



PERSPEKTIVEN

PERSPEKTIVEN Volume 3, No. 3

Summer 2004



GERMAN FEST - YOUR PASSPORT TO FUN!

Photos from German Fest

Salute to German Fest's Proud Heritage

By Helga Nikolic

German Classes in Jeopardy *Cooperation a Must to Save Courses*

By John Pustejovsky
and Mark Wagner

Colleagues from around the country are astonished to learn that in the most German city in the United States only two high schools in the Milwaukee Public School district offer German: Rufus King and the Milwaukee German Immersion School.

On Milwaukee's North Shore, both Dominican High School (private) and Shorewood High School (public) have eliminated German programs.

But German programs have also been saved. That happened recently at a North Shore middle school, where a vigorous intervention by teachers, parents, and a Goethe

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Bringing together a proud heritage of tradition, hospitality and appreciation of culture and history with the basic ability to "just have fun," German Fest unfurls its colorful banners for the 24th year July 23-25 at Maier Festival Park on Milwaukee's lakefront.

German Fest probably is the most visible and graphic proof of Milwaukee's Germanic foundation, a showcase of everything that Milwaukeeans regard with affection as "typisch Deutsch" (typically German), from beer to Beethoven. Interwoven with the authentic musical entertainment and fabulous German cooking are the threads of excellence and diverse interests that a myriad of German organizations contribute to the overall fabric of the Fest: crafts, the arts, education, genealogy, literature and history are all featured.

Thirty-eight German organizations and 3,000 volunteers produce German Fest. It has evolved from a suggestion by Henry W. Maier, mayor of Milwaukee for 28 years, who remarked in the late 1970s that "it's about time the Germans join the Italians and the Polish and have a fest, too," to becoming "the largest gathering of German culture, food, music and fun in North

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**PERSPEKTIVEN**

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**From
the President**

German Fest has become such a traditional cultural event on the Midwest scene that we thought it appropriate to remind everyone just how and whence it came to be. We trust Helga Nikolic's reminder of history will help you to enjoy the occasion all the more!

We are with this issue announcing the commencement of our oral history program. We intend this to be a continuing, year-round effort to collect and preserve for future generations the richness of our culture. Come visit the Goethe House at German Fest. Record your memories and those of your forebears and receive a recording for posterity. For exact details please refer to the Oral History ad on Page 9.

We are pleased to announce the appointment of three members to our board of directors:

Manfred E. Beger, a native of Munich, comes to us from the accounting firm of Komisar, Brady & Co. His accounting and business skills will serve Goethe House well.

Lorraine Lynn Hoffmann is president of Harri Hoffmann Co. Inc. and a former vice president of Merrill Lynch in Chicago. She continues to serve on many nonprofit organizations both in Chicago and Milwaukee.

Daniel P. Hanley Jr. was a reporter and an editor for The Milwaukee Journal and the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. He is a co-editor of PERSPEKTIVEN.

Finally, don't forget to visit us at German Fest at our membership hospitality site. Join us for a refreshing Sprecher!

ALLES GUTE

ALLES GOETHE

Ted E. Wedemeyer Jr.

The Summer Menu: Kinder Kamps, German Fest, a Picnic

By Katharina Hren
Executive director

In Bloom at Goethe House! It certainly does the soul good to see everything green and blooming again!

Our first Kinder Kamp of the summer at Prairie Hill Waldorf School was led by Mechthilde Moser and was comprised of 21 children! Three more Kinder Kamps are taking place in July. The Saturday Spielgruppe concluded its third year with a visit to the zoo because we have learned a great deal about the animals in German. Zookeeper Ray Hren (my brother) took us into the elephant house for a closer look. In June our Spielgruppe had its second Kinderfest in the park to mark the conclusion of a stimulating and energizing year of activities. The Spielgruppe will resume Saturday, September 25, so if you are interested in joining, contact me personally. To watch children become enthusiastic about language is to be reminded of our greatest cultural legacies no matter what our backgrounds. My son Gustav is now 4 and has been in the Spielgruppe for the past 3 years. The first thing he tells everyone he meets is that he is a German boy!

We will have 2 tents at German Fest this year - our Computer Tent offers all sorts of quizzes to test your language skills and trivia knowledge and our Oral History Tent allows you to tell us your stories. Please stop by our hospitality area and have a toast with us, thanks to Sprecher!

After the Kinder Kamps and German Fest have ended, and it is almost time to go back to school, we will be having one last party to conclude the summer! The fourth Goethe House Kultur Cafe/Member Potluck Picnic will take place on August 21st - the Goethe House will provide Bratwurst and Kartoffelsalat at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, August 21st at Lake Park, Site 1 (near the playground, on the drive just off of Lincoln Memorial Drive)

The Goethe House Kultur Cafe welcomes Goethe House Board Members, members of Goethe House, and other German speakers or aficionados to enjoy a picnic atmosphere. Please call Goethe House (414-276-7435) to RSVP if you are interested in coming, and we will provide you with more information. Feel free to bring a special dish or beverage to share...it does not have to be German!

