

This past May and June, twelve Arrowhead Park High School (APHS) students and two teachers spent three weeks with host families and attended Albert-Schweitzer-Schule (ASS) in Nienburg/Weser, which is Las Cruces' German sister city. They returned last fall's visit of sixteen students, a teacher and the principal of their German partner school. This youth exchange, in its 30<sup>th</sup> year between ASS and high schools in Las Cruces, is now taking place within the framework of the German American Partnership Program (GAPP) and the Las Cruces-Nienburg Sister Cities Affiliation. The following report was written by **Marina Moore**, one of seven APHS students who received travel scholarships from the Nienburg Affiliation and Friends of the German Language.

## Letter from Liebenau and Nienburg, Germany



*Marina Moore and Merle Brüggemann (right)      “Fachwerk” (wooden beam construction) houses in downtown Nienburg*

In a brief meeting just before the departure, our advisors instructed us that it is rude to be late and use too much water (long showers are a no-no), and that neat appearances are important. Being constantly late and taking notoriously long showers I knew that I was already seriously handicapped in the three important areas, so I was determined to make up for it in appearance. I carefully folded every jean, sweater, and t-shirt that I had in my closet in addition to the most sophisticated makeup Target carried and was genuinely surprised when I was told my luggage was 7 pounds over the weight limit. As I found out later, the students at Albert-Schweitzer-Schule (ASS) were not too concerned with their variety of makeup or clothing. They were too busy studying.



*Downtown Nienburg*



*On the Weser river*

This year, classes at our German school lasted close to the end of June. We were there in what would be considered the final weeks of the school year. Of my ten days of school I went to a variety of classes that were offered to the students. The most intriguing of the classes was chemistry. The class was structured in a way that the lecture would be done during the first part of the class and the experiment in the second half. Because the lab and the class were held in the same lesson and the same room, all the lab equipment was stored in the classroom. The first time the students began to assemble their lab equipment in front of us, we took notice of some hazards present. Things like wooden test tube holders and sketchy Bunsen burners were enough to make us wonder how the school hasn't been burned down yet. However, the experiment was a lot of fun and everybody seemed to enjoy it. Another class we attended was math class in which they were learning calculus, a class that isn't required for high school graduation in the States. I sat down feeling calm and confident until the teacher whipped out a worksheet that contained word problems. Which left me with TWO codes to decipher. That was a rough class to say the least. I was shocked to see a lack of laptops, smart boards and other forms of technology that are deemed 'necessary' for teaching in the US. The classes did not have a separate lab or sophisticated equipment, yet my German classmates studied advanced concepts in every subject and everybody was fluent in at least two languages. My host Merle, for example, besides being fluent in English, also studies Spanish and French.

