



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

**Ussher Von Maur of Verbier, Switzerland, was in the Quad-Cities recently to visit her father, Henry Von Maur of Davenport. She's in the business of developing personalized Alpine walks for visitors to her home country.**

NEAR AND FAR

## Walking through Switzerland with a tour guide

Daughter of Davenport leads Alps' treks

**I**F you like to ski and hike through the mountains, there may be no more inviting place in the world to live than Verbier, Switzerland, an Alpine resort located high in the Rhone Valley and overlooking Mont Blanc.

Ussher Von Maur, daughter of Henry Von Maur of Davenport, obviously is aware that her hometown of Verbier is recognized worldwide as being Europe's leading ski resort, and it's here she decided to go into the business of leading others through the Alps.

In Davenport to visit her father recently, Ussher told of working in an office in Geneva, Switzerland, when she decided she'd like to do something more adventurous. She thought she'd be good in a trekking business in which she'd be the "mountain leader" for visitors to her part of the world.

"I signed up for a four-year course that involved learning first aid and security, studying orientation and how to find your way out of various mountain situations, and then we concentrated on the study of flora and fauna and how you can use certain flowers for eating or curing purposes," she explained.

Ussher came by her Switzerland connection quite simply; she was born there. "My father was a banker; he married my mother in New York City and then moved to Switzerland. It was a good place to be if you were in the banking business."

Ussher, who has dual citizenship, has two older brothers, Denison, who lives in Montana, and Winslow, who lives in Switzerland.

After visiting her father in Davenport, she and her boyfriend took off for Montana to visit her brother before returning to Switzerland. "I'd like to convince Europeans to try hiking in Montana," she said.

"My boyfriend is a mountain guide, and he can take you to the top of the Matterhorn or the Eiger. I'm not trained to take clients on glaciers, as that means working with ropes and ice axes." She mentioned that his work resembled the type of climbing Quad-Citians saw in the recent IMAX film, "The Alps," which told of a breathtaking climb to the top of the Eiger.

"Going to the top of a mountain is an endeavor, but if you take a walk through the mountains you have time to see things," she said, and she tailors her walking tours to her clients.

"Sometimes I suggest a 10-day walk around Mt. Blanc, staying in mountain huts. "All you have to do is carry your own windbreaker, backpack, sun hat, water and picnic food," she explained. "They cook dinner for you at the huts."

Of the Alps, she said, "We've civilized our mountains. We don't have bears or wolves like they have in



SHIRLEY DAVIS

the Rockies, so we don't have to worry about dangerous wild animals when we trek.

"If we see a squirrel we get excited, and we do see ibexes (wild goats with large, backward-curved horns)."

Because she speaks French, English, Spanish and Italian, she can escort a variety of visitors through the Swiss Alps. "Most of my clients are over 50; they don't want to read maps or get lost in the mountains, so they hire me as a guide."

Where does one go on vacation when you live surrounded by so much Alpine beauty? "I sometimes vacation in Davenport," Ussher said, adding, "Last summer, however, my boyfriend and I put my front door key under the doormat and walked through the Italian Alps to the Mediterranean. It took us 30 days. I tried to get him to walk back to Switzerland, but we finally decided to take a French express train home; that took only five hours."

I asked if she attended school in the United States. "I came to a boarding school in Massachusetts for high school and went to college at the American University in Washington, D.C."

She now leads clients in all seasons, "on snowshoes in winter and walking in the summer. The length of our trek depends on the client. Some can walk for seven hours, others are more interested in shorter trips where they can study the wild flowers. I have a lot of visitors from England who are very interested in the flowers."

"My clients come from many parts of the world. We are just a 45-minute drive to Italy, and the base of Mont Blanc — Europe's highest mountain — is only an hour away. It's a wonderful location."

Her resort city of Verbier has four large cable-car systems and two chair-lifts and is considered to have the largest ski lift and cable car system in the Alps. It starts at the Le Chable railway station and stretches over five mountain ranges, linking 12 ski areas, of which Verbier and the "4-Valley" regions is the largest.

Her resort town is also known for Para Gliding, with courses for beginners as well as more advanced flyers. There are nine snowshoeing itineraries in the area, and Verbier has three snowboarding areas.

The resort is an hour and a half from the Geneva Airport and three-and-a-half hours from the Zurich Airport.

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# Tours focus on architecture

Chicago's skyscrapers are well known

CHICAGO (AP) — The boat glides under the Michigan Avenue bridge and heads into the heart of the city, as the shimmering white Wrigley Building and neo-Gothic Tribune Tower rise to the north.

It passes the corn-cob-like Marina Towers, the sprawling Merchandise Mart and glass-and-steel skyscrapers — a tapestry of new and old that draws architecture enthusiasts from around the world to the city that famed architect Daniel Burnham once called his "Paris on the Prairie."

