

NAAM Newsletter

www.dutchclub.org

April 2008



Presidents Message

Dear Members of the Dutch Club NAAM,

“Die winter is vergangen, Ik zie des meien schijn” (Winter has gone, May is appearing) as the 16th century Dutch/German songs says. Like our foreparents, NAAM looks forward to thawing and celebrating our Dutch heritage in the coming months. Not that the winter was bad, we Dutch-Minnesotans enjoy the cold weather. Cold, ice, sun, skates and hot chocolate warms our hearts. This became clear at the First Annual NAAM skating party on Lake of the Isles in Minneapolis and organized by Board Member Elisabeth Beelaerts. I had brought my wooden ‘Noren’ skates, the kind you tie under your shoes. They are hark back to the original skates, pieces of animal bones sharpened and tied to whatever the foot coverings were in that long ago past, which were invented, of course, in the Netherlands by the Friesians (who generously allow themselves to be claimed as part of the Netherlands). I was eager to join the NAAM members skating on the lake, easily recognized by the orange armbands thoughtfully provided by Elizabeth. However, I found out that if you don’t skate for forty years, you will forget how to do it. It took me half an hour just put on my skates (I’m not as limber as I used to be) and I ‘skated’ only a couple of yards. Luckily, there are lots of (Dutch) Minnesotans who do remember skating, gliding over the frozen lake, making it look so easy. By the way, bicycling is a whole different matter. I bought a bike last year, just hopped on and rode away. Although the helmet felt a little awkward at first – cyclists in Amsterdam don’t wear helmets, we are immortal. Anyway, let us spring forward. The NAAM will kick off the return of warmer weather with the Queen’s Birthday party, on Sunday April 27. The party will be from 2 to 5 p.m. at the house and yard generously opened by Board Member Dirk van Toor and his family. (See the announcement elsewhere in this newsletter, there is a map to Dirk’s house on the NAAM website www.dutchclub.org – notice the ending “org”. If you type dutchclub.com you will end up on the site of the Dutch club in South Florida – not bad, nice people, nice weather, but not NAAM).



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NAAM is looking for a new Newsletter Editor!
Contact any Board member for details

Our celebration this year is on April 27, three days before the official observance back in the Old Country. But that’s okay, the birthday of the current queen, Beatrix, isn’t April 30th anyway, she was born on January 30 (1938). But the weather at the end of January is too cold to celebrate outside, even in the Netherlands. So when she ascended the throne in 1980, queen Beatrix made April 30, the birthday of her mother, former queen Juliana, the official day to celebrate the queen’s (and in the future king’s) birthday. Soon after we recover from toasting the Queen, it will be time to go to work at the Festival of Nations in St. Paul, May 1-4. This celebration of diversity is NAAM’s annual chance to show Minnesotans that ‘Dutch’ is different from ‘Deutsch’ (German) and to make clear that fried potatoes aren’t French, but are Dutch (ok *and* Belgian) and are really called “patatten.” We are looking for volunteers to fry the ‘patat’, fill the ‘roomsoezen’ and sell those plus real Dutch cookies. If you forget to volunteer: the board will soon start calling members asking for help run the food stand (which, by the way, is also an important fundraiser for NAAM). See you at Koninginnedag, the Festival of Nations. Or, a little further out, the annual NAAM picnic, July 20.

Please don’t forget the monthly Dutch ‘borrel’, organized by our former president AlbertJan van Afton. Every fourth Thursday of the month, at W.A. Frost on Selby Avenue in St. Paul, next meetings are April 17 and May 15.

Benno Groeneveld, NAAM President

CONSULATE INFORMATION

The Netherlands Consulate in Minneapolis has undergone several changes recently, including a change in address. The new address is set forth below. Effective June 1, 2007, visa applications are no longer accepted at the Consulate in Minneapolis. All visa applications are processed by the Consulate General in Chicago only (information below).