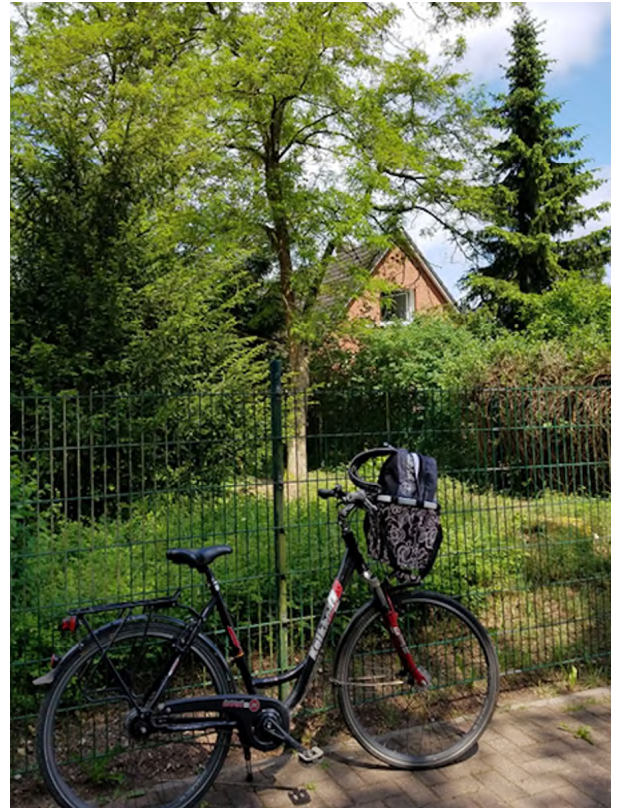


*Surprising architecture*

Taken back by the thought of the school cafeteria food in the States, I was dreading lunch. Walking into the ASS cafeteria for a snack, I was envisioning half baked pizza, cold hot dogs, prematurely picked fruit and a sad, limp salad. I was pleasantly surprised to be greeted with a variety of fresh sandwiches, and baked bread and butter topped with tomatoes, mozzarella cheese and seasoning for a total of close to 1 euro (including their delicious coffee). I found out from the staff that the bread used for sandwiches and baked breads are donated (fresh) daily by a local baker. Later I found out that all the people who work in the cafeteria are volunteer parents; no wonder the food looked and tasted so delicious! Let's just say I was the one who was 7 pounds heavier flying back to the States:).

To give you an idea of the beauty of Nienburg and the area, you need to imagine yourself on the set of the latest Beauty and the Beast movie, in Belle's village. I felt as if I went to sleep and woke up in the middle of a fairytale village, with the picturesque houses, little chocolate shops, and cute bakeries. I felt like Belle walking on the cobble stone streets through the farmers' market. I was hoping to get lost and never find my way back.





*Bikes -- a favorite means of transportation*

As a part of the exchange program I had an opportunity to travel all over Northern Germany. We went to Hannover, Hamburg, Bremerhaven, and Berlin. Hannover boasts one of the largest modern shopping centers in Germany and even though Calvin Klein, Hollister and Abercrombie and Fitch stores were calling my name, none of them compared to the town hall and a 13<sup>th</sup> century church that we visited. My day visit to Hamburg with my host family was amazing as well. I found out that a large majority of the occupants of Hamburg are very well off after I saw a Maserati and a Lamborghini drive by me casually while we were on our way to the boat tour in the Hamburg harbor. The Hamburg Elbphilharmonie is one of the most amazing buildings I've ever seen. It stands as one of the tallest buildings in Hamburg and houses several multimillion-dollar flats and a hotel in addition to the concert hall.



*Elbphilharmonie (concert hall) and Hamburg harbor*



*Bremerhaven dock*



The highlight of our trip to Bremerhaven was the tour of the Emigration Museum, which features realistic exhibits of the conditions on boats from Germany to North and South America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Our group's stay in Berlin was 4 days long. We traveled all around the city (unintentionally when we got lost a few times). We visited the Holocaust Memorial, Checkpoint Charlie, Charlottenburg Schloss, Reichstag, Bundestag (the newer Parliament building), the Espionage Museum, and the Berlin Mall. The most intriguing characteristic of Berlin is the gradual degradation of infrastructure from West to East.



*My host family and I (on the right) with Elle in front*

Most of my stay in Germany involved spending time with Merle Brüggemann (my host student) and her family who were generous enough to let me live with them in the village of Liebenau (and eat most of their bread) for almost three weeks. Each day Heike (my host mother) would greet me with a smile, freshly brewed coffee and scrambled eggs. Before I left, she would ask me if there was anything particular that I would want to eat when we got back from school. I realized quickly that there was no need to be picky because she was an exceptional cook and everything she made was wonderful! Knut (my host dad) is no stranger to the GAPP exchange. He was a part of the first group of students that traveled from Nienburg to Las Cruces in April 1987. He enjoyed his three-week stay with the Perry family. Their group visited famous landmarks in the area such as White Sands, Trinity Site and traveled up north as far as the Grand Canyon. He said that if there was one time of his life he would relive, it would be his three-week stay in our area. I learned that we shared a common love for New Mexico's salsa and sunny weather.

I loved every moment of my trip to Germany and am happy to have experienced the culture through full immersion. The GAPP exchange has been a great eye opener for many members of our group. I would like to thank everybody who made this trip possible, especially the Las Cruces-Nienburg Sister Cities Affiliation, Arrowhead Park HS teachers Tracy Bennett and Jeffrey Johnson, Albert-Schweitzer-Schule teacher Thomas Volkhausen and principal Dr. Ralf Weghöft, the Brüggemann family, and my parents. Most importantly, I would like to thank Frau Ingrid Luchini for all the effort she put into teaching German to eight sleepy students every Wednesday morning before school during two semesters. I hope this exchange program will continue for the benefit of students from both Arrowhead Park HS and Albert-Schweitzer-Schule. DANKE!



*Martins-Kirche (St. Martin's Church)*