

She's from Luxembourg but at home in Belgium

Written by SARAH McCRAW
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Sophie Myck of Luxembourg is a long way from home, but she said it doesn't feel like it when she's hard at work at the Luxembourg American Cultural Center in the Village of Belgium.

Myck said she has received a warm reception from the community.

"Everybody has been really friendly and open with me and caring," she said.

There have been plenty of things in Belgium that have pleasantly surprised Myck, 24, since she arrived in the state last month, she said.

"I was informed that it was going to be cold and it was going to be snowy, but I've been pleased with the snow because in Luxembourg it doesn't stay snowy for so long," Myck said.

The hospitality started with Roy and Gerriann Bichler, 825 Hwy. D, who welcomed Myck into their home for a month.

"She basically fit right in to the family," Gerriann Bichler said.

Myck said the experience allowed her to observe the dynamics of other families.

"What's nice about living with host families is just seeing how different families are. I know how my family is, but it's fun to see how things are run in other families," Myck said, adding that life with three boys was a new adventure for her too.

"I've got a younger sister and the Bichlers have three sons, so it's like I've got brothers," she said.

The Bichlers' three sons — Ryan, 18, Jason, 20, and Eric, 23 — have showed Myck the area. It was Jason who exposed her to a new winter activity.

"I got a chance to go on a snowmobile," Myck said. "I thought it was the most amazing thing ever, and now when I see snowmobiles passing, I find it incredible that people drive around with them."

Bichler said, "She was so excited when she got back."

For the next month, Myck is living with Sara Jacoby, operations and events manager at the Cultural Center, and her 8-year-old son.

Myck is planning a series of day trips with Jacoby so she can continue to experience life in southeastern Wisconsin.

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"I've been to Port Washington, which was really nice, and I've been to Sheboygan as well, so we're traveling about," she said.

One of the things her family and friends in Luxembourg ask about most is the food in Belgium.



Myck has eaten at Hobo's Restaurant and Bic's Place in Belgium, and tried frozen custard for the first time.

"The food here is not too different (from home). Just the amount of cheese. I've eaten a lot of cheese. I love cheese, so I fit in really well," Myck said.

Myck said she is facinated by a certain Wisconsin dining tradition.

"The fish fry — here it's a Friday thing, which I find quite interesting," she said. "In Scotland, you can have it every day if you want. In Aberdeen (Scotland) especially, you live by the coast, so that is very normal. I find it interesting that here it's the Friday thing."

Myck is no stranger to living in different parts of the world. Born in Austria, she moved to Luxembourg with her family as a child, then to New York and Portugal, where her father worked for the Luxembourg Embassy.

She then moved to Aberdeen, Scotland, where she graduated from the University of Aberdeen with a degree in art history. She also earned a degree in international business from Robert Gordon University, in Aberdeen.

The small-town charm and lifestyle of Belgium intrigues Myck, she said.

"I'm getting to live outside of a larger city and meet different people and experience different ways of life," Myck said. "You also get to see what people in a smaller city admire and how their values are different. It's something that I think is quite unique."

Myck has had the chance to meet a lot of Belgium residents through her internship at the Cultural Center, where she works with Jacoby and Executive Director Kevin Wester archiving and cataloging Luxembourg artifacts.

She recently organized a medals of honor display for the museum.

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"It's really exciting because everything we get in, we get to learn about the history of it. You can also see how people are tied to their past," Myck said.

Her next task at the center will be to catalog the more than 200,000 negatives and black-and-white photographs donated to the center in 2007 by the late Ozaukee Press photographer Vern Arendt.

The massive collection is quite impressive, said Myck, and features images from weddings, social gatherings and community events.

"I was surprised at how large the collection is. Each photo, as they say, is worth 1,000 words. He (Arendt) has such a great way of taking a snapshot in time. I'm just excited to see it all," she said.

The internship not only allows her to learn about Belgium's connection to Luxembourg, but the heritage that residents are keeping alive as well, Myck said.

When someone walks in and donates a family heirloom to the museum, she enjoys hearing the story behind each piece. Some are familiar to Myck.

"We've got a lot of plates from Villeroy & Boch. It's incredible because I walk past the shop in Luxembourg," she said. "When I'm in Luxembourg, I don't think so much about what I see around. When I come here, I get to look at Luxembourg in a different way."

It is that connection between the country and artifacts that has made Myck a wealth of knowledge for the cultural center, Jacoby said.

But the fascinating thing for Jacoby is how just how much the two have in common.

"What's interesting to me is Sophie comes from Luxembourg and she's 50% Luxembourgish. I come from Belgium, Wisconsin, and I'm 50% Luxembourgish. We're just as Luxembourgish as each other," Jacoby said.

The partnership between the village and her homeland is something Myck is helping to promote.

"What I find so amazing is that there's such a tie, such a bond with Luxembourg," Myck said. "I'm impressed as well that they're so involved with the upkeep of the museum and help setting up Luxembourg Fest.

"People are so proud of this place and they're so supportive of it. I like that the community is so involved."

Myck said she is looking forward to spring and hopes to enjoy a few more local activities, including visiting a farm, before she leaves at the end of April.

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Myck recently went to a Village Board meeting to experience how the community operates.

“People were sharing their opinions on what should be done and what hasn’t been done, and I just thought that was good that people are really involved and they want to make the best out of what they have here,” she said.

Image Information: Sophie Myck of Luxembourg (center) stood with her first host family (from left) Gerriann, Jason, Ryan and Roy Bichler, at the Luxembourg American Cultural Center, where Myck is working for the next two months as an intern. Photo by Sam Arendt