

## Thuin, World's Capital City for dogs

**The head office of the Fédération Cynologique Internationale is in Thuin.** The FCI could be compared, on the canine scene, to what the FIFA is on the football scene.

Even in Ecuador, the name of Thuin sounds familiar to all dog fanciers. This is because Thuin is the home city of FCI head office. *“Our federation has 83 members around the world, boasts Hans Müller, the president of the FCI, who has travelled especially from Switzerland to take part in the jury of a drawing contest (see below). We have only one representative member in each country, organising the activities domestically and vouching for all the rules we enact. We work, making due allowances, as the FIFA which leads the different national football federations. For Belgium, we work with the Saint-Hubert which is very active. I believe we could say that Belgium is doing better with its dogs than with its football players ! We also have members everywhere in Europe, in Asia, in Africa and on the American continent, most of all in Latin America.”*

The FCI struggles for the recognition and the promotion of pure-bred dogs. However, it does not limit itself to beauty championships. *“We work according to the qualities induced by the breed. Obedience is developed for defence dogs, strength for sledge dogs, speed for sighthounds or tracking capacities for gun dogs. Everywhere, we are in contact with local authorities to improve animal well-being. For example, we held talks with the European Union in order to prohibit the import of dog fur in its territory. Today, we also want the public to be more aware of our action. This is why I was pleased with the idea of a drawing contest. It is original and it addresses the greater number.”*

### Thanks to Gendebien

So this international organisation has its head office in Thuin. And since the sixties'. The man who moved the head office from Brussels to this city along the Sambre was Charles Gendebien, by that time senator and Secretary General of the FCI. So Belgium, one of the founding members, has always hosted the nerve centre of the Federation. *“At the beginning, there were five nations, says Hans Müller. Austria, France, the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium. The Secretary General has always been a Belgian. About forty years ago, the possibility to move the head office was mentioned. Belgium remained the better choice. We are in the centre of Europe and, from a purely pragmatic point of view, property is still affordable here. In particular as compared to Switzerland. As far as Thuin is concerned, the region is all the same much more pleasant than Brussels, where driving is becoming impossible.”*

In 1994, the FCI bought a building on the place Albert Ier, before extending with the purchase of the house next door. There is no more question of leaving Thuin now. *“We have a closely knit and competent staff here, underlines President Müller. I am happy with the work done here. We are on our way to modernisation. We are working for the future and the future goes through Thuin.”*

### Huge stakes

The canine sphere is not only made of old grannies in love with their doggie. Breeders, judges, exhibitors in big international shows, employees of pet care firms, they are millions throughout the world to make a living on this market. In these hard times for the global economy, the dog world is a safe investment, based on passion. At the Charleroi international show, every year, one can see 1,300 dogs which draw 7,000 to 8,000 spectators. Not bad, but we are still far from the 30,000

spectators for more than 20,000 dogs at the last World Dog Show in Stockholm. With, on top of this, the money from the registration fees and the visitors' tickets !

### **All the pencils of the Athénée**

The FCI is determined to take care of its impact over the region where it is based. *"Before thinking of addressing the World, we thought about putting ourselves on the map, speaks Marie Luna Durán, the Public Relations Manager of the Federation. It is in this context that we thought about a drawing contest about dogs. We contacted the schools of the borough to propose this activity."*

For this first edition, the Athénée de Thuin was the only school to answer our invitation. With the call from the Deputy Mayor, Philippe Blanchart, other schools should get involved in the project as soon as the next school year. *"Some teachers have already told me about their interest, says Marie Luna Durán. To them, the dog is an efficient gateway. We will contact them again and try to plan the contest so that a maximum of pupils in the region can participate."*

A jury gathering members of the FCI, the Deputy Mayor and Mr Leonardo, the cartoonist "father" of Rantanplan, has already had the occasion to admire the works of the pupils from the nursery and primary schools of the Athénée. A grading will be established, but will only be made public in January. *"We will take our time to announce the results and organise an exhibition in the school and in the city hall. I have already heard some people talking about it in local shops. People are slowly beginning to know what is going on behind the facade of our building in the city centre."*

The FCI will also contact the SPA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) and other organisations sensitive to the animal condition in order to get the drawings on tour. Moreover, this initiative should extend as one goes along, since the contest could as well imply other countries. *"In 2011, we will celebrate the FCI's centenary. We will do something great. It would be nice to exhibit the drawings on our facade. We are located off the main thoroughfare. It would be cool for the children to see their works shown to all the people driving through."*

### **A native to Thuin at the controls**

Yves De Clercq is the Executive Director of the FCI. This pure-bred native to Thuin is the head of the administration of this international federation. He is very proud to work for this institution which *"provides Thuin with international radiance and employs 13 people of the region."*

Translator of English, Spanish and Dutch, Yves arrived at the FCI in 1994, after working as an employee for a bank. *"I have worked as assistant Secretary General for four years before taking the position whose name has changed. My job has allowed me to discover the whole world, since I am abroad several days a month, visiting the member countries of the FCI. It is fifteen years now that I have been spending time in dog shows and I have always had a special passion for dogs. However, my function also involves a great deal of HR Management, accountancy, etc. I have also given lectures and written several articles edited by Royal Canin."*

This father of two superb girls is not known in the city for his cynological activities only. He is also totally immersed into local life. Former member of the Saint-Roch committee, Yves De Clercq cannot imagine not taking part in the annual march.

Aged 40, he is also a real sportsman. After a career as a football player which brought him from Couillet to Erpion via Gozée and Frasnes-lez-Gosselies, he now plays tennis in Thuin. He is addicted to reading, doing the splits from the novels by Didier van Cauwelaert and the thrillers by Maxime Chattam.

Caption of photo 1 : The FCI settled in Place Albert 1er in 1994

Caption of photo 2 : The jury met to establish a grading of the best drawings

Caption of photo 3 : Yves De Clercq loves his city, its folklore and the evenings among friends trying to put the world to rights

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