"I knew I was going to be coming to Chicago and the one thing that I wanted to do was the river cruise," said Kristen Moore, 35, of Phoenix, snapping photos on the tour, sponsored by the nonprofit Chicago Architecture Foundation.

"There's so much history in the buildings here."

The city's rise in the world of architecture began after the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 destroyed swaths of buildings, and the late 19th century saw the city's architects become world leaders — designing everything from the employee-packed skyscrapers to quaint homes that now make up the so-called Bungalow Belt.

Isolated from the East Coast's European influences, Chicago's historic architects were known for putting aside common ideas about design, creating a unique and different way of building.

So innovative were their ideas that Chicago is considered the home of the modern skyscraper. Among the most famous are the 110-story Sears Tower — the tallest building in the U.S. — and the Hancock Tower, along Lake Michigan.

"We have always thought big," says Charles Stanford, a docent and architecture expert with the Architecture Foundation. "Chicago was always bold about the way we built. We sort of really do believe that the sky is the limit. That if engineering will take us there, we'll go."

The Foundation tries to put modern marvels and the city's classic buildings in context for visitors. The group hosts a museum on Michigan Avenue and offers more than 80 different boat, bicycle, bus and walking tours.

Moore said she hoped to catch glimpses of the neoclassical and French classical building styles she loves. Chicago's Tribune Tower, built in 1925, and under-construction Trump Tower, were on her list.

There soon will be more to see, with three more skyscrapers under construction.

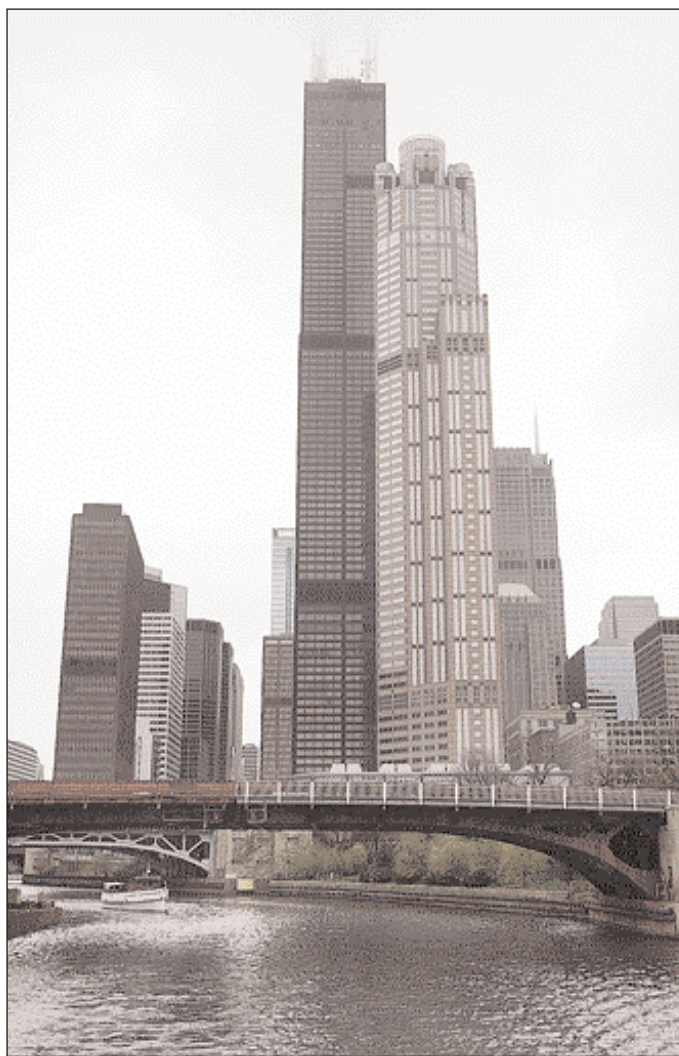
The Chicago Spire, designed by renowned architect Santiago Calatrava, will twist skyward for 150 stories and become the tallest building in North America. The Trump Tower will be 92 stories and Waterview Tower 90 stories.

Interest in Chicago architects increased after the 2004 publication of Erik Larson's "Devil in the White City," a story of Chicago's 1893 World's Fair that



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOS

**From their vantage point aboard an architectural tour boat, passengers can see the nearly-completed Trump International Hotel & Tower, left, the Wrigley Building, center, and the Tribune Tower, right, before they pass under the the double-deck, double-leaf bascule Michigan Avenue Bridge.**



**A boat passes under a bridge on the Chicago River after passing the city's tallest building, the Sears Tower, left. At right is the John Hancock tower.**

tells of architect Daniel Burnham and serial killer H.H. Holmes. Along with Burnham, Stanford says interest piqued in Chicago architects Frank Lloyd Wright and his Prairie Style, Louis Sullivan and his ornate facades, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, known for a sleek, modern design.