Questions regarding both visa and passport issues should be directed to the Netherlands Front Office, which is available from 7 a.m. through 7 p.m. (Central) Monday through Friday at 1-877-388-2443 (toll free) or via e-mail at nfo@dutchhelp.com.

Passport applications may be submitted at the Consulate General in Chicago from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. (Central) Monday through Friday, except on Dutch or U.S. national holidays. As a service to Dutch citizens in Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, and Wisconsin, the Consulate in Minneapolis will accept passport applications once a month.

Passport application days for the next 2 months will be:

9 May 2008 and 6 June 2008 or call the Netherlands Front Office (1-877-388-2443 or nfo@dutchhelp.com).

The Consulate in Minneapolis remains available for emergencies, including issuance of emergency travel documents and assistance in the event of arrest, incarceration, illness, and death. Additionally, proof-of-life and proof-of-residency statements may be obtained in Minneapolis, and the office will continue to handle local economic, trade, cultural, and diplomatic affairs.

Contact information:

Marc A. Al, Honorary Consul

Consulate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

c/o Stoel Rives LLP

33 South Sixth Street

Suite 4200

Minneapolis, MN 55402

(612) 373-8831 (Consulate general number)

(612) 373-8801 (Dutch-citizen emergencies and law enforcement only; additional emergency numbers are available from the Consulate General in Chicago and the Netherlands Front Office)

(612) 373-8881 (fax)

consul@minnesotaconsul.nl

Consulate General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

303 East Wacker Drive

Suite 2600

Chicago, IL 60601-5297

(877) 388-2443 (Netherlands Front Office) (toll free)

nfo@dutchhelp.com (Netherlands Front Office)

(312) 856-0110 (Consulate General telephone)

www.cgchicago.org

MESSAGE FROM NAAM NEWSLETTER EDITOR

NAAM is looking for a new Newsletter editor! This is a great way to keep in touch with different people, NAAM itself and all its various activities. No skills required, just a computer with a Text editor or better and a little time. Volunteer today and get involved! Please call any Board member for details.

Goodbye to NAAM Board Member

Our secretary Pam... recently left NAAM and the Twin Cities to follow her husband ... who was offered a new job in Texas. Pam said she was sad leaving NAAM, but she won't miss the Minnesota winters. She is busy settling in and we encourage her to work on setting up NAAT (Netherlands America Association of Texas). We'll miss her in the NAAM board, she kept us all organized (very organized!).

Moppen voor Kinderen

- Leendert, kijk eens door het raam. Wat voor weer het is.
Ik kan het niet zien. Het is te mistig.
- What do you call a sleeping dinosaur?
A Brontosnorus
- Which side of a bird has the most feathers?
The Outside!
- What has 4 legs but can't walk?
A Table!



Top

The famous group of windmills of Kinderdijk, near Alblasserdam

Left

't Woudt is a small village, close to Delft, in the Dutch province Zuid-Holland. It has only forty inhabitants.

NAAM Website: Don't forget to look here for all the latest information

<http://www.dutchclub.org/>

“Sniffed by the Rats”

This is the English translation of the Dutch Article “van de ratten besnuffeld” published in the July 2007 Newsletter. MANY thanks to Jenneke Oosterhoff and her Dutch-language students at the UoM for the translation! Please refer to the original article to match the captions to the foto’s. (your photocopy or the NAAM website)

Vertaling in het Engels door: Jon Dehning, Laura Ermini, Kaamil Haider, Della Hansmann, Rachael Kulick, Jonathan Loveall, Emily Radosavljevic, and Peter Willcutt, students in the Dutch program at the University of Minnesota.

(Original authors: Dirk van Toor, Bart Weetjens)

(caption with picture: Apopo project manager Bart Weetjens with a hero rat)

The above expression (article heading) indicates, in Dutch and Flemish language, something that is crazy, rare or supposedly appalling. For example, the sharply asked, literally translated question: “Say, have you been sniffed by the rats?” indicates that the behavior to which it relates is considered to be completely reprehensible, unusual, idiotic or all of the above. The indication “That is sniffed out by the rats!” refers to something that is totally bizarre and bordering on the insane.