Summer Closings

The Goethe House will be closed July 3 & 5 (Fourth of July weekend); July 23 & 24 (German Fest); August 21



Goethe Words of Wisdom

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

In German

Wer lügen will, sagt man,
muss sich erst selbst überreden.

In English

He who wants to lie, they say,
must first convince himself.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

(Goethe House Annual Potluck Picnick); and September 4 & 6 (Labor Day Weekend).

We resume our fall adult German classes during the week of September 13th, so be sure to call or check out our web site for more details.

This fall we will showing movies every month on a Saturday (on the first Saturday if it is not a holiday) from 11:30 to 1:30 here at Goethe House...free to the public! These movies are from Germany and are unrated...and so may contain material unsuitable for children. Some of the films are subtitled; most are not. Our tentative film schedule:

Good Bye Lenin - September 18; Sonnenallee...
- October 2; Das fliegende Klassenzimmer (fuer Kinder)
- November 6; Maennerpension - December 4; Der Eisbaer - January 8; Das Leben ist eine Baustelle - February 5; Advertising Rules - March 5; Enlightenment Guaranteed - April 2; Kleine Haie - May 7; Asterix Siegfried Caesar - June 4. Please call us for more details about these films!

Liebe Grüsse, Eure Katharina

A 2004 Salute to German Fest's Proud Heritage

[Fest, from Page 1]

America," attracting up to 100,000 visitors over a three-day run.

Ken Pedersen, a Milwaukee attorney and long-time president of the German-American Societies (1974-1996), recalled his conversation with Maier, who himself was of German heritage. Pedersen said the mayor called him, asking why the largest ethnic group in the state (the Germans) still didn't have a fest. With the mayor's suggestion, the German-American Societies, comprised of over 30 clubs at the time, decided to form a committee to work on the idea. Casper Peter, president of the Technischer Verein, headed the group, which included Tony Saladi, president of the Donau Schwaben, and Walter Geissler, president of D.A.N.K.

A Year of Preparation

According to Pedersen, the committee worked for a year on a contract for the festival and set up a corporation, making German Fest a separate, money-making entity from the German-American Societies, but with essentially the same mission: to promote the German culture and heritage. As a direct result of this financial undertaking, German Fest was able to purchase its own building at 8229 W. Capitol Drive which, Pedersen said, provides a place for the German-American Societies to meet monthly.

That common thread of culture and heritage brought the clubs together in the monumental effort that produces their "Germanic showcase," although not all the clubs were convinced to participate for the opening of the first German Fest gates in 1981, Pedersen remembers.

Figuring prominently in those formative years in setting the direction for German Fest were Klaus Hippe, Walter Geissler, Heinz Scherzer, Heinz and Wilma Giese and George Weiss, who ran German Fest for 13 years. Klaus Fromme, of the Rheinischer Verein, is the current German Fest president, working with a board made up of 22 directors.

Full Support for German Fest

Today, German Fest has the full support of all the German-American Societies' clubs in the area, as well as two clubs from out-state Wisconsin, and strives to truly satisfy the cross section of enthusiastic Germans and "wannabe" Germans who attend the Fest each year. Targeting all ages as their most important "Customer," most events at German Fest cater to family-oriented interests, Reinhold Ellerman, public relations coordinator for German Fest, emphasized.



"The image of a beer-guzzling Oktoberfest is not what German Fest is about," Ellerman said. The various clubs participate in everything from food booths to folk-dance performances. "The diversity of the clubs is best shown through the parade on Saturday," Ellerman said. Bands, floats, dance groups and costumed "Karnival" groups are featured in the 2 p.m. extravaganza.

Professional entertainment, some of which comes directly from Germany specifically for German Fest, is presented on five stages throughout the grounds.

Singers Heidi and Heiko

Appearing for the first time at German Fest this year are popular German singers Heidi and Heiko, who are well known in Germany for their stage, television and radio performances of popular hits and traditional German songs.

The Stettholz Musikanten, seven Southern German musicians performing music from the Black Forest region, are back for their fourth appearance at German Fest.

A group of professional musicians from the Stuttgart-Schwaebisch Gmuend area, the Heidelberg Quartett has performed its blend of Volksmusik, oldies and pop together for 20 years.

"Crown of Folk Music" winners

From St. Oswald, Austria, Die Oswalders, a band formed in 1976, plays a wide range of music, from jazz to classical, folk music to blues. They are well known internationally and won the national "Crown of Folk Music" competition.

