

## French consul general gets first taste of Maine, and Fenway

Christophe Guilhou will help the state make the most of a trade mission to Paris, and also a food show there.

*By Beth Quimby, Staff Writer*

May 12, 2010

PORTLAND - Christophe Guilhou, the French consul general in Boston, made his first official visit to Maine on Tuesday, fresh from his very first Red Sox game the night before.

Guilhou, who has been in the United States for the past eight months, said his goal in life is to try to understand the people in the countries where he lives. But it may take a while for him to appreciate the subtleties of America's national pastime. He said he wasn't prepared for a baseball "match" that lasts four hours, much longer than the sports events he is used to watching.

"I have to confess, I left after two hours," he said.

Guilhou said he will try it again in two weeks, when he takes his children to their first baseball game.

Guilhou made his remarks to a group of business people who gathered at the law offices of Preti Flaherty, on the top floor of One City Center. It was part of his statewide tour with Severin Beliveau, an attorney with Preti Flaherty and the French consular agent for Maine.

They visited Thornton Academy in Saco and met with representatives from Maine's business, political and Franco-American communities.

Guilhou pledged to help Maine officials prepare for an upcoming trade mission involving Maine and France. Gov. John Baldacci will lead the mission to Paris in October to promote Maine foods and tourism.

The mission, coinciding with an international food show, will play up Maine's growing reputation as a dining destination, said Wade Merritt, vice president of the Maine International Trade Center, which is arranging the visit.

Guilhou, who has worked around the world for the French Foreign Service, said he loves American seafood, especially lobsters and scallops. He expressed some surprise at the abundance of food concession stands he saw at his first American baseball game. He said he didn't realize that baseball was also an eating and drinking event.

"There was food everywhere," he said.

The French Consulate in Boston serves all New England, except Connecticut. About 12,000 French citizens live in the region, Guilhou said, and about 1 million French tourists visit Maine each year.

Guilhou said the consulate provides help with visas and other matters for its citizens, promotes the French language, enhances cooperation between French and New England universities, and helps revive the Franco-American community.

Beliveau spent some of the time selling Guilhou on a summer vacation on Rangeley Lake, "which is clean enough to drink," Beliveau said.

Guilhou appeared interested.

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