Rats became seen by the community as uniquely unpleasant and disease-spreading vermin and to become a volunteer for an investigation to smell seems unthinkable to most of us. Now, that can quickly change because it appears that these long tail rodents are in the possession of an extremely well developed sense of smell.

They can apparently smell so well that they could in many instances meet or surpass trained dogs in scent contests. Even better than with dogs, they can be trained in a simpler manner and in much less time how they can apply these skills so that we are able to do more useful things with them.

Also, rats are generally rather available everywhere. In their wild form, they are a harbinger of sickness and in the domesticated variety we know them as treasured house pets. When they receive favorable conditions, they multiply and adapt and colonize upon everything available. Everyone who has had the occasion to battle against the determination of the pest rats against household food is well aware of their intelligence, tenacious nature, and dexterity. Despite however well rats are raised in surely civilized situations from youth with respect, patience, and care; they remain never completely tame and remain in many respects forever wild animals.

Those of us who keep the rats as pets find in their gnawing long tail rodent a pleasant, tidy, clever and funny housemate that can perpetually and playfully entertain itself with tempting little snacks and treats.

In this situation they are, if well treated, affectionate and friendly and they quickly become active and interested members of the family, clearly attached to the people who devote the most attention to them; they can even be taught to recognize their own names. Only rarely does a so-called ‘tame’ rat misbehave by scratching or biting for no reason and often undesirable behavior can quickly and effectively be stopped with a verbal command. Physical punishment does no good and ends only in a regular trip to the first-aid kit. A rat has extremely sharp teeth and, when maltreated, will not shrink from using them. On the other hand, when good behavior is rewarded with treats, petting and daily delivered attention, amazing results can often be achieved. The long and the short of it is that the rat is an exceptionally successful animal that can easily hold its own in the world whether we like it or not.

This obviously has not escaped the attention of the Flemish Belgian engineer Bart Weetjens. Eight years ago while working in Africa developing and fabricating artificial limbs, he asked himself how he could decrease the sad, ever growing number of victims from land mines.

Until fifteen years ago, Central Southern Africa was an area distressed with terror and war where all parties that took part in it placed land mines in the ground. After the end of the hostilities most of those involved parties simply went home and the uppermost of them seldomly took the effort to clean up the dangerous remnants.

(caption with picture: Land mines: innocents pay the price in a bloody pain and mutilation. With each deadly or mutilating land mine explosion the price of grief, human suffering, costly care, goes up and no one has become any wiser from it.)

Estimations on those useless but perilous war remnants are varying; however, roughly speaking we can assume that the worldwide total amount lies between 100 to 150 million with approximately 90 million in South Africa. Often the places and types of land mines were not or rarely determined or correctly reported, so no one knows what or how much of this war stuff lies buried. Where anti-personnel land mines originally fulfilled what is now considered to be a totally out-of-date military function, they became, after the end of the warfare, extremely dangerous weapons of terror that were difficult to disarm and that would make the lives of the local population like hell.

Compared to the rest of the world, Africa, Bart Weetjen’s main work area, is a poor continent, and the constant chance of a sudden explosion resulting in death or horrible injury by a landmine, doesn’t make it any better.

Bart Weetjens knew that the only way to diminish the potential black-market for artificial limbs and to lessen the

horrible suffering of the local population was removing the threat of landmines. It was also clear that this needed to happen both quickly and cheaply because there was and still is almost no money available to tackle this problem on a grand scale.

As a former infantry officer with extensive landmine experience, I can personally testify that the clearing of land mines is a dangerous, time consuming, unpleasant and as a result exorbitantly expensive and incredibly annoying job, especially when they are not your own landmines and nobody knows who, how, where and when they were planted. There are roughly thirty different makes and models of landmines originating from a small number of countries in use in south central Africa. Each one has its own particular, dangerous and labor intensive method of disposal, and often several different types were used together to make this even more tense and exciting.

(caption with picture: Land mines: Merciless Murderers. A selection of mines found in Angola etc ...)