In addition, popular local bands and musical groups, such as Sterne der Heimat, the Austrian Express and Johnny Hoffmann & Herzbuben remain the staples of German Fest, joined by the Magnificent Performing Strings of Milwaukee, drum and bugle corps and ethnic dance groups from the Milwaukee area, among the approximately 20 entertainment groups appearing during the weekend. The "Kinder": are accommodated from

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A 2004 Salute to German Fest's Proud Heritage

[Fest, from Page 4]

creative "happenings" at "Pretzel Park" that include everything from arts and crafts to learning some German to competing in a Fairy Tale Costume Contest to marching in the Children's Parade on Sunday at 3 p.m.

This year's theme, "Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten" (The Bremen Town Musicians) will feature children dressed in costumes of their favorite character from the fairy tale. The costume contest, opened to children 5-12 years of age, precedes the parade and will award prizes for the homemade costumes most closely resembling a character.

Our Professor Umlaut

The Goethe House official greeter, "Professor Umlaut," strolls the grounds and encourages festival-goers of all ages to "denk Deutsch" and learn a little more about their heritage.

Adults look forward to lively music and dancing to it as well as viewing the cultural displays, the "Glockenspiel" live re-enactment, the "Trachtenschau," a fashion show of regional costumes, and, of course, visiting the wine-tasting and biergarten locales. And the food is the mainstay of everyone's visit, from Spanferkel to Strudel!

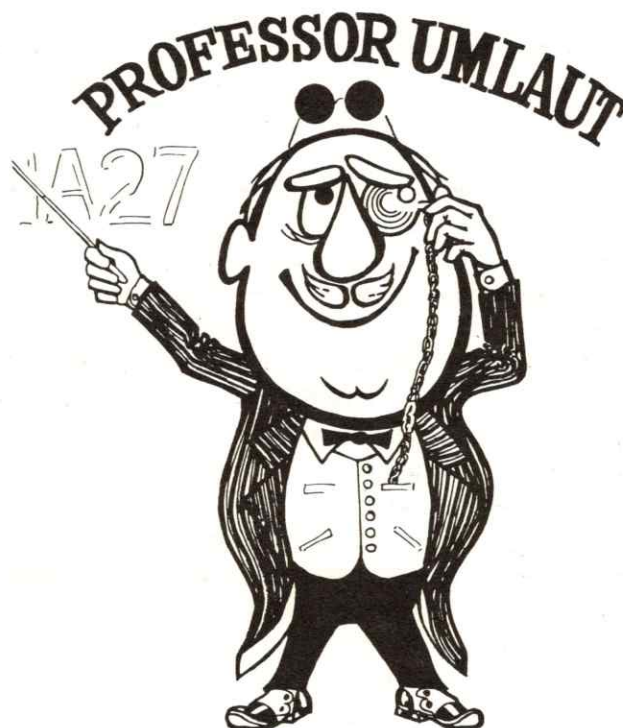
German Fest is always ready to try new things, while improving the areas people most enjoy. Ellerman, a 20-year veteran of German Fest who does most of the emceeing at the stages, recalled the event's sponsorship of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra concerts in the 1990s as a large draw. Peter Cuje, a native German and bassist with the MSO, remembers the Beethoven's Ninth Symphony concert as "fantastic" and how much the orchestra enjoyed playing those concerts. Unfortunately, conflicts in scheduling curtailed that association after a few years, but the concerts are still regarded as a highlight of the programming.

Staunch Sponsors of German Fest

The Raffle Give-away has been a popular feature for years, underwritten by staunch sponsors. This year, Ernie von Schledorn and Volkswagen of America are joined by Midwest Airlines, Weinbauer (German Fest wines) and Hinckley Springs in making raffle prizes available.

Ellerman said that in addition to free admission policies they already have in place on certain days and for certain groups, or with a charitable donation, they are offering new this year discounted tickets in conjunction with the purchase of State Fair tickets. More information is available by calling (414) 464-9444 or online at www.germanfest.com.

The enormity of an undertaking such as German Fest is daunting, even to the "largest ethnic group" in



A Tribute To Professor Umlaut

The star of the show for Goethe House of Wisconsin, since the 2001 German Fest, is our German cultural icon, Professor Umlaut. The professor has a hardy "Willkommen" for all Germans and all who wish to be German. The artistic creator of Professor Umlaut is Carl M. Ruppert.

Wisconsin. Having the vision and perseverance to bring about its evolution speaks to the traditional German characteristics of high work ethic, stubbornness, pursuit of excellence and the underlying feeling of "Gemuetlichkeit and Gastfreundschaft" - fellowship and hospitality - that Germans retain and project.

