

## Probus Club of Pretoria East



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### Aroma Therapy

According to Napoleon an army marches on its stomach. That is became clear to him when he tried to invade Russia in June 1812 and could not find any food for his soldiers as the Russians destroyed it as they fled.

But how is an army to march when food is plenty, but his stomach is wracked by dysentery and other tropical diseases? This was the question that faced Dr Johann Gottlieb Benjamin Siegert, a volunteer medical doctor in the army of Simon Bolivar in South America.

Siegert, born in Germany in 1796, was trained as a medical doctor and served in the Prussian Army, which joined the British Army at final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815. With a call to arms still ringing in his ears, he set sail with a group of like minded Prussians to help Simon Bolivar in the liberation of that continent.

Siegert was appointed surgeon-general by Bolivar and was posted to the town of Angostura in central Venezuela. He was alarmed with the large number of soldiers suffering with stomach ailments and started experimenting with local herbs and spices for a remedy. In 1824 he came up with a recipe that he though was perfect and called the product *Amargo Aromatica* or Aromatic Bitters. (Was Siegert perhaps trying to cook up a batch of schnapps?)

The use of this "medicine" (the bottle in my possession indicates that it contains 45 % alcohol) was very successful but other uses for it were soon found, mainly as a flavouring. Fame of the mixture soon spread by sailors and it was first tasted in Britain in 1830. The gin of the day was quite horrible and the addition of a little of the "medicine" improved it markedly.

Production was increased and by 1850 Siegert exported his first bulk shipment to Britain and to Trinidad. When Siegert died in 1870 he was a very rich man and his son Don Carlos Siegert inherited the business. The business was flourishing, but Venezuela was not. Don Carlos decided to move the business and manufacturing to Trinidad.

Don Carlos continued the tradition set by his father that the recipe remains a secret. Even today there are only 5 people who know part of the recipe. They are not allowed to enter the blending room together or even travel together. They mix their part of the production in their own mixing room and send the product via a chute to the same percolating container, which has been in use since the company moved to Trinidad. There the mixture is "stewed" with alcohol for 20 hours, before the following processes and eventually bottling.

Don Carlos was something of a marketing genius. He was aware that he was in possession of a unique product and embarked on a series of international trade exhibitions, which sprang up as a result of the industrial revolution. He exhibited in London in 1862, where he introduced "pink gin" to the public. He also exhibited at Paris, Vienna, Frankfurt, and Philadelphia in America. At all of these exhibitions he received gold and silver medals for his product. His product became one of the first truly international products.

His success meant that he was soon copied by others. Despite the existence of patent laws, he took all the imitators to court and won all the cases. Angostura Bitters continued to flavour the British Empire's drinks. It was in all the drawing rooms and gentlemen's residences and also in the middle class houses. Not less than 7 British Monarchs, including Queen Elizabeth II, have given bitters their royal warrants. (Queen Elizabeth II visited the factory and unveiled a plaque commemorating another extension of the factory at that time)

When Don Carlos died, the family business was inherited by his brother Alfredo. Alfredo was a bit of a play-boy and the company almost vanished in 1919. Angostura's assets were sold off, but the secrets of the recipe were not, and Alfredo's grandson Alfredo Gallo continued to produce the bitters. He also started making rum. It was a difficult time for the firm and the prohibition in America also added to the difficulties.

During World War II and for years afterwards, thousands of American soldiers were based in Trinidad. The soldiers soon acquired taste for rum and the fortunes of Angostura once again turned. Investors were keen to buy shares again, but the Government stepped in and bought the shares and promptly gave the company back to the family firm Siegert Holdings. This firm in turn offered shares at cut-price to employees, thus confirming its status as the "people's distillery". To day Angostura enjoys the highest profile of any Trinidad-Tobago company. The cricketer Brian Lara is the chairman of the company.

In 1995 the British Advertising Council voted Angostura Bitters as the worst packaged product. It is true that the packagings has changed very little since 1824, but why use a label that seems too big for the bottle? No body knows, maybe they were the wrong size, but Siegert being very cost conscious decided to use them. Perhaps it was to protect the product from the ambient light. Nobody in the firm knows, but the firm is very proud of the award.

The use of the bitters is legio. Not only for an upset stomach, or in gin and tonic but also in cooking (The firm regularly publish recipe books using the bitters as an ingredient), and in cocktails, vodka, Champagne cocktails and in soft drinks such as rock shandy. It is even praised a cure for hiccups!

The production has increased during the years and at present it is around 50 million litres per year!