Also, explosives that have been in the ground for fifteen or thirty years or so, and have completely overgrown, do not become more stable over time. It may have taken 400 pounds or so to set it off in the beginning, but now it may explode under only 40 or so pounds or even less. Sometimes the slight tremor of a passing car or train is enough to let the whole thing explode. And so a safe way of finding, removing and destroying of useless and dangerous war tools becomes an almost impossible enterprise.

The usually employed land mine and metal detector only works with old fashioned land mines in a metal shell en cannot distinguish a heavy anti tank mine from an empty sardine tin. Besides, in the African laterite grounds that contain a lot of iron, a metal detector gives quite a few false signals. Most mines, however, have a plastic, ceramic or glass shell or consist entirely of pressed explosives with as few metal parts as possible. So a metal and land mine detector is of no use to you there.

(caption with picture: removing by hand: an awful job)

If and when something is found, it must carefully be scanned, often by hand with a mine pick, a sort of oversized barbecue stick, then it must be dug out and, if possible, disarmed in order to be transported away and destroyed. If uprooting it safely seems impossible then there is no choice but to detonate it in place with all sorts of associated danger and delay.

In some cases two mines are bonded together or linked in such a way that you can never be sure the whole business is safe from exploding. Just as you think you have removed the catch and you can lug the rotten thing out of the ground, the whole

thing flies into the sky. This gives a whole new meaning to the word 'relief.'

Working safely and methodically within the regulations, a well trained human mine-diffuser can clear between 40 and 60 square meters of an unknown mine field per day. This process isn't really hurried up by the very pricy average wage of 400 dollars per person per day.

Bart Weetjens also knew that landmines are not only dangerous and inhumane terror weapons, but that they also stink. All landmines have an explosives charge that smells slightly like ammonia. The human nose is not truly sensitive enough to notice this in a practical and safe manner.

For a human, walking around alone with outstretched nostrils in a minefield or sniffing heavily while crawling along with one's nose to the ground is unhealthy business and not a feasible option. In the past years different methods such as this have been tried, using the help of animals to trace landmines. Tracking dogs, honey bees, bacteria colonies, plants, truffle pigs, ewes, and different creatures have been tried, and they all have had success to a certain degree. Before the mine detection rat arrived on the scene, however, only the tracking dog and humans themselves ultimately remained practical options.

(caption with picture: to purchase a sniff hound amounts to about 25,000 dollars and that is without talking about the salary of the caretaker, the cost of food and the visits to the vet, to name a few things. A hero rat costs 2,000 dollars en much less in maintenance, transport and housing)

The usable dog breeds are limited and all remain vulnerable to tropical diseases and parasites, so the number of years that they can use each dog is not ideal. Additionally the dogs, especially the kinds with the appropriate nose for landmines, are also apparently heavy enough to set off the mines. That is very unhealthy and tragic for the dogs and an emotional burden for "the boss," to say nothing of the cost the whole organization must pay for the replacement of the poor animal.

Dogs take their cue entirely from "the boss" (i.e., the trainer) and how well they work depends completely on how the trainer praises, rewards, or corrects them. After playing the same game ten or so times, dogs get fed up and want to do something else. They lose their concentration which results in them becoming imprudent and then accidents happen - because a landmine knows no mercy. Bart Weetjens came to the conclusion that the ideal mine detection animal must be inexpensive, smart, sturdy, light, relatively independent, able to be constantly motivated, and preferably quick to reproduce. These qualities inspired him to think about rats. As a child, he had experienced pleasure and affection having rodents such as mice, hamsters, rats, etc. as pets and he was well-aware of the

sense of smell of the four-footed gnawers in general and of the rat in particular.

Now, there are plenty of rats in Africa. Gambian Giant Hamster Rats that can grow to be as large as a house cat cover the whole of Africa from the Sahara to the northern border of South Africa and from Senegal to Madagascar.

