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New Zealand/Swiss news

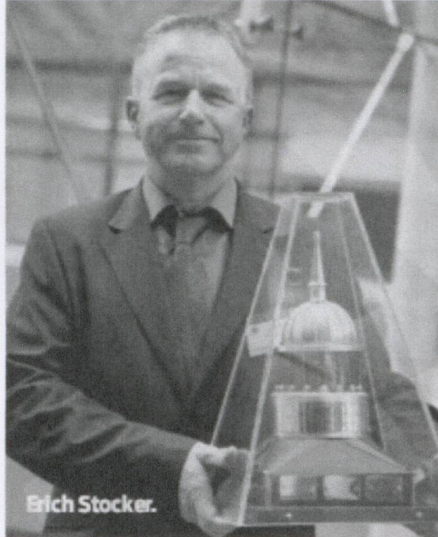
Swiss Erich Stocker wins prestigious New Zealand roofing award

Described by architects as "a true craftsman and one they would welcome on any project", Swiss-born Erich Stocker from the Classic Metal Division of Aquaheat New Zealand Ltd in Wellington last year became the winner of the prestigious 2013 RANZ (Roofing Association of New Zealand) Roofing Excellence Award.

Erich, a Switzerland-qualified roofing expert, was recruited in Switzerland in 1995 to clad the \$300 million Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Erich came to New Zealand with six fellow Swiss craftsmen for the Te Papa project - installing zinc cladding on the exposed waterfront building with its many varied angles and shapes.

Erich has also played a key role in a number of other major projects, such as the Supreme Court of New Zealand and "the Rock", Wellington Airport's International passenger terminal.

Judges Stuart Thomson and Des Cowperthwaite realised they were dealing with a very unique tradesman when considering Erich's award entry with its glowing reports from designers and builders of his knowledge and innovative thinking on complex projects.



His patience and willingness to pass on his knowledge and encouragement to others was widely acknowledged in Erich becoming this year's RANZ Roofing Excellence Award recipient.

Erich, 47, describes himself as "quite a private person" who appreciates family life in Wellington with wife Annie and their son. Erich has a workshop where he works on his ideas and nuts out problems. He is a recreational runner and often runs up Mt. Kaukau near Johnsonville.

Forthcoming ballots 9 February 2014

On 9 February 2014, Swiss will be voting on three separate issues:

1. An initiative by the rightwing Swiss People's Party for the re-introduction of annual immigration quotas, including asylum seekers.
2. A proposal to take abortions off the list of medical treatments covered by the mandatory health insurance.
3. A constitutional amendment defining the financing of railway infrastructure projects.

An early poll held on a proposal to re-introduce immigration quotas indicates that this would fail to win a majority at the ballot box next month. But pollsters say a high turnout of citizens could still swing the outcome. Supporters of the initiative by the rightwing Swiss People's Party lagged 18% points behind in the poll.

A united front of opponents has argued approval of the initiative would undermine Switzerland's prosperity and the competitive edge of its economy with the European Union, its main export market.

A separate controversial initiative is to end the funding of abortions under the mandatory health insurance scheme. The proponents, backed by the People's Party, say it is not justified to call on the general public to help finance the termination of pregnancies. However, their opponents have a lead of more than 20% in the latest opinion poll.

The third vote issue, a constitutional amendment to set up a financing scheme for the country's railway infrastructure, currently has a majority of 56%, but a further 17% of respondents are still undecided.

Source: www.swissinfo.ch

Didier Burkhalter elected new President

Swiss Foreign Minister Didier Burkhalter will be Switzerland's new President this year, after parliament accepted his nomination on 4 December 2013.

Burkhalter received 183 votes out 222 ballots cast by the parliamentarians. The 53-year-old centre-right Radical from canton Neuchâtel took over from Defence Minister Ueli Maurer on January 1.

The Swiss presidency is held by a different member of the seven-person cabinet every calendar year. The choice is based on seniority in the government, which means that a minister becomes president at least once every seven years.

Burkhalter was elected in the first round of voting with a good score, one of the best over the past decade, a result greeted with traditional cheers by a joint session of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Maurer, for example, only received 148 votes last year.

Source: www.swissinfo.ch

November 2013 ballot results

An initiative to limit wages within a company at a 1:12 ratio:

Yes 34.7%
No 65.3%

A proposal to grant tax breaks for families who raise their children at home:

Yes 41.5%
No 58.5%

A plan to increase motorway fees:

Yes 39.5%
No 60.5%

Turnout: 53%

An estimated 5.2 million citizens were eligible to take part in the ballot, including registered Swiss expatriates.

Source: www.swissinfo.ch