Swiss Benevolent Society of San Francisco

MINUTES OF THE 139th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
JANUARY 26, 2024, AT FIOR D'ITALIA, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

The meeting was called to order at 6:10 PM.

President's Greeting

Ruedi Sandmeier extended a warm greeting to everyone and welcomed our guests, Consuls Martin Zaugg and Beat Henzen. Martin will later conduct the reelection of Board members and Auditors. Tonight, we have a recipient of our scholarship program, Fatuma Rinderknecht as our guest. We also welcome Liam Keeton, a previous scholarship recipient. We'll ask them to tell us a little about themselves later. Finally, we are happy to welcome former Board members Susy Lutsky and Erika Schittli. Above all, thank you, our trusted and generous members, who make our Society what it is. You are the backbone of our society.

Our records show that we have 96 dues-paying members. 10%, or 10 members, represent a quorum. In addition to 33 members in attendance, we received 8 proxies. We therefore meet our quorum requirement and can proceed with our agenda.

Copies of the minutes of the 2023 Annual Meeting have been posted on our website and also placed on the tables. Are there any questions about the minutes? Andy Eggler made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Pius Kampfen, which were approved without opposition. Thank you, Marianne Aubert, for taking care of the minutes.

Committee Reports

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer John Zeiter indicated that the P&L statement has been reviewed by our Auditors, and then proceeded to read the details of the financial profit and loss statement and endowment balances.

Thank you, John Zeiter, for a job well done!

Auditors Report, presented by Stefan Welter

As a preface to the reading of the report, Ruedi announced that Pius Kampfen is retiring from his role as Auditor. For his part, Pius urged everyone to encourage friends and young family members to join this fine organization.

Stefan Welter presented the report of the audit that he and Pius Kampfen conducted for the period of January 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023 for the Swiss Benevolent Society's General Fund, the Amstutz Fund, the Canonica Fund, the Isler Fund, the Silvia and Jacques Iselin Fund, as well as the Walter Munz Scholarship Fund. They examined, on a test basis, the evidence supporting the amounts and disclosures to obtain reasonable assurances that these statements are free of material misstatements. In conclusion, they found that the balance sheets and the statements of operations fairly represent the financial position of the Swiss Benevolent Society and that the books have been kept in an orderly manner.

Investment Committee Report, presented by Andy Eggler

Andy began by saying what a pleasure it is to be with our members tonight.

Andy began, as usual, with a little synopsis of what was going on in the economy in 2023 and what we can expect the current year to look like.

"When we look back at 2023, we are tempted to agree that our economy is humming along at a desirable pace. While it's true that GDP has been picking up and inflation has now been abating for two consecutive quarters, however, on more detailed examination of events and metrics we conclude that the government is trying to tell us the story of a goldilocks economy. We cannot ignore the fact that the cumulative inflation for the last three years is 17% and the decline in real wages is 3%, in other words, the average American is worse off by a whopping 20% since the beginning of 2021. Further, Andy says he would be remiss in not mentioning a couple of potential pitfalls when trying to extrapolate from current optimistic GDP growth. The portion of GDP generated by personal consumption has historically been around 70% but we know that the consumer of late has been radically depleting personal savings and gone heavily into debt. Late credit card and car loan payments and defaults thereof have been reaching nosebleed levels. The second most critical component of GDP is business investment in new plant, equipment, R&D, etc. and we know that it is in decline because the avalanche of regulation by the government is causing unwanted uncertainty for corporations.

The capital markets fared fairly well in 2023. The S&P 500 Index which represents the US economy grew by 24%. The bond market, on the other hand, continued a two year losing streak until after midyear when the Federal Reserve finally stopped hiking interest rates and finished 2023 with a 5% gain.

While most of our cash position was invested in a money market fund earlier this year, earning a healthy 5%, I am happy to report that our total return on the portfolio was 11% for the year."

Ruedi thanked Andy for a job well done and his golden touch with our investments.

<u>Welfare Report, presented by Carla Twitchell</u>

"Swiss Benevolent Society was contacted by an elderly woman who needed financial assistance to place a deposit on a small house she wanted to rent, which was near her current apartment. I tried to contact her by phone and email but got no response. A few weeks later, she contacted Ruedi and explained that she had been ill and hospitalized. In the meantime, the house she wanted to rent had been leased to another party and she no longer needed financial help.