They can't see for their lives, but otherwise they are almost always busy searching for and collecting food. Four feet, a tail, and a snout in devoted service to their stomach and cheek pouches. With almost ape-like dexterity, they fill their cheek pouches full with everything they find delicious or pretty (they find shiny or glimmering things irresistible) and then they hide and bury these things for later. When they then get hungry and cannot find anything tasty to eat, they need their extremely sensitive noses to find the hiding place again. They are not really picky and they eat almost anything that comes in front of their snout, but they have a special appreciation for bananas and peanuts.

Bart Weetjens began to develop the idea of the mine detecting rat a bit further. In the beginning everyone thought that he was "sniffed by the rats" and that tropical madness had struck him.

(caption with picture: I do something for you, you do something for me)

Bart, however, did not give up and with the help of friends, acquaintances, family and university scholars he continued to work so that his brainchild could be brought to reality.

Finally, in 1997 the Apopo Project was started with a grant from the University of Antwerp and after some hits and misses with the first Gambian hamster-rat from the wild, the test results proved to be straightforward and surprisingly good and would continue to improve.

An important advantage of the Gambian hamster rat is that it is almost an ideal combination of build, size, weight, manner and resistance. It is big enough, relatively tall on the legs, and has an obvious aversion to letting its tail drag on the ground and sweeps it back and forth in the air. That makes it easy to keep track of it, but it is simultaneously small enough to be easily manageable. It is heavy enough that it is easy and safe to place it in a leash and safety harness, but too light to set off the explosion of a landmine. Because this animal usually appears in the wild, it easily resists local diseases and parasites and is perfectly climatized to the usage territory in Africa. Furthermore, it is significantly less aggressive than normal rats and considerably in a better mood than the normal rat and has proven to be a first-rate learner. African giant hamster rats don't multiply too fast, on average two litters per year of 2-4 babies. On the other hand the Gambian hamster rat is in captivity an average of 6 to 8 years, and during their lifetime they have approximately 5-6 serviceable years for

investigation service. That is about the same as what, under the best conditions, you can expect of the average sniff hound. The females serve a somewhat shorter amount of time because of gestation; as mothers they have to take care of their young.

The socializing and training of the mine-sniffing rat takes place on the African operational base of Apopo. This base is located on the campus of the Sokoine Agricultural University in Morogoro, Tanzania. Tanzania itself doesn't have a landmine problem, it has a politically stable society and it lies centrally in the area of operation. This is why it is an ideal operating base for Apopo.

Training begins when the rat pup is four years old and it takes about a year in which a rat goes through a substantial training program. It begins with a kindergarten for rats with lots of playing and learning how to pleasantly interact with people and after that there are different steps that ultimately lead to certification. Compared to sniff hounds it takes the rat just about a third of the training time and less money to get to the same or even a better result.

In responding to the most sublime instinct of the Gambian hamster rat, its huge urge to eat and gather food, the rat's strongest and most persistent motivation is utilized. During the training, the rats are taught that as soon as they hear a special clicking sound, something tasty will be made available. After that they learn that when they approach a place that smells even the slightest of explosives and when they show a marking behavior, that this will be rewarded with the same clicking signal. For the rat this is a sign that it can earn its wages before continuing the search until it is satisfied and both cheeks are full.

(caption with picture: tired, satisfied and on the way to rest)

The marking behavior can be in the form of scratching or biting the ground where the smell of the explosives is strongest. When the caretaker doesn't react quickly enough, the rat will sometimes repeat the marking with special emphasis. Each rat has its own particular identity, and each is given its own name, and all caretakers know the rats by their names and their own peculiar habits in their marking behavior.

The rats are employed in groups of three, and the differences in their individual characteristics are taken into consideration. Males tend to be aggressively territorial, so you don't let them work in groups because there will be a blood bath. The females are a bit easier and they like it when there is a male close by, and that is mutual, so that's not a problem.

Even though the rats behave very pleasantly and cheerfully towards their caretakers, they do not really attach themselves to one in particular. As long as they can expect enough rewards in the form of food, and as long as the work conditions are favorable, they will work with any caretaker.

