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Europe/International

## Royal decoration for Dutch museum director from Aalten

### City of Bocholt congratulates and supports award

In the neighbouring and border town of Aalten (Netherlands), the museum director has been awarded a high Dutch medal. The city of Bocholt supported this honour.

Gerda Brethouwer is the director of the "Nationaal Onderduikmuseum" in Aalten, a museum dedicated to the events of the Second World War, hiding and resistance. She has now been made a Knight of the Order of Orange-Nassau.

The royal decoration was presented during a reception in Aalten's town hall by Aalten's mayor Anton Stapelkamp. The Deputy Mayor of Bocholt, Elisabeth Kroesen, and around 100 other guests from Germany and the Netherlands were also present.

Mayor Thomas Kerkhoff supported the motion to honour Brethouwer. In his statement on the royal honour, he wrote: "For many years, Gerda Brethouwer has worked across borders with the city of Bocholt with regard to the remembrance of fellow citizens of the Jewish faith in our German-Dutch border region. In particular, the project "75 Years of Peace and Freedom" at the end of the Second World War in 2020 was the start of the cross-border cooperation with the "Nationaal Onderduikmuseum" in Aalten."

### **Congratulations from Bocholt**

Deputy Mayor Elisabeth Kroesen conveyed her congratulations from Bocholt on this special honour on behalf of the council and administration. "With the peace and freedom programme that we were able to experience together with you, you have reached out to us as Germans."

Mayor Stapelkamp said that Gerda Brethouwer had made a great contribution to remembrance with her dedicated work: "She is a true Achterhoek ambassador!". Gerda Brethouwer had not only attracted volunteers to the museum, but had also built up a large network with other institutions and companies. "The connection with Germany is important to her," concluded Stapelkamp.

### **Museum with more than 30,000 visitors a year**

Many Bocholters have got to know the museum in the neighbouring Dutch city. Gerda Brethouwer has been working there since 2011 with more than 120 volunteers and six full-time employees. In the past, her cross-border commitment has raised awareness of the people who had to flee because of their faith during the Second World War and put them centre stage. Last year, more than 30,000 people visited the Aalten museum. However, Brethouwer has not only worked there, but has also researched the history of "Gut Heidefeld" in the Bocholt district of Spork. She is also in charge of the Regio Achterhoek / Liemers project "Freedom", which will run until 2025.

### **Handing over the baton to Marijke Verschoor-Boule**

Gerda Brethouwer expressed her gratitude for the prestigious award: "I would like to thank everyone who has supported me over the past few years. The cooperation with Bocholt is very important to me." Even though she will now be handing over her role as Director of the "Nationaal Onderduikmuseum" to younger hands, she will remain with the museum for the renovation work.

She will be succeeded as the new director by Marijke Verschoor-Boule from the Netherlands. She already runs the Grenzlandmuseum in Suderwick on a voluntary basis.

This year, for example, she organised the first cross-border freedom meal in Dinxperlo on 5 May with a German-Dutch team.



*Anton Stapelkamp, Mayor of the municipality of Aalten, honours Gerda Brethouwer (centre), Director of the National Onderduikmuseum Aalten, with the Dutch Order of Merit "Order of Orange-Nassau" in the presence of Elisabeth Kroesen, Deputy Mayor of Bocholt.  
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