The ability to meld the diverse German groups into a single celebration of all things German should earn the respect and admiration of those whose roots are planted in their German ancestry and brought to blossom in the fruit of their labors called German Fest.

Take the time to enjoy the product!

German Classes in Jeopardy; Cooperation a Must

[German. From Page 1]

House network caught the attention of the school board and administrators. The story offers several lessons on preserving our German language and heritage in Milwaukee and Wisconsin.

The past 10 years have seen a steady decline in the number of schools in Wisconsin offering German language instruction. Deficits and spending caps imposed by the state are one reason for this. Another is the growing perception that in the future Spanish will prove more useful to younger Americans. And because German is less frequently spoken by Wisconsinites of German ancestry, descendants of even recent immigrants are less motivated to learn the language.

A Fraying Link

The link between children and the cultural heritage of parents and grandparents is fraying. Ironically, recent legislation requiring foreign language instruction in the middle schools has also worked against German. Many schools have complied by offering only one language (often Spanish), or by pitting German and French against each other to be the second.

There are ripple effects as well. In the past students entering high school without exposure to a language would likely consider their own heritage when choosing a language. Now they are more likely to stick with whatever language was offered in middle school. These factors have produced a crisis of sorts for German learning in the state.

School Faced Tough Decisions

Yet the recent experience at this suburban Milwaukee middle school points out that it is possible to buck this trend. Caught between declining enrollments and declining revenues, the school faced tough decisions. Up to now it had offered French, German and Spanish. In sixth grade, students were exposed to all three languages, then chose one for seventh and eighth grades. These two years of middle school instruction allowed many students to place into a higher level upon entering high school.

But offering three languages meant keeping three foreign language teachers on part-time contracts. Teacher retention was an issue, and spelled a threat for the German program. As a committee of teachers, parents and community members considered solutions, it was rumored that one possibility might be to cut German. Hearing this, the German teachers from middle school and the high school came up with a two-pronged response:

■ Detail the success of German students, both while in the middle school and later in high school. Edited into a simple flyer headed "A Record of Student Success," the accomplishments of individual students were organized to demonstrate that the middle school's German students achieve high academic success; that German learned in the school is put to work in real situations; that German students take leadership roles, and are recognized for excellence nationally and beyond.

The effect was to portray the success of the German program in terms of its individual students, and the benefits of German in their education beyond middle school. The flyer was circulated to school board members, parents, and community supporters of German. The coalition to save German had started with the parents of the children in middle school, as well as high school students and alumni.

■ Call for help from beyond the district, through a broad network of individuals and organizations committed to German. Contact with Goethe House produced action by its Academic Advisory Committee, a unique group representing eight Wisconsin colleges and universities, as well as high schools, business, the Wisconsin chapter of the American Association of Teachers of German (AATG), and liaisons to important German-American organizations. Informed of the danger facing the middle school program, members wrote letters to school board members, contacted other teachers and interested parties, and prepared to attend the school board meeting in person.

Speaking on Behalf of German Program

When the board convened, no one expected the nearly sixty people who crowded into the meeting room, all ready to speak out on behalf of the middle school German program. The show of support was impressive, and in the weeks that followed, the phone calls and letters continued, coming even from state legislators who had been contacted by Goethe House. School administrators, working with a committee of parents and teachers, have found a way to cover the deficit without sacrificing German. The program is safe for now.

What made this modest success possible?

The fact that the middle school and high school teachers focused on their students' success underscored the German program's contribution to the district's larger goals. It was also important that the teachers reached out

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German Classes in Jeopardy; Cooperation a Must

[German, from Page 6]

beyond their district in gathering support: letters from college faculty, German-American organizations, and business leaders reinforce the fact that German in the schools benefits far more people than just those who teach it. But, as the Academic Advisory Committee noted in its June meeting, this whole effort was reactive.

What, members asked, can we do that is pro-active?

Some suggestions surfaced immediately. Those of us committed to keeping German in schools need to know the people who teach the language, and support them. We need to encourage them to belong to Goethe House, and to build ties with others interested in German - not just other teachers. It certainly helped that three of the people involved here had been part of the AATG leadership program called TraiNDaf, the American Association of Teachers of German initiative to train a cadre of German teachers and professors to deal with challenges facing German in the 21st century. We need to help teachers recognize their students' success, whether by writing a note to students who win German Day competitions and scholarships, or by seeing to it that the success of German students finds its way into local newspapers. The members of the committee have begun to take the advocacy information found in the AATG's Werbemappe and give it local detail - Wisconsin students who have succeeded because of their German studies, Wisconsin firms doing business in Germany, the German heritage of Wisconsin, still the nation's most German state.