(caption with picture: Shhh! Don't bother me. I'm hunting for mines!)

As long as it isn't too hot or dry for them and the rats are decently hungry and have a bit of space in the cheek pockets, they are cheerful, tireless and extremely precise in their searches.

The rat has obvious pleasure in following the same routine time after time. In any case, they go on much longer than the tracker dogs who get bored and give up much quicker and can therefore be dangerously incomplete. Dogs are dependent on people and can be devoted only to their own caregiver, thus their motivation is based on the bonds of affection instead of the fulfillment of the digestive system, which is a costly operational problem which sets clear limits on the usefulness of dogs.

In any case, this means that as long as there are at least two rat handlers and a helper to mark any discoveries, more rat teams can continue to work. When the first trio of rats become full up and exhausted, then the handlers can go on with another set of hungry, well-rested rats as long as circumstances require. It takes a team of three rats around a half hour to check 100 square meters for mines, defects and damaged ones with 100 percent accuracy; this is much faster and safer than we relatively big clumsy heavy humans can manage.

Bart and his brother Frank Weetjens have meanwhile tested their theory out in practice in Mozambique with great success and without accidents, participating in the de-mining of the economically important Limpopo railway and the agriculturally vital region around the villages in the vicinity.

(caption with picture: The well deserved reward for the correct find)

In each de-mined village, Apopo follows the tradition of the Belgian Mine tracing service through the organization of a soccer game that is played on a field that has just been cleared of mines. This fills the double function of a healthy way to celebrate the work well done and the reassurance to the local population that the land is now truly safe for use.

The Apopo mine clearers themselves display in this way that they all have trust in their own work and that serves as a direct recommendation to put the long-unused farming capacity back into use. As directly provable results, the local prosperity and community well-being grows considerably and the number of landmine mutilations decreases by an equal amount, and for that we should all tip our hats.

Another and surely not less important application of the rat's sniffing ability is the demonstration of contagious diseases. In a part of the world wherein AIDS and malaria strike upon a relatively large percentage of the local population, tuberculosis can be expected as a common secondary

infection. Tuberculosis can spread in a very quick manner, affecting the health of the impoverished and weakened population. If not noticed and handled in time, a disastrous and deadly epidemic could develop, simultaneously exterminating the entire village.

A tuberculosis infection has a very special smell to the rats, which can be easily trained to alarm a tuberculosis infection accurately. With the local population submitting accurate saliva testing samples, the rats can just as accurately, much faster, and much less expensively than in a medical laboratory, faultlessly and individually give warning of the possibility of tuberculosis, or make notice of the absence of it. Afterwards they can, if required, give direct and prudent medical attention to those who may have been exposed.

This increases chances of survival, health and general well being of the local population. Also, it enables a better and more efficient employment of as of yet very scarce and limited medical capacities.

And in this same manner, there are hopeful discoveries and prognoses with regard to the early detection of different kinds of cancer. Possibly, in the near future, at a doctor's visit we might run into the rat as an esteemed medical investigator.

And so the meaning of "sniffed by the rats" gets a whole different and certainly less negative sound and meaning.

At present, Apopo has about one hundred mine sniffing rats that are certified and ready to be employed, and hundreds of young rats are in training. Instead of the bearers of illnesses and misery that rats have been throughout history, they now become important and active assistants in the early detection, treatment and prevention of deadly accidents caused by landmines and of contagious diseases that still take so many people's lives today.

There are various plans to expand the area of operation of Apopo's mine sniffing rats to Sudan and Angola, so that the local population there can also return to a humanly dignified and independent existence, and after all, wouldn't that help everyone of us?

(caption with picture: making money doesn't stink)

In conclusion, it is worth noting that while the rats will work for bananas and peanuts, the entire project cannot be done for free. Under the unceasing pressure of the ever growing necessity of expansion, deepening of the application, and the support of the present-day project, Apopo is always greatly in need of financial support.

