

big SWEA event where Bangkok is hosting the Region Meeting for the whole Asian region.

"We will probably be more than 100 participants and there will be a golf cup, two days of workshops and board meetings and a trip to somewhere in Thailand," she tells with excitement.

Wanted to do something

The 53-years-old Agneta came to Bangkok with her husband and teenage daughter two years ago. Agneta had no working permit. However, she refused to sit around doing nothing.

"I worked in Switzerland and I really missed working out here. That is the reason why I chose to be so active in SWEA when I came to Bangkok. I wanted to do something," she says, adding:

"It gives me the social networking out here but also the feeling that I'm doing something, that I'm creating something with and for others."

Working for SWEA in Switzerland versus Thailand is not that big a difference according to Agneta. However, joining the Bangkok organisation has been a very positive experience.

"There are so many young, active Swedish women out here who do an impressive job with SWEA and have so many ideas. They have careers, babies and are still so active. The member average age is around 35," she says.

Adopted from Thailand

Even though it is only two years since the 53-year-old Agneta moved to Thailand she has had a special bonding with the country for many years. Ever since she and her husband Stefan Bekassy de Bekas who works for SEB came to Thailand on a holiday 20 years ago, they fell in love with the country and culture. Since then they have been back on holidays two to three times a year. They also chose to adopt their daughter Vanessa from Thailand when she was a baby. Now, she is soon turning 14.

"I lived in Thailand with her during the adoption process so she could get use to me before we went to Switzerland where she grew up from the age of 11 months. Of course she sees herself as only Swedish and Swiss, but after we moved to

Bangkok she started at the fantastic St. Andrew's International School where she learns Thai as well," Agneta explains.

Work was a coincidence

In Switzerland Agneta's job was also strongly influenced by Thailand. For ten years she imported beautiful and elegant designer clothing and sold it in Switzerland. The designer is a Thai woman named Khanitha, who now runs successful restaurants instead. For 10 years they had a great partnership and are still very close friends.

"The whole thing started as a total coincidence. During a holiday in Bangkok we saw this shop at the Oriental Hotel with beautiful dresses. I almost couldn't be bothered trying them on because I didn't think I could fit the tiny Thai sizes. But it turned out that they were European sizes. They all fit perfectly. My husband phoned the designer right away and the day after we had a deal that I should be her agent in Switzerland. It was a great success, and I sold the most beautiful evening gowns and even wedding dresses made by her," she tells.

"I miss that job. However, I love living in Thailand. People are open minded, social and it is a great life."

Helping each other

Agneta can easily see herself as the President for SWEA for all four years which is the maximum.

"If I get elected again after the first two years, then of course I want to continue. I'm not moving away from Bangkok anytime soon. In fact, I think we will stay here forever. We love it out here," she tells.

As the President and member of the board, she has ambitions on SWEA's behalf here in Thailand. The women just sponsored a Thai student who wanted to study abroad in Sweden and paid for her airfare. They will together with SWEA International help the Swedish National Gallery in Stockholm which is in a bad condition.

"We will in the near future donate money. The Gallery has to close down for seven years as it is falling apart and must be restored. A film about the Gallery's past, today and the future is going to be made, and SWEA International will contribute to make this movie."



Agneta Bekassy de Bekas with her husband Stefan and daughter Vanessa.

Photo on opposite page: Agneta with SWEA Bangkok Vice President Erika Ng Björklund.

They are also trying to help local SWEA groups getting started in other parts of Thailand as well as taking care of their Bangkok members.

"I hope we will keep up supporting and arranging events. And of course I hope SWEA in Bangkok will grow and that more women will join our network. We do a lot to keep and protect the Swedish traditions, language and culture, and in a way we are Sweden's ambassadors out here. I think that every Swedish woman should join since it is a unique chance to meet so many adorable and interesting women. We help each other with practical advice, meet up for wine tasting and dinner evenings. But most importantly, we have so much fun together. And that is the most important to us. To have fun," Agneta says with a smile.

SWEA

SWEA, Swedish Women's Educational Association Inc. is a nonprofit global organisation for Swedish women or Swedish speaking women who are or have been living abroad. SWEA has around 8500 members in 40 different countries.

For more info or to join SWEA in Bangkok:
www.chapters-swea.org/bangkok/