It took scores of phone calls, dozens of e-mails, letters, and conversations to hold on to German in this one school. One might conclude that the job of holding on to German state-wide is simply too big. But the effort in

Milwaukee's North Shore pointed out two things very clearly:

■ Simply saying that a lot of people support having German in schools isn't sufficient. The number of supporters only matters if each of them makes a call, writes a letter, contacts someone who knows someone who also knows someone.

■ A broad network will lend its support if only the human contacts are already prepared.

Beginning this month, German teachers at all levels (K-12 and university), in public and private institutions are eligible for one-year free Goethe House membership. Simply send a letter describing your position on your school or university letterhead to:

Membership and Records
Goethe House of Wisconsin
814 West Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53233

Be sure to include your email address! If you're attending German Fest July 23-26, you may present the letter at the Goethe House membership table, and then enjoy the hospitality of Sprecher Brewery, open only to Goethe House members!

John Pustejovsky is associate professor of German at Marquette University and chair of the Goethe House Academic Advisory Committee. Mark Wagner teaches German at Nicolet High School in Glendale, Wisconsin.

For a copy of the Student Success fact sheet, contact:

John Pustejovsky@Marquette.edu

CLIP AND USE COUPON BELOW

Another benefit of Goethe House membership!

DISCOUNT COUPON

Goethe House members receive a 10% discount on any lunch or dinner entrée.

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THE IMPRESSIVE GERMAN RESTAURANT



Goethe House Has German Class for MSOE



The Goethe House Beginning German Class at the Milwaukee School of Engineering:
Back row, (from left) Shaun Kazuck, Christopher von Sande, Jonathan Stallings, Steven Turner. Middle row, Gary Cheung, Mary Barber, Aisha Kitcher, Ryan Mattek, Dr. Samuel Scheibler (instructor), Samis Abdeljawwad. Front row, Lindsey Heinrich, Jesse Vogt.

Cooperation between Goethe House of Wisconsin and the Milwaukee School of Engineering is a natural, fraternal partnership.

Modeled on the Mittweida Technikum (East Prussia), MSOE has retained its German-American roots through over a century of internationally recognized development. One manifestation of this commitment to heritage is a joint degree program between MSOE and the Fach Hochschule (Technical University) in Lübeck (Schleswig-Holstein). This unique exchange allows students from both institutions to earn dual degrees (an American Bachelor of Science and a German Diplom) through a year of study on the sister campus.

While courses in Lübeck are taught in English, German language instruction is an essential core of the curriculum. This spring and summer Goethe House is assisting students planning to attend the Fach Hochschule Lübeck in September with two eight-week classes in Beginning German with a special emphasis on technical and classroom vocabulary. In August, a special, intensive session in German for Business will be offered. Dr. Samuel Scheibler, a member of Goethe House board of directors, is directing the program. Goethe House members will have an opportunity to meet our MSOE students as all of them have volunteered to help with the Goethe House Pavilion at German Fest.



Members of the MSOE German class pose in front of statues of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller in Washington Park, Milwaukee.



"Ich erinnere mich an..."

"I remember when..."

The Wisconsin Oral History Project®

**A CULTURAL HERITAGE
PROGRAM OF GOETHE
HOUSE OF WISCONSIN**

**Creating an enduring record
of the rich and powerful
personal memories of Wis-
consin's German and Ger-
man-American citizens.**

Become a part of living history...

Oral history is a method of gathering and preserving historical information through recorded interviews with those whose memories are living records of our past.

Simple stories about times past provide unique and dynamic insights into our shared history.

Even those who do not feel that their personal stories have intersected the great events of the past can provide an invaluable resource in preserving accounts of earlier ways of life.

Our trained staff will encourage the recounting of memories in a quiet, comfortable environment equipped for digital recording.

For a donation of eight dollars, each session of twenty to thirty minutes will produce two compact disks – one for the participants to share with their families and one for the permanent archive of the Wisconsin Oral History Project.

The Wisconsin Oral History Project begins with German Fest 2004 in the Goethe House pavilion at the Maier Festival Grounds.

To pre-register for a recording session during German Fest, please call Goethe House (414) 276-7435

An Immigrant's Journey from East Prussia to the USA

By Jason Scheibler

One hundred sixty-six years ago, Ralph Waldo Emerson delivered one of his most moving public addresses. While focused upon college graduates in 19th century New England, Emerson might have been speaking presciently about the life of a remarkable German-American, who now is settled in Milwaukee.

History remembers Emerson's speech under the titular phrase "A Life Passed Through the Fire." Businessman Burkhard K's personal history might be remembered under the same descriptive title and his story contains far more drama than a single line from a commencement oration.

Burkhard's story begins in the lovely medieval city of Tilsit on the banks of the Memel in East Prussia. At the age of 6, the world he had known came to a crashing end. By late 1944 Tilsit was engulfed by the tide of World War II in Europe.