To the present, the Weetjens brothers have given much of their own money, time, and self-sacrificing dedication to the Apopo project. The Belgian government and the GICHD (Geneva

International Center for Humanitarian De-mining) have also contributed in the form of money and supplies. For the rest, they are dependent on individual contributions in the form of donations. I invite you to consider supporting this praiseworthy, extremely successful, and results-yielding project with your modest gift.

You can find the latest news about Apopo and information about how to financially contribute via the internet at: <http://www.Apopo.org>

For children and educational institutions, there is a funny and clarifying Internet page that is devoted to the long-tailed heroes and information about how you can become a contributor through the long-distance adoption of a Hero Rat: <http://www.herorat.org>

If you would like to send me a blank CD-RW, CD-R, or USB memory stick (minimum 512 Mb) along with a self-addressed stamped envelop, I would gladly send you a copy of the two very interesting documentaries (one of which is in Dutch) that I have on hand. Please do not send cash or checks. If you would like to make a contribution to Apopo, you can do that best - and most safely - via the above-named web pages.

My address is:
Dirk van Toor
123 Isabel Street West
Saint Paul, MN 55107-2130
e-mail:dvantoor@msn.com

For more information on Dutch expressions please see: http://nl.wikiquote.org/wiki/Nederlandstalige_gezegden



The **Wimmemolens** polder mill is a windmill which moves water from a polder. Water is pumped by a scoop or by a jack (Archimedes principles) from the polder. This type of mill is still working especially in the lower polder areas of West - and the Northern part of Holland. See <http://www.wimmemolens.nl/>

A **polder** is a low-lying tract of land enclosed by embankments known as **dikes**, that form an artificial **hydrological** entity, meaning it has no connection with outside water other than through human-operated devices.

NAAM Events Calendar

Every Third Thursday of the Month – NAAM Borrel - Please join us at 5:30pm for a drink, food and terrific conversation! Location: W.A. Frost & Co, [374 Selby Ave, St. Paul, MN 55102](http://www.wafrost.com). Dates 5/15, 6/19, 7/17, 8/21, 9/18, 10/16.

Koninginnedag - Sunday April 27, 2pm–5pm [123 Isabel St W, St Paul, MN 55107](http://www.dutchclub.org). Directions: I-94 E, exit 241B, take the 5th St ramp, turn right onto St. Peter St, turn left onto Kellogg Blvd W, turn right onto Wabasha St, cross the river, turn right onto Isabel St W.

Festival of Nations - May 1-4, St. Paul, please call Sander Biehn, 651-293-1134 or email us at board@dutchclub.org for volunteer opportunities.

NAAM Summer Picnic - Sunday, July 20, 2008

NAAM Annual Meeting - Saturday, October 25, 2008

FESTIVAL OF NATIONS

As has long been the tradition, NAAM will be at the Festival of Nations again this year in St. Paul. We will have a cafe booth, dancers, and an exhibit and will support our friend, Mr. Bob Siegler – Wooden Clogmaker. Johan Hart will be presenting on the Dutch Merchant Marines. We will be calling all members looking for volunteers to help support the efforts especially in the Cafe and with helping Johan and Bob Siegler. Please consider helping out. This summer we will also be looking for new members to help with dancing so please keep an eye out for dates and times of the practices starting in Fall 2008.

The festival is May 1-4 this year, so please keep your calendar open and consider **volunteering** or just stopping by to support the efforts. If you wish to contact us about Festival of Nations please call Sander Biehn, 651-293-1134 or email us at board@dutchclub.org.

NAAM Skating Party

The **NAAM Skating Party** was held at Lake of the Isles (Minneapolis) in February. The ice condition was perfect, and some members had taken their *'noren uit het vet'* to come skate on the lake. Our president Benno was spotted wearing the good old *'houtjes'*! And one dutchclub secret got revealed: our treasurer Sander is a great goalie! The hot chocolate kept us warm and the cookies and homemade *'kruidenkoek'* (thanks for baking Tony!) at our *'Koek en Zopie'* stand tasted very, very yummie.

