



Attaché Patrick Ott at the Binnenhof, the government center in The Hague. Photo by Glenn Fawcett

# DIPLOMATIC CHAMPIONS

CBP's attachés advance agency agenda abroad

By Paul Koscak

It's midnight and Patrick Ott's phone is ringing.

It could be a call to change a country's law enforcement culture. Or to discuss phony merchandise dumped into the U.S. economy. Or from U.S. law enforcement pursuing a fugitive. Regardless, as a CBP attaché stationed in the Netherlands, Ott knows he has to take this call.

A likely scenario.

"There's one thing about being an attaché," remarked Patrick Ott, CBP's attaché in The Hague, a Border Patrol agent who began his career in 1995. "There's no clock. You always can take a call."

To borrow a British adage, the sun never sets on CBP's 21 attachés stationed throughout the world. They're a valued group, mostly frontline professionals with international experience. Their stakeholders are federal agencies and law enforcement and security

officials from the host country as well as other nations working in that country. Experience is vital, but their effectiveness really depends on how well they can connect with people.

While issues vary by region, their skill to build relationships and the drive and creativity to do whatever it takes to get things done as the commissioner's representative is a common trait.

## Passionate work

Attachés are really law enforcement diplomats assigned to the U.S. embassy, and like other diplomats, they report to the U.S. ambassador. Ott works with his counterparts within the alphabet soup of federal agencies — DHS, TSA, Secret Service, FBI, DEA, HSI and DOJ. "We work hand-in-glove," said Ott, who covers the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, France, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark.

Ott provides the Department of Justice with CBP's access to valuable flight information and nefarious actors to assist the agency with its investigations. William Stern, the department's legal attaché in the Netherlands, credits Ott and CBP with convincing the Dutch and other European countries make better use of Justice's terrorist watch list.

Ott meets regularly with Dutch law enforcement and border protection and customs officials to show them how supporting U.S. interests is also in their best interest. That trust helps the Drug Enforcement Administration, or DEA, crack down on drugs entering the U.S. by involving the Dutch National Police to target outgoing mail parcels, a significant achievement in a nation where privacy is sacred.

"The Dutch were slow to change, but without his meetings and the cooperation of CBP, we wouldn't see this change of attitude," explained Michael Maxwell, country attaché for the DEA. "The Netherlands is the No. 1 supplier of ecstasy. Seizures at the U.S. ports of entry have increased about 600 percent."

Ott is working diligently with Dutch authorities to establish a preclearance facility at Amsterdam's Schiphol International Airport, stem the flow of illicit drugs and promote information sharing. He's

also advancing a software project to automatically provide information on passengers arriving in Europe from other nations. "The Dutch are new to sharing information on this scale," he said.

Ott helped obtain a European Union grant to fund the project. He stood before members of the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security and their software developers and with a finger stabbing the air for emphasis, drove home the program's value.

He stressed the software will improve efficiency while preserving privacy. Ott later briefed H.P. Schreinemachers on the project, the ministry's national coordinator, equivalent to CBP's assistant commissioner.

U.S. Ambassador Peter Hoekstra, who works closely with Ott, said he looks to CBP's attaché to build bridges between agencies to keep him informed. "When you have so many departments, we have silos, but we need to know what the others are doing."

One sure way Ott builds bridges is through the well-known barbeques he hosts at his residence. "My counterparts have nicknamed the practice Barbeque Diplomacy," he said. "I have found that providing a casual setting, good food and good conversation goes a long way in strengthening relationships."



Attaché Patrick Ott presses a point during a staff meeting with U.S. Ambassador Peter Hoekstra (back row, second from right). Photo by Glenn Fawcett