Avoids Russian Strafing

Burkhard recalls narrowly avoiding Russian strafing operations on more than one occasion. As he recounts "they attacked Prussian cities at will; East Prussia was a shooting gallery for the Russians... I luckily escaped the hail of bullets numerous times." Attending school became increasingly difficult so Burkhard spent his days with his grandmother who managed Tilsit's Botanical Gardens.

(Editor's note: Jason Scheibler has written the story of an immigrant's journey from East Prussia to Wisconsin. While sharing this compelling, real life drama, the subject of the story asked to be identified only as Burkhard K. to preserve his privacy.)

Advance of Russian "Shock Troops"

What Burkhard's family saw of the advancing Russian "shock troops" was enough to convince them to flee their home. The Soviet Army "lacked any civility...they were uneducated." They committed horrendous atrocities against the women and children of East Prussia with such frequency that "people just got used to it...it was horrific." Having tasted the cruelty of Stalin's Army, Burkhard's family began their long, harrowing journey away from their homeland.

Burkhard describes his memories as partly his own recollection and partly what he was told about their escape. The family left Tilsit in January of 1945 without his father who was in the German army, and as he learned

later, was a prisoner of war by the British. Carrying everything they could and leaving almost everything behind, young Burkhard, his mother, grandmother and sister began their escape from East Prussia by train.

They moved from train to bus and from bus to wagon. They were assisted along the way by local farmers, and eventually boarded another train destined for Dresden. Hearing Burkhard describe the journey inspires simultaneously a sense of revulsion and inspiration. He describes the journey as an exercise in Darwinian "survival of the fittest." The survivors were those who could "walk or crawl." Some like Burkhard's family were fortunate to find some generous person willing to provide transportation along the way.

Family Reaches Dresden

Burkhard's family survived to reach Dresden together, although many others died attempting the same route. In the midst of this horror, Burkhard recalls his family's determination to triumph: "We were always going, we were never stuck, we always knew we were going to keep on going."

Burkhard's train arrived in Dresden on February 13, 1945 filled to capacity with refugees. It is believed that 200,000 refugees were in Dresden that night, adding one third of the city's population of 630,000. With its grand size and central location, the Dresden Hauptbahnhof served as the nexus for refugees fleeing west and as the hub for German troop transport to the eastern front. With such a large influx of German soldiers and refugees moving in opposite directions, combat priorities left refugees stranded in the Hauptbahnhof on the evening of February 13. Army trains were given priority while refugee trains waited on the tracks.

Bombing of Dresden Begins

At 11:00 PM, suddenly, and without warning, the combined U.S. Army Air Force and British Royal Air Force began bombing Dresden. For the next three days 1,300 Allied warplanes continued a non-stop, aerial incendiary bombardment of the "Florence of the North." Over 70 per cent of the city was reduced to smoldering rubble and between 35,000 and 135,000 inhabitants and refugees were killed in the firestorm created by conditions one historian has called "the devil's tinderbox."

Burkhard recalls being trapped in the basement under the tracks where restroom facilities were located.

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An Immigrant's Journey from East Prussia to the USA

[Dresden, from Page 10]

This crowded, subterranean area had partially filled with water perhaps saving him and his family.

"We were in there like sardines."

Some 50,000 to 60,000 people filled the train station at the time of the attack. Of those who survived the firestorm, many were trampled to death seeking safety, although no place was really safe. The nightmare of the Dresden fire storm was the combined lethal force that killed by heat and asphyxiation. In the chaos, Burkhard, like many other children, was separated from his family. He recalls being in shock, but never afraid. "People made it known to me that they would take care of me." And he remembers a sense of hope born in the struggle to survive, "a situation like that, as hopeless as it is, there is always a ray of sunshine, that some good soul takes upon themselves to look out for you...Maybe that's the last thing they will ever do in there life. They may be dead in the next few minutes, but they have compassion with you, pity on each other."

In the aftermath of the city's destruction the German Red Cross immediately organized an effort to reunite children with their parents. Each refugee child was given a name tag with name and address and within two days they had managed to deliver Burkhard to his mother.

Grateful to be Together

Burkhard never recalls the family discussing their experience at Dresden. "I think we were all just very silent about it, just grateful that we were together, and we survived and that we could continue living. We were in shock, but we had been under siege for quite a few years so we got used to the idea that this was war."

The attack did wear on the mind and emotions of the young East Prussian refugee; as Burkhard admits he began to stutter severely after the Dresden bombing.

Shortly after the attack Burkhard's family settled in the Thuringen town of Seibitz. In Seibitz they were reunited with Burkhard's father who had been released as a British prisoner of war.

