

2005 Lawrence-Eutin High Schools Exchange

The 16th exchange between high school students in Lawrence, Kansas, and gymnasium students in Eutin, Schleswig-Holstein, took place in the summer and fall of 2005. Twelve students from Lawrence High School and Lawrence Free State High School (the highest number ever) spent five and a half weeks in Eutin. Their counterparts came to Lawrence in early September and stayed through mid-October.

For the Lawrence students there were seven monthly orientation meetings, from November to May. Many topics were covered: from packing questions, to appropriate behavior as guests in a foreign country, to the issue of homesickness. Students were also made aware of the fact that current German political perception of U.S. foreign policies is still of a very critical nature. Our final meeting before departure was a “farewell” potluck with the participating families.

As in previous years, the exchange was coordinated by Friedemann Eisert (Lawrence High School) and Stuart Strecker (Lawrence Free State High School). Friedemann Eisert escorted the students to Eutin on May 27 and also brought them back home to Lawrence on July 2. In June Edwina Eisert joined the group for two and a half weeks. Both Eiserts took the students to Berlin for an extended weekend.

The students were split between the Carl-Maria-von-Weber-Gymnasium and the Johann-Heinrich-Voß-Gymnasium. Everyone enjoyed a lovingly arranged welcome party in the Schlosspark. After initially attending classes with their German exchange partners, our students were given individualized schedules at the school they attended. Once a day there was “homeroom”: all the Lawrence students met with their Lawrence teacher(s) in one of the schools. This was easy because the two schools are in very close proximity. These “homeroom” meetings provided opportunities to discuss the students’ new and unfamiliar experiences, to help them with practical daily routines in the foreign environment, and also to plan and prepare for upcoming activities and group trips. School was in session for four weeks after the group’s arrival. During the last week in Germany many of the German host families took their American guests with them on mini-vacations, with destinations as far south as Nürnberg, Munich, and even Freiburg and the Elsass region.

Excursions included a walking tour of Eutin, a beautiful five-lakes boat trip, starting and finishing in Malente, two half-day trips to Lübeck, a full day trip to Kiel/Laboe (with a ferry ride and visit to the U-Boot and the Marine-Denkmal), and a full day trip to Hamburg (with a guided city tour, and a guided boat ride through the Speicherstadt and the harbor). As in previous years the students thought it was a must to visit the “Hamburg Dungeon”, and again they enjoyed it immensely. There were many opportunities for the American students to participate in school sports activities: they had the opportunity to participate in the Bundesjugendspiele, and many of them played in a Weber-Schule basketball tournament at the end of the school year. Another memorable

event was the participation in the annual German-American Friendship Evening, hosted by the Freunde von Lawrence in Eutin. The wonderful performance of the Lawrence Children's Choir at this year's German-American Evening helped to make our students feel especially proud of our city.

On Friday, June 10, we traveled to Berlin by bus. We stayed at a Pension near the Funkturm. The first evening we strolled from Potsdamer Platz to Brandenburger Tor and Reichstag and absorbed the spectacular sights. The recently opened Holocaust Memorial touched everyone and provided opportunity for contemplation and discussion. On the second day we walked along the Eastside Gallery and learned about the more recent history of Berlin. A brief stop at Checkpoint Charly followed. After that it was time to experience the Jüdisches Museum with its rich documentation of Berlin's Jewish history which is housed in Daniel Libeskind's irritating architectural masterpiece. The afternoon was dedicated to a visit to the Museums-Insel where we enjoyed the Pergamon-Museum with its impressively restored Pergamonaltar. An early evening visit to the Reichstag followed where the students leisurely walked up and down the spectacular spiral dome. Some free time for strolling and eating in the Arkaden mall at Potsdamer Platz rounded out the day. The third and final day began with a brief visit to the renovated Olympic Stadium (site of the 2006 soccer world cup final). Window-shopping on Kurfürstendamm, passing Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtnis-Kirche, we reached KaDeWe which provided the ultimate shopping opportunity. After that it was time to walk down to the Theater des Westens to experience an unforgettable beautiful and exciting musical performance of "Die drei Musketiere". We returned to Eutin by bus on Monday, June 13.

Berlin was the half-way highlight of the trip to Eutin. At the end of the second half, the German host families put on a farewell potluck to wish their American guests a safe trip home. There were tears but also excitement since the students knew that they would see each other again soon.

In early August the Lawrence host families met to plan the exchange's second part. The Eutin students and their accompanying teacher, Mr. Hans-Otto Viethsen, (Voß Gymnasium) arrived on Saturday, September 3, and they had their first day of school after Labor Day. A televised introduction before the City Commission and a reception were the official opening of their visit to Lawrence.

There also was a more informal welcome party at a host parents' house. In addition to attending school as fully intergrated guest students, the young people from Eutin and its surrounding towns and villages participated in many activities: homecoming parades, attending football games, an evening visit to the Campanile at The University of Kansas (where they were even allowed to try out the carillon), a day at KU (Spencer Research Library, Spencer Museum of Art, and KU Natural History Museum), and a day trip to Kansas City (Steamboat Arabia, Nelson Atkins Art Museum, and Union Station). Host parents organized a Saturday trip to the Kanza Prairie Wildlife Refuge, provided for complimentary tickets to the Renaissance Festival, they took students to KU football games and to professional soccer games in Kansas City. On Saturday, October

8, it was time to say good-bye at a farewell party. Departure for Chicago was on the next day. As in previous years, Mr. Graham Kreicker, the current chair of the Sister City Board in Lawrence, provided his expertise and served as Chicago guide for the Eutin group. They flew home on Wednesday, October 12. Several students already have announced that they will be back for private visits. True friendships have been forged.

This year again many parents approached me during the farewell party and at other occasions to let me know how happy they were that their child had the opportunity to participate in the exchange. They expressed their feeling that this is a well-organized and well-run program, and they hope that many students in future years will be able to benefit from it. Almost all Lawrence families agreed to donate their portion of this year's unspent money to the "Eutin scholarship fund".

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Friedemann Eisert
October 12, 2005

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