

Youth Exchange
Arrowhead Park High Schools/Las Cruces/USA
Albert-Schweitzer-Schule/Nienburg/Germany

This school year marks the 30th anniversary of the youth exchange between Albert-Schweitzer-Schule (ASS) in Nienburg/Germany and high schools in Las Cruces. For 20+ years, it was running strong between ASS and Mayfield High School (MHS). In 2012, it moved to Centennial High School and finally in 2016/17 to Arrowhead Park High Schools (APHS). It is now taking place within the framework of the German American Partnership Program (GAPP) and the Las Cruces-Nienburg Sister Cities Affiliation. (The Las Cruces-Nienburg partnership started in 1993 through the student exchange between ASS and MHS.)



APHS students and sponsors getting ready for the visit of their German exchange students (APHS photo)

An ASS group of 16 students and 2 adults arrived in Las Cruces on September 20. For close to 3 weeks, the students were hosted by APHS families; teacher Thomas Volkhausen by APHS Dean of Students Joshua Silver; and principal Ralf Weghöft by Nienburg Affiliation Vice Chair Erda Hillmann. The ASS guests attended school, gave presentations about German life to APHS classes, and learned about American life through their host families and many excursions. APHS-GAPP sponsors Tracie Bennett and Jeffrey Johnson coordinated school related activities; Nienburg Affiliation members Ingrid Luchini and Jodi Richardson organized some in-school activities and all field trips – preparation and reservations had started months before the events. Host parents and Nienburg Affiliation members provided transportation for many excursions.



"Welcome to Arrowhead – Willkommen zu Arrowhead" - ASS students and sponsors (APHS photo)

A big, tasty Welcome Breakfast, courtesy of the Nienburg Affiliation, was put together in the APHS Cafeteria on 9-21 by Jodi Richardson and Kathy Hester from the BakeHouse. A student-guided tour through the Arrowhead Park Early College High School and the Arrowhead Park Medical Academy followed. A little later, Nienburg Affiliation Chair Werner Lehmann and Erda Hillmann welcomed the ASS guests and presented everyone with a gift.

On Sunday, 9-25, the Germans and their hosts gathered at White Sands National Monument. The students learned about the geology, flora and fauna from the exhibits at the Visitor Center and from a ranger presentation. Naturally there were also a picnic and fun in the dunes, always a highlight for visitors from Germany. They love the white sand that reminds them of the white beaches on the North See and frequently ask: "Now – where's the water?"



White Sands Spaß = fun (Volkhausen photo)

On 9-28, a Border Patrol Canine Handler came to class with his German Shepard Tara, gave an interesting presentation, and took questions from the Nienburg guests. To the great astonishment of everyone, Tara's commands were given in German, one reason being that she was trained in Germany, another one that smugglers along the south-western border usually don't speak German and therefore can't interfere with handlers' commands.

A day later, the Germans were off to the New Mexico State Police local headquarters on Sonoma Ranch Boulevard where they enjoyed an intriguing tour. This was followed by a spectacular performance of Ballet Folklorico, Mariachi and Conjunto Music and an enthusiastic welcome at La Academia Dolores Huerta Middle School.

On 9-30, Erda Hillmann hosted a great Welcome Party for German and American exchange teachers, organizers, and Las Cruces Sister Cities representatives with many delicious foods, beverages, and good conversation.



BMX Spaß! (Weghöft photo)

Our visitors from Las Cruces' German sister city were recognized on 10-3 during the regular Las Cruces City Council meeting, and each received a bag with goodies, including T-shirts and beanie hats sporting the Las Cruces logo. Las Cruces Sister Cities Foundation President Noreen Lehman gave background information to the city councilors on Las Cruces's two sister cities, Nienburg/Germany and Lerdo/Mexico; Werner Lehman explained about the Las Cruces-Nienburg sister cities relationship.



Our Nienburg guests with Werner and Noreen Lehman in front of City Hall (Volkhausen photo)

On 10-4, it was off on an exciting day trip to City of Rocks and Faywood Hot Springs. The Nienburg Affiliation took care of all usage fees and generously financed a big, healthy picnic lunch. The students thoroughly enjoyed an educational ranger-led walk through the area; then they happily hiked and climbed among the huge boulders. Later on, they marveled at the springs, but not everyone was courageous enough for a long soaking in the hot water.



City of Rocks under a blue sky (Richardson photo)

The Germans learned about the important role that agriculture and ranching plays while visiting the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum on 10-5.

A day later, which was German-American day in the US, there was already the school farewell for our German visitors because fall break started on Friday, 10-7. That morning, a group of APHS and ASS students went on an invigorating hike to Dripping Springs; at night 42 American and German exchange students and chaperones enjoyed “Rock & Bowl” at 10 Pin Alley thanks to the Nienburg Affiliation, which picked up the tab.

Before we knew it, there was the Farewell Party on 10-8 coordinated by host parents; quite a few tears were shed because a wonderful time seemed to have come to an end. Actually, the event was called “Auf Wiedersehen (= see you again) Party” because 13 APHS students and their sponsors, Tracie Bennett and Jeffrey Johnson, will travel to Germany in May 2017 just after the end of the school year. They will spend 3 weeks in Germany, attend Albert-Schweitzer-Schule, live in host families, and explore Nienburg as well as the surrounding area and some major northern German cities. The students are currently enrolled in Oklahoma State University’s GermanOnline and practice their conversation skills in an additional class, “Deutsche Konversation”, which meets every Wednesday before school.



Albert-Schweitzer-Schule from across the moat