

Honorary Life Membership awarded by IFA Canada to Mr. Helmut Birk on May 23, 2013 during the Branch's Annual International Tax Seminar



Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen. My name is Brian Schneiderman and I have the privilege of introducing Mr. Helmut Birk to you. Mr. Birk is a former President of IFA Canada, your branch of the International Fiscal Association. In a few moments Mr. Birk will speak to us about the early days of IFA Canada, after which Mr. Nick Pantaleo, the Branch's current President, will present Mr. Birk with the award of honorary life membership in IFA Canada in recognition and appreciation of Mr. Birk's dedicated leadership of, and commitment to, the Branch.

Today IFA Canada, at only a few hundred members less than IFA USA, is the second largest branch in the International Fiscal Association, and as a result IFA Canada punches well above its weight in the central organization. If IFA Canada is so highly regarded in the International Fiscal Association it is because of individuals like Mr. Birk who work so hard and with such devotion to make IFA Canada that which it is today.

Mr. Birk was born in Cologne, Germany where he received his education. Before leaving Germany for Canada at age 21, he interned with Deutsche Bank. After arriving in Montréal he studied accounting, finance and taxation at Concordia University and earned his CA at McGill University. He joined the Canadian predecessor of KPMG Canada of which he became a founding member and at which in due course he became senior international tax partner. In 1985 he was awarded an FCA.

During his illustrious 30 year career with KPMG Mr. Birk built a solid reputation as a Canadian and international tax practitioner. On occasion he served in an advisory capacity on tax matters to the Québec Minister of Revenue and over a three-year period assisted the government in drafting and editing its tax laws and regulations. For six years he was a special advisor to the Standing Committee on Banking and Commerce of the Senate of Canada in respect of federal budgets, tax policy and tax legislation amendments.

The International Fiscal Association is governed by its Executive Committee. Mr. Birk was a member of that committee for several years. He also served as Chairman of the Canadian German Chamber of Industry and Commerce. In recognition of his activities in developing cultural and economic ties between Canada and Germany, the Federal Republic of Germany in a very moving ceremony in 2001 at the German Consulate in Montréal awarded Mr. Birk the German Order of Merit First Class.

I thank you for your attention and now call upon Mr. Helmut Birk to address his fellow IFA Canada members.

Helmut Birk, 2013 Recipient, Honorary Membership Award



Helmut Birk, a Past President of IFA Canada, was presented with an Honorary Membership Award on May 23, 2013 during the 2013 IFA Seminar. The tribute was presented by Brian Schneiderman, another Past President of IFA Canada.

In accepting the award, Helmut reflected on the early days of IFA Canada. Below is an excerpt of his acceptance speech.

Helmut Birk: I am very honoured to be here to receive this award and I accept it in the name of the many original members of IFA Canada who were active in the Branch's activities with me.

As you know, IFA was formed in the Netherlands in 1938. Today there are sixty-two branches with more than twelve thousand members in various countries.

IFA Canada started much later – in 1976 in Montreal. Its first president, Philip Vineberg, started the branch along with a number of other tax professionals, including Peter Cumyn, Maurice Regnier, Herbert Spindler and Albert Poissant in Montreal, David Ward, Bob Brown and Bob Dart in Toronto and Arnold Sherman in Calgary. In fact, Arnold is still a member of IFA Canada today and continues to serve on its Council.

At that time, international tax was practised by people in large accounting firms and law firms with international exposure and interests. But there was no Canadian organization that you would say was internationally focussed.

As you can well imagine, as a new organization with few members, IFA Canada had very little funds available in those early years. Finally, Albert Poissant, an individual who always had great ideas, convinced the branch's executive to seek to host an annual IFA Congress. Finally, we were awarded the opportunity to host our first Congress in 1982 right here in Montreal.

Now, hosting the Congress came with much financial risks. The risks were that we had absolutely no seed money and Central IFA was not in a position in those days to support or to guarantee or to lend funds to the branch. So what did we do? Well, we created a voluntary congress fund into which all members would invest with the understanding that if we were successful in making a profit, they would recoup their investment - but only after all expenses were paid. So there was a fair amount of risk involved.

We started slowly, creating a group of people that would take over various functions for the 1982 Congress. For example, the luncheons at the annual IFA Congress today are part of the overall fee. But in those days, that was not the case. So what happened was that some members with large properties

or large houses with maybe a garden on a lake or on the river, would invite guests from other countries to come for lunch at their own expense. And you know what? A lot of people came and they liked it! It was the talk of the congress and for quite some time thereafter.

In the end, the Montreal Congress was a great success and we made a profit of over \$200,000, which we were able to use to fund IFA events in Canada.

IFA Canada today is one of the largest branches in IFA. Its members are very active and the branch is highly recognized and admired by IFA Central. They all love and support what is going on in Canada.

Why? First of all, the branch continues to have tremendous support from its members in attending seminars such as this one. Then there is the annual travelling lectureship, the brainchild developed by Brian Schneiderman some time ago. These are things that were done gradually with funds that were available and they were the result of new ideas by people like Brian who wanted to raise the profile of international tax in Canada.

The success of the branch is also the result of the dedication of a number of individuals over the years – individuals who have been very generous with their time in serving the branch; a number of them also had executive roles at Central IFA that required an even greater time and financial commitment.

I am very grateful and thankful to have been able to work with the many people and professional contacts that I met through IFA, both in Canada and throughout the world. I am still in contact with many of these individuals, which has always been something very personal and very rewarding to me.

Today, IFA Canada is a very strong organization with good membership and good finances and good leadership. I know it will continue to do well in the future.

I am very proud of my involvement with IFA Canada and the role I played to help make it the great organization that it is today.

Thank you again for this award.

Nick Pantaleo, President, IFA Canada: Helmut, thank you for your charming remarks about the early days of IFA Canada.

IFA Canada today is indeed a strong organization and its success is owed to individuals such as yourself, who built a solid foundation for those of us who followed.

I want to thank you for being with us today to accept this award. You are certainly a very worthy recipient.