The daughters of a 90-year-old woman contacted me to ask if a Swiss person could make a social visit to their Swiss widowed mother who lived in San Francisco. I made arrangements for an appropriate time and visited her twice in the fall. The woman was pleasant and very alert but had some mobility issues. When I phoned the daughter again in December, the daughter said there was no need to come again but that her mother had been pleased with my previous visits. I plan to contact her again at a later date in the new year. This experience opened up a way for me to help the elderly who were needy in a non-financial way."

<u>Scholarship Committee Report, presented by Ariana Ghelfi</u>

"The Scholarship Committee (Susann Sandmeier, Ariana Ghelfi, and John Andrew) is pleased to report that in 2023, the Society awarded $65,000 in scholarships to 15 young Swiss in Northern California. For comparison, in 2022, we made 13 awards for a total of $54,000.

Some details of our program this year include the following.

- We received 22 applications (including 11 re-applicants), from which we awarded 15 scholarships for a total of $65,000.
- We made named awards from Silvia & Jacques Iselin, Clement & Frieda Amstutz, Willy Isler, Walter Munz, and our General Fund.
- The students are majoring in a diverse set of subjects such as: Comparative Literature, Music, Education, Psychology, Business, and Science, at an equally diverse set of schools, including campuses of: the University of California and California State University, University of Oregon, Boston College, Vanderbilt, John Hopkins University, and Tufts.

In conclusion, I would like to express gratitude for John Andrew, exiting member of the Scholarship committee, who served as chair for a decade (from 2009 to 2018). His leadership helped shape this program and his many years of service on this committee has made a lasting impact. I would also like to thank Susann Sandmeier for her steadfast support administering this program and also extend a warm welcome to Phillip Kalshed, who will join our committee this year.

Together, the Scholarship committee would like to express our sincere appreciation to our members for making these scholarships possible!"

Membership Committee Report, presented by Doug Twitchell

- SBS defines members as those that donate to the organization. We define voting members as those that have donated in the last two years.
- The total amount received through regular donations has remained relatively stable for the past 11 years (2013 – 2023).
    - High was in 2014 of $32,835
    - Low was in 2022 of $15,792
    - 2023 donations were $19,320
    - Average $237,065 / 11 = $21,551
- Bequests are not included in the regular donations and do not figure into the membership database. Some of these have been very large.
- Number of donors are declining.
    - 186 in 2014 (a high point for the past 11 years)
    - 59 in 2023 (a low point for the past 11 years).
- Average amount donated per donor is increasing.
    - Average amount donated in 2013 was $129
    - Average amount donated in 2023 was $327
- Striving to get new members:
    - This fall our annual mailing included the presidents of the Swiss Clubs that belong to the United Swiss Societies (USS).
    - It is difficult to tell, but we have received some donations from new individuals this fall that are likely the result of this effort.
    - Our existing members can help in this effort by encouraging your friends and family to donate to this wonderful organization. Note: you do not have to be Swiss to donate!

Ruedi then asked our Fatuma and Ian to introduce themselves and tell us about their studies.

> Fatuma Rinderknecht, attending the Annual Meeting for the third time, is in her final year of medical school at UCSF. She will graduate in 2024 and enter the Dermatology field. She expresses her deep gratitude to our society for the financial help over the last few years.

Liam Keeton graduated last year and is looking for a job.

President's Report by Ruedi Sandmeier

“Two actions stand out for 2023:

We received a legacy of over $39,000 from the estate of Klara Holzer, who died two years ago after a long and not always easy life: when Klara was four years old, her father died. Her mother could not support the family, so Klara became a “Verdingkind”. This shameful practice, where a child is placed in a farmer’s family and must work for his/her upkeep was back then still the fate for such unlucky children. Klara’s break came when a sponsor enabled her to enter an apprenticeship as nurse. She worked initially in Switzerland and later emigrated to the US. Here, Klara had the good fortune to become private nurse to a wealthy woman who left her a sizeable fortune. Because her training was of such importance to Klara, she wanted her legacy to be used to support students. The board has therefore decided to use her money by adding $500 to every scholarship grant.

