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Michael E. Scullin, back row (fifth from left in red tie), with Mayor Michael A. Nutter at the meeting of the Consular Corps Association of Philadelphia, held at McElroy, Deutsch, Mulvaney & Carpenter, LLP, on April 16, 2014.

The Honorary Consul

By Richard G. Freeman

On an average day Michael Scullin has two states in mind – Pennsylvania, where as a member of the Philadelphia Bar Association he serves as partner at McElroy, Deutsch, Mulvaney & Carpenter, LLP—and France, the nation he serves as Honorary Consul.

Tall, angular, a discursive conversationalist in English and French, Scullin has represented France in Philadelphia and Wilmington since 2005. After the French Foreign Ministry nominated him, his credentials went to the U.S. Department of State for approval.

“It is not a position you apply for,” Scullin explained.

“You are tapped.” What made Scullin eligible for the position was a lifetime investment in international matters. “I love languages,” he explains. “I studied classics in high school. When I was 13 my family sent me to live with a family in Mexico by myself.”

While he did not study French in college (University

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of Pennsylvania), Scullin tutored English in Paris after graduating. After law school (The Dickinson School of Law) and four years of practice, he took a leave of absence to study at the University of Salzburg. That period led to an internship with a “Francophone” law firm in Geneva.

Back in Philadelphia, where Scullin worked for the Monteverde firm, since merged with McElroy, Deutsch, he served as chairman of the Philadelphia Bar Association’s International Law Committee and pioneered the Bar Association’s partnership with the Bar Association of Lyon.

The goal of the enduring Lyon partnership, he explains, “is for lawyers from both ends to develop international connections.” The partnership has developed into a “nuts and bolts training session” for Philadelphia attorneys getting acquainted with the French legal *métier* and for attorneys from Lyon to immerse themselves in the highways and byways of

our legal system. Under Scullin’s leadership the program has provided international travel and study opportunities to law students as well.

“The world is becoming globalized,” Scullin said. “And the practice of law is getting much more globalized... students want to have international experience and employers appreciate that also.”

What has developed from Scullin’s involvement in the partnership has been what he calls “a very robust relationship” between the Commonwealth and the Rhône-Alpes region (the cradle of Lyon) with many related activities, culminating in economic exchanges and the recent tour of Paris and the Rhône-Alpes region by the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Philadelphia has hosted local consuls general since the 1800s, when a local Association of Consul General was formed. Currently there are, Scullin explains, “four and a half”

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Michael E. Scullin (far left) presented Legion of Honor medals to 11 American veterans who fought for the liberation of France in World War II, all residing at Foulkeways Retirement Community in Gwynedd, PA on Feb. 20, 2009.

consuls general, i.e. paid diplomats in residence representing their countries, and a collection of honorary consuls from 35 countries. The “half” is the Chilean consul, where the consul retired but his staff remains. Other Philadelphia attorneys have served as honorary consuls; Albert Momjian, retired partner at Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis LLP, has served as Honorary Consul for the Philadelphia Region for the Republic of Haiti.

An honorary consul may pursue a kaleidoscopic range of diplomatic duties. Scullin divides his duties between “ministerial” and “constituent.” There are around 5,000 French people who live in Philadelphia. These individuals turn to him for constituent needs such as the reissuance of passports, stamping official documents and even the rare act of legal representation. Perhaps among the more unorthodox of his recent tasks was representing before U.S. Customs and Border Protection a French solo Atlantic sailor who had been rescued by a Philadelphia-bound freighter and deposited here.

On a typical day Scullin divides his time between consular duties and his ongoing practice as a specialist in international trade and development, sometimes combining the two by representing entities with dealings in the United States and Europe. The job of consul also carries colorful ceremonial duties that tend to sustain Scullin’s passion for his doubled-edged endeavors.

For example, “French Alliance Day” annually presses Scullin into service. For the non-savants “French Alliance Day,” Scullin describes, “celebrates the day in 1778 the troops at Valley Forge found out that King Louis XVI had resolved to support the American Revolution. French support for the American Revolution was the thing that clinched it. Benjamin Franklin had spent a lot of time at court getting the king to support the American Revolution. After Lafayette committed

to the Revolution the French lent full-fledged support with General Rochambeau leading a contingent of French soldiers in support of the Revolution. There were more French troops than American troops at Yorktown. The American Navy there was all French. They blocked the British retreat. That was the key to the American victory.”

Bastille Day, of course, requires Scullin’s attendance at six or more local events (and marks one of the few “gimmes” the job offers, like a case or two of wine imported to his doorstep to help mark the day).

Some events require Scullin to associate with those individuals whose role in life is to dress up as historic figures. Recently, after a wreath-laying in Chester, Scullin returned to Philadelphia in the company of Benjamin Franklin and George Washington. On Bastille Day, he may attend a reenactment of the storming of the Bastille in Media where a local restaurateur dresses up as the Marquis de Lafayette.

He is also prominent in the promotion of the arts. For example, Scullin was present and active in June when the Philadelphia Museum of Art premiered its exhibition of Impressionist painting.

And for those curiosity-seekers who really want to know, yes, Scullin is allotted a consular parking place in front of his downtown office, an institution inaugurated by the late Richardson Dilworth, who as mayor wanted to demonstrate the city’s hospitality to the diplomatic corps.

And at times he may wear a tricolor sash. ■

Richard G. Freeman (rgfrim@gmail.com), a sole practitioner, is a member of the editorial board of The Philadelphia Lawyer.