’m a definite fan of the *Rieslings* or *Grüner Veltliner* on the wine front, even though Burgenland is rather home to the reds. On the food front:

Eierschwammerl [chanterelles]. Definitely!

Last question: Do you feel a little Austrian yourself?

Funny you should ask that. My wife said to me the other day, “I’ve never seen someone who embraced the Austrian culture as quickly as you did.” And you could fashion this in this positive way, as I hope you would wanna do. One aspect of this I have found so interesting is that it was very easy to do. There is something in the way Austrians interact. It may be a consequence of having been part of the center of the empire for hundreds of years. It may be the diplomatic angle. It may just be the way the Austrians think. But just as an example: I play the trumpet since I’ve been in 5th grade. I’m over in the town of Siegraben, the tiny neck of the Burgenland. Someone found out that I play trumpet. Shortly thereafter, they said, “You wanna play trumpet in the *Musikverein*?” and I said, “sure.” So here I am. Somebody found me a trumpet. Somebody found me a mouthpiece. Somebody got me some music. I’m in a *Musikverein* playing trumpet, for goodness sake! Then they said “Let’s go over to the bar and let’s have a beer.” Okay, so we did. It was so natural in that little village in the Burgenland. I had a great time, and I hope to repeat that experience again the next time I go over. But I will bring my mouthpiece with me so all I would have to do is have somebody find a trumpet for me.

Thanks for your time!

Clement H. Luken, Jr. has been serving as Austrian Honorary Consul since July of 2014 after previously working with the Austrian Consulates General in New York and Chicago, as well as the Advantage Austria office in Chicago. In his day-job, he is a Partner with Wood Herron & Evans in Cincinnati, having joined the firm in 1986. Wood Herron & Evans has focused its practice on intellectual property matters since its founding in 1868. Clement is also presently serving on the firm’s executive committee.

Clement is married to Irene who is a professor of Modern Languages at Xavier University. They have three sons, Andy, Ross and Wilson. Clement has been playing the trumpet since 5th grade, also performing in a jazz big band, and as further hobbies enjoys hiking and cycling.