They felt profound joy at their good fortune in being back together and finding refuge in the American Sector of Occupation. Their fortunes, however, changed only a few months later. In accordance with the yet-unpublished Allied agreements at Potsdam, Thuringen was to be under Russian control. One morning the U.S. forces pulled out of the area to be replaced later in the day by Soviets. "The Silver Star was replaced by the Red Star," Burkhard recounts.

(The Summer, 2002, issue of PERSPEKTIVEN told the first-person story of Rolf Wlasak, a native of Dresden, Germany, and a soldier in the German Army in World War II, who was a U.S. prisoner of war interned in Hartford, Wisconsin, in February 1945 when he learned of the destruction of his hometown while operating a film projector at the POW camp. It was "movie night" and a news reel was shown first. The news reel showed the Dresden bombing and the shock of seeing that, Wlasak recalled, caused him to begin crying and he had to halt the projector.)

For the second time in less than a year the family began making plans to flee the Soviets. On a foggy morning in the spring of 1946 the family met a guide whom Burkhard's father had arranged to move the family across "the creek", the Russian Zone border, from Seibitz to Neila about fifteen miles inside the American Zone.

Burkhard takes English Lessons

The family remained in Neila for the next six years. During this time Burkhard's sister married an American soldier and Burkhard continued his education. He took English lessons both privately and at school and he passed his time visiting the nearby U.S. Government House. He practiced his English with the soldiers and read American publications like Time, Life and Post magazines.

In the winter of 1952, Burkhard's parents made arrangements to relocate to the U.S. Germany was still struggling to recover politically and economically from the war and the family missed Burkhard's sister who had moved to Green Bay with her husband. Aboard the SS America, Burkhard, his parents and grandmother made the six day voyage arriving in New York in late January. Burkhard's increasing fluency in English made him the family interpreter for their journey.

From New York they traveled by train to Milwaukee with stops in Buffalo and Chicago. The stop in Buffalo holds fond memories for Burkhard. They had a five hour lay-over and an American, seeing the family waiting, began asking Burkhard questions. When the man learned they had such a long wait before their connection he offered to show them the Niagara Falls. Having never heard of Niagara Falls, but trusting Americans, the family

[Please turn to Dresden, Page 12]

An Immigrant's Journey from East Prussia to the USA

[Dresden, from Page 11]

agreed to go and Burkhard got his first glimpse of American life. The generosity of Americans that he first saw in the U.S. soldiers in Neila, and found in this kind stranger in Buffalo, nurtured Burkhard's tremendous admiration for the United States.

Burkhard recalls starting school the day after they arrived in Green Bay. Having only been in the United States for a couple of weeks and at his new school for one week, he was so surprised to receive Valentine's Day cards from his classmates. While he humbly admits that he was a handsome young man, he believes there was more to the Valentine's cards. They were a testimony to the kindness, sincerity and generosity that are a hallmark of Americans. Within no time, as if "miraculously," Burkhard's stuttering ceased.

Having passed "through the fire" on his journey from Tilsit, Burkhard is thankful for the wonderful life he has enjoyed in Wisconsin. With a beaming smile, he says: "I am very happy to be an American, this is a fabulous country."

Goethe House of Wisconsin is a non-profit German-American cultural institute serving Wisconsin since 1958.

Our mission is to serve as a statewide resource for information about the past and present culture of all German-speaking people - especially those in the Federal Republic of Germany.


Goethe House of Wisconsin invites the financial support of individuals, companies and organizations who share our mission and recognize the value of this important cultural exchange. Goethe House of Wisconsin is a not-for-profit (501) (c) (3) organization.

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German is a Saving Grace for College Student

By Kathleen Dolan

My alarm goes off at 8:30 in the morning. It's Saturday, and I'm a college student. Not exactly the time when I want to rise and shine.

But today is playgroup at the Goethe House of Wisconsin, the German-American Cultural Institute, and I have to be ready to greet the families, answer the voice mails, corral children (mostly the under-3 crowd) and help set up and clean up the activities for the day.

Did I mention that it's all in German?

During my junior year of college, I had the opportunity to study abroad in Salzburg, Austria, and to live with a host family while I was there. It had been about three years since I spoke German at all, but I wanted to go and give it a try.

Austria was beautiful, my host family was wonderful, and my German was awful. But, after a few weeks of class time and conversation, it gradually came back to me. Soon I could shop, order food in restaurants, and make jokes here and there.

And during travel to Eastern Europe and several other countries, German provided saving grace more than once. Somewhere in the Czech Republic, my train was delayed and there was a chance I would spend a winter's night at a run-down station with no indoor areas and no—ahem—facilities to speak of. Thankfully, one person on the train—who spoke no English—was able to give me fair warning of the situation, and used her cell phone to find the train connection and departure platform. It was only when I had barely stepped on board and the train started pulling away that I thought about how helpful German had been.