It was really a lot of fun for *'jong en oud'*! Please come join the NAAM Winter Skating Party next year!

-Elisabeth



Esther's Column

Time flies...

Inmiddels zijn we alweer 3 jaar woonachtig in de US. We hebben nu ongeveer het hele gewenningsproces wel doorgemaakt en die ronden we zo langzamerhand af. Waar "zijn" we nu?

Het hoogtepunt en de belangrijkste test was ons bezoek aan Nederland. De conclusie die we trokken was dat de afstand Minneapolis-Amsterdam gevoelsmatig goed te overbruggen is.

Een belangrijke plek in de Amerikaanse samenleving is die binnen de school. En daar heb ik mij al regelmatig nuttig gemaakt. Ik ben met name in de weer met plak en knipwerk en mag zelfs in het voorjaar een cursus calligrafie gaan geven aan een groepje studenten. Het begrip vrijwilligerswerk voelt hier anders dan ik gewend was vanuit Nederland. Er staat altijd een "beloning" tegenover. Op de huidige school van onze meiden, worden de vrijwilligers elk voorjaar "verrast" met een ontbijt op school. Een extraatje vind ik dan ook altijd weer: zelfs aan kinderopvang is gedacht! En in tegenstelling tot wat ik gewend was in Nederland, staat het hier ook goed op je cv!

De kinderen gedijen goed in Amerika. Actief bij de Girls Scouts, sport en school. De laatste besteed veel aandacht aan wat het individuele kind nodig heeft en dat vinden wij als ouders toch alleen maar geweldig?! De meisjes komen aan hun trekken, worden op een gezonde manier uitgedaagd en tegelijkertijd niet overvraagd. Er is veel aandacht voor pesten op school (dat mag niet!) en veel aandacht voor respect voor elkaar en andermans spullen. De een vindt het heerlijk die duidelijke grenzen op school, de ander loopt nog wel eens tegen een grens aan... maar ook dat mag.

De Universiteit van Minnesota is een goede werkgever voor ons. Niet in de laatste plaats vanwege de gezondheidsverzekering voor onze

jongste telg. Deze kleuter kampt regelmatig met gezondheids issues vanwege het syndroom waar hij mee geboren is: het Syndroom van Down. Een goede verzekering is absoluut een vereiste in het geval van Sven. Sterker nog: destijds in Nederland lieten de artsen ons hen verzekeren dat het allemaal goed zat. Geen risico's!

De combinatie van school district en Down Syndrome Association of Minnesota pakt heel goed uit voor Sven (en ons). Wat een bof dat men hier al lang werkt met het "Early Intervention Program". Sven vindt het fantastisch op school, waar men met hem werkt aan spraak, motoriek, sociale vaardigheden en spel in combinatie met een groep kinderen zonder "special needs". Iedereen lijkt dik tevreden met het aanbod van de school, al neemt Sven bij het weggaan dubbel zoveel tijd omdat hij heel uitgebreid afscheid moet nemen van al die mensen achter al die deuren! Dat duurt lang!

Onze levens bestaan uit werk, sport, activiteiten van de kinderen op school of op andere plaatsen, de DSAMN en activiteiten die daaruit voortvloeien, en een sociaal leven met Amerikanen en Nederlanders! We voelen ons eigenlijk wel heel rijk!

Het gezin Ijzer vindt zijn plekje en het enige wat nog wel eens lastig is voor alle leden ... de winter in Minnesota! Hoewel de echte kou eigenlijk maar een relatief korte periode beslaat, hebben we toch wel een beetje last van: veel binnen moeten zijn en veel kleren moeten dragen. Koud, koud koud... Maar ja, zoals iemand van de Nederlandse vrouwen eetgroep (wat trouwens ook altijd heel gezellig is!) laatst zei: "De zomer in Minnesota, die moeten we echt verdienen!"

Wij blijven voorlopig nog even!

Esther ☀

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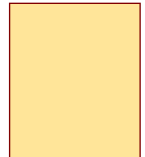
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