"People like to see something by these people," Stanford says. He gets questions about what the architects were like as people during his tours, he adds. "It sort of connects them to them. They were all great characters."

More than a century later, Chicago architecture continues to welcome groundbreaking designs, said Mark Sexton, whose Chicago firm Krueck and Sexton designed Mille-

niun Park's Crown Fountain and the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies.

He says today's architects look to the city's historic buildings to inspire the future.

"Here's a great opportunity not to be timid," Sexton said. "Because Burnham and Sullivan and Wright were not timid. They were pushing the limits of technology and thinking. We thought we should do the same thing."

He said Chicago is special because classic and modern buildings complement each other.

"The two can coexist, each one making the other better," he said. "That's what architecture leaves. It leaves an indelible print."

### IF YOU GO

#### Boat

Chicago River cruises take tourists on open-air boats with enclosed lower decks, and sometimes, bars. Cruises sail by Chicago standbys, the Merchandise Mart, Tribune Tower, Sears Tower and the corn cob Marina Towers, led by knowledgeable docents.

**Chicago Architecture Foundation:** Several boats daily on the hour, May 4-Nov. 23; \$28 during the week, \$30 Saturday, Sunday, holidays.

**Shoreline Sightseeing:** Boats daily, April 1-Nov. 30. Adults, \$24 weekdays, \$26 weekends; seniors, \$21 weekdays, \$23 weekends; children, \$12 weekdays, \$13 weekends.

**Wendella:** Six boats daily. Adults \$22; age 65 and over, \$20; age 11 and under, \$11; under age 3, no charge.

#### Bicycle

The Architecture Foundation offers three-hour bicycle tours from Millennium Park along Lake Michigan, and covers the museum campus, Soldier Field and Northerly Island. Bring your own bike or rent one. Adults, \$10; students and seniors, \$5.

#### Bus

The Architecture Foundation offers a dozen different bus tours covering the city. The most popular is "Highlights by Bus" takings tourists 30 miles through the Loop, Hyde Park and Gold Coast. Daily tours, adults, \$40; seniors and students, \$35.

#### On foot

The Chicago Architecture Foundation offers more than 60 different walking tours of the city's buildings, featuring tours by specific architect, neighborhood, cemetery, street or skyscraper. Tours priced \$5 to \$20.

#### Assorted

The foundation also offers happy hour tours, lunchtime lectures and tours in foreign languages. It also has a museum with permanent and rotating exhibitions and a lecture hall. Details from Chicago Architecture Foundation, 224 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago; architecture.org or 312-922-3432; open daily 9 a.m.-5 p.m.



Shirley Davis/QUAD-CITY TIMES

**A cruise aboard the Spirit of '98 along Alaska's Inside Passage will be featured in Tuesday's travelogue called "Northern Exposures" at the Operahouse Theater in DeWitt. In addition to Alaska, the travelogue will also include pictures of the Calgary Stampede and a train ride across western Canada. Shows are at 3 and 7 p.m.**

## Travelogue features Alaska and Canada

"Northern Exposures" is the title for the Tuesday, May 27, travelogues at 3 and 7 p.m. in the DeWitt, Iowa, Operahouse Theater.

Presenter will be Shirley Davis Homrighausen, travel writer and photographer for the Quad-City Times. Her pictures will include those taken on a 2007 cross-Canada train trip aboard the Rocky Mountaineer, of the 2007 Calgary Stampede rodeo, Lake Louise, Banff, Jasper and Vancouver, as well as on a small boat cruise of the Inside Passage in Alaska.

The photos aboard the Spirit of '98, a small Cruise West boat carrying 90 passengers through Alaska's Inside Passage, will include pictures taken aboard a jet-boat through the icebergs of LeConte Glacier, on a float trip out of Haines, aboard the train between Skagway and British Columbia, to the capital city of Juneau and the "salmon capi-

tal of the world," Ketchikan. Thus the "Northern Exposures" title.

The travelogue series is sponsored annually by the Noon Lions Club to raise money for the club's philanthropic works. Proceeds from this final presentation of the season go toward the Habitat for Humanity home being built in DeWitt.

A \$3 donation is suggested for all programs in this travelogue series. Many DeWitt restaurants offer discounts to travelogue-goers (a list is available at the theater).

— Shirley Davis

**LOBSTER \$25.95 DINNER**  
Crab Stuffed Lobster with Parmesan Encrusted Shrimp and Soup or Salad

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