There were other times when I was asked, "What do you think of President Bush?" or "How do Americans feel about the environment?" or even, "Can you help me find my way?" and I was able to communicate very important information. German isn't just something to do for fun, but a common language used by thousands of people. Since then, there have been many times when I've

met German-speakers in the U.S. and been able to return the favor.

We're being told that "everybody" in the world wants to speak English and we don't need to learn other languages. But I've found the opposite to be true. More than ever, we owe it to ourselves and others to be global citizens, to learn more about other cultures, and to have great respect for those who speak another language. Even though the world is "getting smaller," language - any language - is a powerful tool. It opens doors to new adventures, new friendships, and new ways of thinking.

After spending a semester in Austria, I didn't want to let my skills fade away. I searched for an internship that would let me continue to speak German, and eventually found the Goethe House. I lived in Milwaukee for three years before I knew it existed, and I wish I had found it sooner.

As an affiliate of the Goethe Institut worldwide, Goethe House offers top-quality language classes, special events, summer Kinder Kamps, subscriptions to news publications, conversation group, new movies, and language-learning tools for any level.

And, as you probably guessed from my opening paragraph, it has a weekly playgroup of German-speaking families.

As soon as I started helping out, I found more and more ways to be involved not only with German, but lots of other cultural groups around the city.

I did some writing and reviewing, heard about new restaurants and shops, talked to people I never knew were German-speakers and even read more about world events. And every Saturday, while many other college students slept until noon, I went to playgroup.

And I couldn't have been happier.

**Kathleen Dolan is a Spring 2004
graduate of Alverno College,
Milwaukee**

Goethe House of Wisconsin

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At Fasching, the Mullers Are Ready to Dance

By Dan Bruskiwitz

The Muller Fasching Verein Nordamerika, Inc., or Mullers for short, are an ethnic dance group with roots in Tyrolean folklore.

The Mullers are a non-profit organization founded on January 23, 1996, in Germantown, Wisconsin. The dance performed comes from the tiny village of Rum, near the city of Innsbruck, in the mountains of Tyrol, Austria.

This dance is only performed during the season of Fasching (Mardi Gras). Fasching begins on the feast of the Epiphany (January 6th), and runs through midnight on Fasching Dienstag (Fat Tuesday), at which time Lent begins, and all celebration ends.

As our legend goes, hundreds of years ago in Rum, the winter season had been a period of little work. The few animals they had were fed quickly, the farm chores were few, and the weather kept most families indoors. Folks would sit around the fire and wait for spring to arrive. Sitting around the fire on long winter nights would cause many to spin a spooky story, or a legend or two.



"Hex"

This is how the seasons, and the Mullers, came to life. The Mullers have many different characters that perform. Each character has a particular meaning.

The "Hex" is an old scary witch, who "sweeps" her way through with her broom to make way for the rest of the characters.

The "Halbweissen" represents the longing for spring, bringing light and youth.

The "Melcher", with his short lederhosen and sleeves, dancing the "Schuhplattler", which recreates the mating dance of the Auerhahn (an alpine grouse), represents the life and energy of summer.

The "Spiegeltuxer", who is a special version of the Melcher, commands the center of the whole



"Halbweissen"

performance. With a large mirror on his towering headdress, he frightens away the spirits of evil.

The "Zaggeler" represents the slowing down and aging of autumn, projecting friendliness, yet still strong.

The "Zottler", who wears a terrifying mask, bright costume, and dances wildly, personifies the unpredictable winter season.

Other characters accompany the Mullers at times, such as the Baer (Bear), Kloetzler (Woodman), and Kasermandl (Alpine Yeti).

The steps, movements, and sounds made by the characters are based upon the habits and courtship of wild animals. The highlight of any performance is when the Zottler performs the "Frosch" (Frog).

The "Mullerschlag" (Muller slap) is a vital part of the Muller performance. Nothing more than a slap on the back for one of the characters, this was originally done to impart well wishes of fertility to the recipient. Today, it is done as an "honorable" greeting, or for good luck. The Mullerschlag is never given out randomly; rather it is considered an honor to receive one.

The Mullers perform at selected events during the Fasching season. Some of the events previously attended are the Milwaukee Spielmannzug Gala Masquerade Ball, the D.A.N.K. Mardi Gras Ball, the Rheinische Verein Milwaukee, and Chicago Gala Masquerade Ball, and the Bavarian Soccer Club Faschingsball.

**For more information on the Mullers,
contact President Rodney Raasch
at (414) 358-1974.**

**The Mullers website address is:
www.muller-fasching.org**