

Christina Hallmert, President of SWEA International



As President of SWEA International, financial manager at Amicheitalia, a Swedish travel agency in central Rome, and a volunteer for the Make-A-Wish foundation, **Christina Hallmert** has her hands full. *Swedish Press* spoke to the diligent CEO about Swedish culture, SWEA and life in Rome.

Interviewed by Sofie Kinnefors

Please tell us a little bit about your background.

I was born and raised in Stockholm. I attended Adolf Fredrik's School of Music and therefore music has always been a central part of my life. During the '80s, Adolf Fredrik's School of Music played an important role in the cultural life of Stockholm, with numerous concerts and events

in churches and concert halls, especially during Lucia and Christmas. It also meant learning a lot about Stockholm and its history, while walking from one church to another.

My family lived just outside of Stockholm and from the age of nine I travelled by bus and train to and from school. This was before cell phones and today it sounds almost irresponsible. I was a shy little girl and no doubt this independence helped me to get more confident.

Eventually I met an Italian man, got married (and even more confident) and moved to Italy. We live in Rome and have two fabulous sons soon finishing their law studies in Milan.

Besides being President of SWEA, I work as administrative manager for a Swedish incoming travel agency called Amicheitalia and as a volunteer for Make-A-Wish.

Can you tell us about your role as president of SWEA International?

To be President of SWEA is a challenge but also a great adventure. The more you grow within the organization, the broader your perspective gets. To get to know SWEA from all of its angles is amazing. There is so much positive energy among these Swedish women living all over the world jointly celebrating and promoting

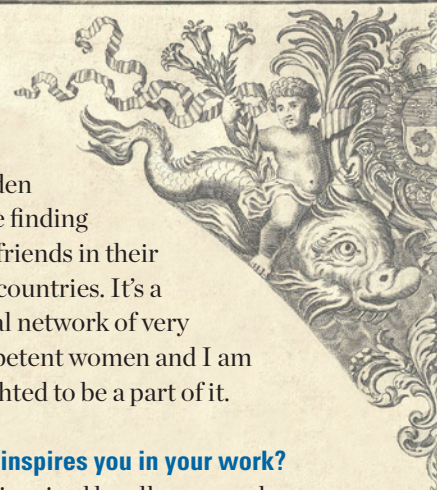
Sweden while finding new friends in their new countries. It's a global network of very competent women and I am delighted to be a part of it.

Who inspires you in your work?

I get inspired by all our members – their work and enthusiasm. We all volunteer but still find it so important to be a Swea and to support the organization. Because of our chapters' hard work, SWEA donates more than 200,000 USD each year to Swedish-related projects all over the world. SWEA makes a difference to many and all SWEA members should feel proud.

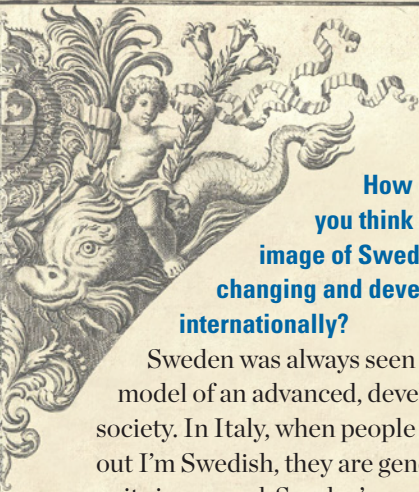
In which areas do you feel Sweden contributes most globally?

From being mainly an export country trading raw materials, Sweden now also exports new innovation and new technology and is a leader in developing renewable energy and ecological solutions. Sweden is also very successful in producing music for the most popular artists in the world. But perhaps most of all we contribute to the world by spreading our respect for equal opportunities and human rights.



SWEDES

'CELEBRATING AND PROMOTING SWEDEN.'



How do you think the image of Sweden is changing and developing internationally?

Sweden was always seen as a model of an advanced, developed society. In Italy, when people find out I'm Swedish, they are generally quite impressed. Sweden's reputation appears to be high all over the world. I hope and believe this will continue. Today our worst enemy is perhaps all the unchecked, provocative fake news circulating. It takes a balanced, wise government to overcome that. Our country faces challenges; the integration of immigrants is perhaps the biggest one right now. To turn this into a positive and productive model to export to the rest of the world would be a great sign of progress.

How do you think Sweden has achieved the success it has despite being such a small country, population-wise?

Despite being such a small country with few inhabitants, Sweden was always innovative and creative, giving birth to numerous inventors and big corporations throughout the years such as Volvo, Astra, Ericsson, SKF etc. For sure Sweden has always been prominent in various fields and the reasons are many. I think the establishment probably has shown and gained mutual

respect and therefore got listened to. We have collected statistics from an early stage and are able to report benchmark data that other countries can only aspire to!

What aspects of Swedish culture and life are you personally most passionate about promoting?

Music was my first love, but I also enjoy history very much. The Swedish way of living also includes a close relationship with nature and a deep respect for it.

SWEA promotes many different cultural projects such as exhibitions, museums, concerts and other cultural events globally, and also donates Swedish books to Swedish schools all over the world. Almost all SWEA chapters, after some research, choose worthy recipients for a grant or a scholarship. It's engaging, creative, fun and at the end of the day you make a difference to someone.

Any other current or upcoming events that you would like to mention?

In a few weeks from now, our annual meeting will take place here in Rome. This is when we will announce the recipients of our three scholarships and the Swedish Woman of the Year. It will be a pleasure for me to show the Board and our advisors my new hometown with Rome having so much to offer.

In October, our big World Meeting takes place in Perth, Australia. It's a challenge to organize a meeting so far away,



but it is also proof that SWEA indeed is a global organization. The meeting is open to all members and we estimate quite a large number of SWEA members attending.

Name three of your favorite places in Rome.

Centro storico, Villa Pamphili, Trastevere.

What do you miss the most about Sweden?

Long breakfasts and "fika".

What do you miss the least?

The weather.

SWEA is a global network, founded by Agneta Nilsson in 1979, consisting of 7000 Swedish speaking women in more than 70 chapters in over 30 countries. It is the largest organization outside Sweden promoting Swedish language, culture and tradition.

SWEA is a non-profit organization providing a strong personal network as well as valuable support to Swedish industry abroad. It grants around \$250,000 a year in donations and scholarships.

SWEA is represented in numerous locations throughout the world and serves an important role in the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs emergency plan. Source: swea.org