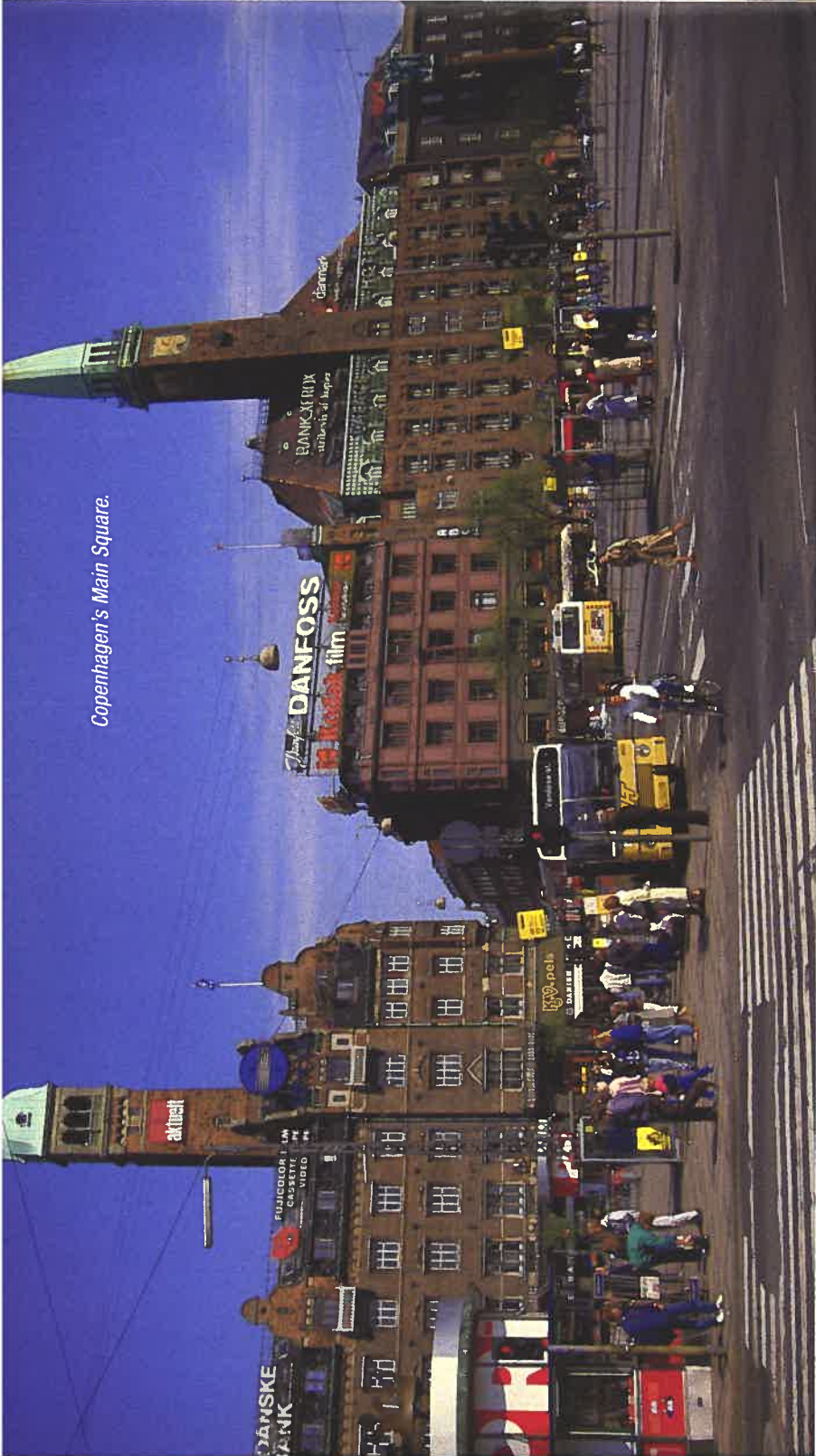
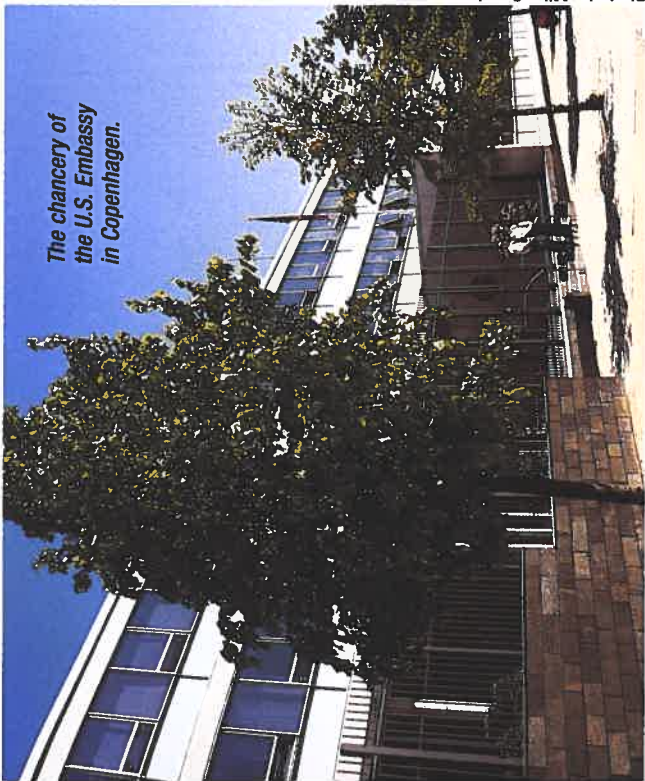




