

10

LOCAL NEWS

Former Colborne resident awarded France's highest honour

continued from page 1

At the same time, he reinforced GlaxoSmithKline's commitment stating, "The human need is too big (for the company to back out)."

Working with a new minister of health, Chris worked to educate doctors and patients to recognize the symptoms of AIDS.

The second factor in his award related to working with the minister of health to generate jobs in the biotech industry in France.

His third contribution was as part of a high-level group headed by two European Commissioners (Cabinet Ministers) to deal with diminishing European competitiveness with the US in the pharmaceutical and health fields. It took two years to come up with a plan that would satisfy two competing interests.

One branch of the government wanted to keep health costs down. Another wanted to promote research and development. Patients were being caught in the middle. Chris brought the two competing groups together and worked with both to build a workable model to all needs.

In her 30-minute speech, recognizing Chris, Mme. Lenoir commented, "few people have been as involved in the improvement of health in Europe as our friend Christopher Viehbacher."

After acknowledging his extraordinary rise in business, she went on.

"Because, if the North American continent is well the starting point of this adventure, you will allow me to say that it is in Europe where some of the most



Chris Viebacher is presented with the Chevalier ribbon by Mme. Noelle Lenoir, Minister of Health for France, at a ceremony in Paris France September 19, 2003.

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beautiful pages of your history were written. ... True citizen of the world and a transatlantic relations... Canadian of stock, you became German by nationality and French by adoption."

As she closed, she recalled how Chris Viebacher's efforts had accelerated the work of the World Health Organization in the care of 200,000 people in eight countries through 18 programs.

Chris says his exploits can be explained in his outlook to the future.

"I'm always interested in what's in the next valley," he says succinctly.

He's supported in that by wife

Alison who has moved seven or eight times, by Chris's account, in their 16 years of marriage. His children have seized on the opportunities, too. Lauren, at 14 is learning Mandarin. She and younger sister, 12-year-old Karena, are both acquiring German. The youngest of the lot, Alexander, nine, is learning Spanish to go along with his French and English. All of the children, born in Europe, carry three passports.

A TIMELY HONOUR

Being awarded the badge in 2003 was particularly moving for Chris. This was the 200th

anniversary of the first granting by Napoleon.

The bearers of the Legion of Honour are held in very high esteem in France. With the red threads in his lapel, he gets preferential treatment throughout the country.

Having travelled the world, now a leader in a major international corporation, a proud bearer of the highest French civilian award, trilingual, and living in a family where five languages are understood, 43-year-old Chris Viehbacher still

From Colborne to international award

How did a Canadian boy from a village in eastern Ontario find himself in a position to earn such high plaudits?

When Chris Viebacher was seven, the family moved to Colborne where his father Al spent his career managing the St. Lawrence Cement plant.

Chris's grade eight teacher at Colborne Public School, Pat Westrope, remembers him well. She thought he was going to become a doctor. She recalls he was extremely bright and academically inclined. He would take the *Readers' Digest* off the shelf in class when he was finished his work and do the vocabulary exercises. Those same words would soon turn up in his essays.

He spent five years at ENSS in Brighton where he was one of only a few students to achieve a perfect mark of 100 in English.

He attended Queen's University in Kingston where he met his future wife, Alison. Chris graduated with his Bachelor of Commerce in 1983.

His employer, Price Waterhouse, recognizing his fluency in German, sent him to Germany in 1985. Once there, he moved to the pharmaceutical company, Wellcome as Director of Finance.

At age 31, he was asked to move back to Canada as their President of Canadian operations. When Wellcome was bought out by rival Glaxo, Chris was appointed the General Manager of their French branch. He quickly added French to his repertoire, making him trilingual.

It was during the seven years spent in France that he earned his Legion of Honour.

In October, 2002 he was appointed President of U.S. pharmaceuticals for GlaxoSmithKline, the second-largest pharmaceutical company in the world.

Chris Viebachers with wife Alison and their three children Lauren, Karena and Alex currently live in Rawleigh, North Carolina.