Second, Tom Neidecker informed me that the Swiss-California Foundation (SCF) decided to close and donate the remaining capital to SBS. Many of you also supported SCF over those years. For those who are not familiar, SCF was founded about 25 years ago by Bruno Schurter, Tom, and Phillip Kalsched to bring a graduate from the University of St. Gallen for 10 months to California as an intern. A total of 20 students have gone through this program. However, major changes, like Bruno moving back to Switzerland, Tom moving to Arizona and finally the pandemic, put an end to the program. Lacking future support from the University and dedicated mentors nearby prompted the closure of the program. It is planned that Phillip will join our board.

Of our two social events, the Annual Meeting was held again in person and was well attended, and we replaced our traditional Senior Party and Spring Dance with a luncheon outdoors at the beer garden. We had less than 50 people attending. For this year, we plan to go back to the Spring Dance, working together with the Aelpler Gruppe, as we last did in 2019. We will celebrate our seniors on April 7.

At this point, are there any questions or comments about what you have heard?

Since no matters to be voted on were submitted from the floor, we can now proceed with the elections.

As I said before, I have an excellent Board helping me to run the various tasks of our society. I hope you can honor that by confirming our Board members and Auditors. Our Board works well together as a team, and I am honored to work with such a fine group.

Under our By-Laws, the Directors are elected based on a system of rotation over a three-year period. Three Board members are up for re-election for three-year terms, and we have two new candidates for the Board.

Phillip Kalsched: Phillip is a lawyer, works in Santa Rosa and lives in San Francisco. I know Phillip from the board of the Chamber. He was at one point also President of the Swiss-American Chamber of Commerce. Phillip is foreseen to join the Scholarship committee.

David Zeiter: David is an accountant and the son of our long-serving Treasurer John Zeiter. David lives in Concord and works in San Francisco as accountant and office manager for a properties company. David has a BS in Business Administration. We plan to elect him as Treasurer.

We also need to re-elect Stefan Welter for the auditor position and elect Walter Gyger as a new Auditor, replacing Pius Kampfen. Walter is also an auditor for the United Swiss Societies.

Now it is time to hand over the meeting to Consul Martin Zaugg, to proceed with the reelection of four Board members and two new members for a three-year term, and two Auditors for a one-year term."

Ruedi Sandmeier, President
David Zeiter, Treasurer
Marianne Aubert, Secretary
Phillip Kalsched, Scholarships
Daniel Eggen, Member at large
Andreas Eggler, Investments
Stefan Welter, Auditor
Walter Gyger, Auditor

All were approved by acclamation.

"Thank you, Martin, for conducting the elections so efficiently, and for bringing us news of interest to people travelling to Switzerland and European countries. I would also like to express our deep appreciation for the steadfast support we have been receiving from the Consulate. It has been a pleasure working with your team and we look forward to a continued close cooperation.

At this point, I would like to express my gratitude to two long-term active members of our society and bestow the title of Honorary Member:

Pius Kampfen, Director since 2001 and later Auditor
John Zeiter, Treasurer since 1995. It is not our custom to give presents to retiring board members but with John, we make an exception. Please accept this stein and a gift card to the Matterhorn Restaurant as token for 29 years of service as Treasurer of our society.

This brings the Meeting to a close. Do I hear a motion to adjourn? Thank you, the meeting is adjourned."

The question of whether the society could provide a microphone was asked. With no further comments from the audience, Andy Eggler made a motion to close the meeting, seconded by John Zeiter.

Meeting closed at 7:05 PM.

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Following the meeting, the Board members reconvened for the purpose of electing a president, secretary, and treasurer, which Vice President Carla Twitchell conducted smoothly and without any opposition.

In 2024, the Board is comprised of the following Directors and Officers:

Ruedi Sandmeier, President
Carla Twitchell, Vice President
Marianne Aubert, Secretary
David Zeiter, Treasurer
Douglas Twitchell, Membership
Andreas Eggler, Investment committee
Ariana Ghelfi, Scholarship committee
Susann Sandmeier, Scholarship committee
Phillip Kalsched, Scholarship committee
John Andrew, Director at Large
Daniel Eggen, Director at Large