So next time you fill your glass with a pink gin and tonic ; say a thank you to Johann Gottlieb Benjamin Siegert for inventing Angostura Bitters.

*The name of the town was changed from Angostura to Ciudad Bolivar in the 1840's and there is a drink made from Angostura bark but it is not the genuine article.*

*The basis of the article was supplied to me by Bill Pretorius. The internet helped me to expand it. Pieter Scribante*

### **Next monthly luncheon**

The next monthly luncheon will be held at the PHSOB Club in Queens Crescent, Lynnwood on 10 July 2009 at 12:00 for 12:30.

Speaker:

Dr Shaw Badenhorst from the Transvaal Museum who will address us on Zooarchaeology(the study of animal bones to determine their eating habits and environment).

**Ladies are as usual welcome to attend**

## **Verjaarsdae in Julie**

Baie geluk aan die volgende persone wat in Mei verjaar. Mag die nuwe lewensjaar vol voorspoed en geluk wees.

8 Julie	Keth Gibbs
15 Julie	Renee Pretorius
28 Julie	Chris Scheffer

## **Vergadering gehou op 17 April 2009**

*Bygedra deur Johan Oosthuizen*

Ons gasspreker by die geleentheid was mnr Cas Pretorius siviele ingenieur by die Gautrein Projek. Cas Pretorius is die Streeks Direkteur van BKS Raadgewende Ingenieurs en verbonde aan die projek.

Die spreker is 'n geregistreerde Siviele Ingenieur en verwerf sy kwalifikasies by die Universiteit van Pretoria (B Ing en B Ing(Hons.)) en die Universiteit van Texas (M Ing-Siviel). Hy is ook lid van verskeie professionele organisasies en deeltydse dosent by die Tshwane Universiteit van Tegnologie.

Hy was betrokke by paaie projekte in Viëtnam en Hongarye. By die Gautrein Projek is hy verantwoordelik vir beplanning en implementering van die spoorlyn tussen Pretoria, Johannesburg en die lughawe.

Mnr Pretorius lig ons in oor die omvang en vordering met die projek. Die lesing word toegelig met beeld materiaal wat veral die kompleksiteit van die projek beklemtoon. Aandag word gegee aan die projek spesifikasies en tender dokumentasie.

Die belyning van die spoor, ligging van stasies en die beoogde bedryf van die trein.

Die projek beoog hoëspoed (160 km/h) vervoer van passasiers (elke 10-15 minute), sekuriteit en volgehoue bedryf. Die voorsiening van lughawe dienste soos sitplek kaartjies en bagasie word ook vir Sandtonstasie beplan. Die bykomende projekte soos busdienste en parkering word ook voorsien.

Uli Wessmann, met sy eie ingenieursagtergrond, bedank ons gas op gepaste wyse.

## **Vergadering gehou op 12 Junie 2009**

### **Nothing to declare**

A distinguished young woman on a flight from Ireland asked the priest beside her, "Father, may I ask a favour?"

"Of course, what may I do for you?"

"Well, I bought an expensive woman's electronic hair dryer for my mother's birthday, that is unopened and well over the Customs limit, and I'm afraid they'll confiscate it. Is there any way you could carry it through Customs for me? Under your robes perhaps?"

"I would love to help you, dear, but I must warn you: I will not lie."

"With your honest face, Father, no one will question you."

When they got to Customs, she let the priest go ahead of her. The official asked, "Father, do you have anything to declare?"

"From the top of my head down to my waist, I have nothing to declare."

The official thought this answer strange, so he asked, "And what do you have to declare from your waist to the floor?"

"I have a marvellous instrument designed to be used on a woman, but which is, to date, unused."

Roaring with laughter, the official said, "Go ahead, Father. Next!" \*

### **The Mechanic and the Cardiologist**

An English mechanic was removing a cylinder-head from the engine of a Harley Davidson motorcycle in Malaga when he spotted a well-known cardiologist from Carlos Haya hospital in his shop.

The cardiologist was there waiting for the service manager to come and take a look at his bike when the mechanic shouted across the Garage, 'Hey Doc, want to take a look at this?' The Cardiologist, a bit surprised, walked over to where the mechanic was working on the motorcycle.

The mechanic straightened up, wiped his hands on a rag and asked, 'So Doc, look at this engine. I open its heart, take the valves out, repair any damage, and then put them back in, and when I finish, it works just like new. So how come I make €39,675 a year (a pretty small salary) and you get the really big bucks (€1,695,759) when you and I are doing basically the same work?'

The cardiologist paused, smiled and leaned over, then whispered to the mechanic...

'Try doing it with the engine running.'

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