Copenhagen's Main Square.

and work. The Danish people have a strong sense of family and community. They seize every chance to celebrate. While they have their own Nordic language, which challenges even the most gifted foreign linguists, most Danes speak excellent English.

For more than a thousand years, kings and queens have ruled this enchanted land. Quaint towns filled with castles and thatched-roof cottages dot the countryside. The national flag is proudly displayed and the people exude happiness and peacefulness. They also have the



The chancery of the U.S. Embassy in Copenhagen.

Photo by Mike Canvin



Maria-Jose Diderichsen, American citizen's assistant, and Simon Weeks, consular administrative assistant, take a break for a photo near the cashier's window in the consular section.

highest number of computers per capita in the world and eagerly embrace the newest technologies. Although Denmark has maintained its beauty and charm, it's not trapped in the past. The nation looks to the future, working side by side with its neighbors, the United States and the rest of Europe as a valued partner and friend. ■

Sarah F. Drew is the administrative officer at the U.S. Embassy in Copenhagen. Sara Wray, a student at Drexel University in Philadelphia, was a summer intern at the embassy.

Photo by Ann Purcell/PictureQuest

Office of the Month:

Office Of Foreign Missions

Story and photos by Paul Koscak

Call it the 51st state.

Diplomatic Motor Vehicles operates much like the other 50 state motor vehicle departments, without the long lines, of course. But the clientele is different: foreign diplomats and their families.

Although motor vehicle services are only part of what the Office of Foreign Missions provides to the more than 10,000 foreign consular officials living in the United States, it's perhaps the most visible.

When it's not issuing plates, licenses and registrations, the office advises foreign diplomats, their families and their staffs about U.S. law. It also champions reciprocal rights for U.S. diplomats overseas, based on the freedoms and privileges given to foreign diplomats living in America. And for Americans at home, the office works to ensure that diplomatic privileges aren't abused.

"Some countries are less sensitive to the treatment of their diplomats," said Ted Strickler, the office's deputy assistant secretary, in explaining some of the challenges of reciprocity.

Reciprocal rights figure into just about everything the office accomplishes, applying to everything from tax relief to automobiles.

"If their diplomat drives a Cadillac and we can't, then we tell him to get a small car," he said. "If we can own only one car, they can own only one."

But it's not all that simple.

The department registers more than 12,000 vehicles every year, processes photographs for licenses and ensures that foreign drivers carry insurance, said Jackie Robinson, who supervises the motor vehicle operation, located at 350 International Place, about a block from the University of the District of Columbia.

"Some diplomats think they should automatically get a license," she said. "We look at what a citizen needs to get a license in that country. Are the standards lower than, equal to or greater than they are here? There's no reciprocity if the standards are less."

If their skills fall short of U.S. standards diplomats are routinely referred to their respective states to take the written and road tests before being issued a license and the trademark red, white and blue diplomatic plates.

There's a perception that foreign diplomats drive with impunity. Not so, said Ms. Robinson. If a diplomat receives a violation, the municipality must report it to the Department. Like U.S. drivers who incur violations, the diplomats are penalized with points. If the points add up, the Department can suspend the license and revoke the diplomat's driving privileges, she said.



Stacey Wiley processes tax exemption cards.