

Long-lasting Friendships -- Reaching Out and Staying Connected Across the Ocean

(Editor's note) The Las Cruces-Nienburg/Germany Sister Cities Affiliation and the German American Partnership Program (GAPP) youth exchange at Arrowhead Park Early College High School (APECHS) and Arrowhead Park Medical Academy (APMA) are looking forward to an eventful fall with the September 22 arrival of 18 GAPP students and 2 teachers from their German partner school, Albert-Schweitzer-Schule/Nienburg. A week later, an official delegation from the city of Nienburg will come to Las Cruces to help celebrate the 25th anniversary of our sister cities relationship that developed from the GAPP youth exchange.

The GAPP exchange between high schools in Las Cruces and Albert-Schweitzer-Schule in Nienburg/Germany is now in its 31st year. German instructor Ingrid Luchini introduced it to Mayfield High School (MHS) in the 1986/87 school year and sponsored it for the last 15 of her 30 years at MHS. Her colleague Hermann Martens started the exchange on the German side, had the idea of a partnership between the two cities, and has remained a great friend ever since. The following MHS German teachers continued the successful program for several more years. With the help of a former MHS student and Jodi Richardson, who has worn many hats for many years organizing exchanges and is the chairperson for this year's 25th Las Cruces/Nienburg Sister Cities Anniversary Celebration, the GAPP was transferred to then brand-new Centennial High School, which welcomed Nienburg students in the fall of 2012 and 2014. A year later, the program went to APECHS and APMA where it's now in its second exchange cycle, with German students visiting for 3 weeks in the fall and American students returning the visit after the school year ends in May. The current GAPP sponsors at Arrowhead are teachers Jeffrey Johnson and Tamara Miller-Dwake. Representatives of Las Cruces-Nienburg Sister Cities continue to assist with coordinating the exchange.

Both the GAPP student exchange and exchanges through Las Cruces-Nienburg Sister Cities have led to many long-lasting friendships across the ocean. The experiences of Knut Brüggemann and daughter Merle from Nienburg with "their" American family of Marina and Sophia Moore are just one example; read on for what they say in their own words.



Past, present and future GAPP exchange students: Knut and Merle Brüggemann, Sophia and Marina Moore (photo: Chris Moore)

Knut Brüggemann [translated from the German]: "I returned to Las Cruces after 31 years. In 1987, I participated in the first GAPP student exchange between Mayfield High School and Albert-Schweitzer-Schule/Nienburg. Today my family and I are visiting the American host family of my daughter Merle, who participated in the student exchange 30 years after me. – Just as I had been very fortunate to be placed with the Perry family and their son Mark, my daughter has found the perfect host family in Chris and Katya Moore and their two daughters. And now, even the American and the German parents

have gotten to know each other in person! This is what an exchange program should look like. – It has been wonderful meeting Mrs. Luchini again who had started the GAPP exchange at Mayfield together with my teacher Hermann Martens. As an adult, I can now fully appreciate how much work and responsibility such a student exchange entails for the sponsors. Without them, the program might not have been as successful. DANKE SEHR - THANKS SO MUCH!”

Merle Brüggemann: “Before going to Las Cruces, I really had my doubts about being in a different country and living with complete strangers for three weeks, but all that doubt vanished when the Moores picked me up from the airport. They made me feel as if I was coming home and belonged with their family. Thanks to the great work of our American and German sponsoring teachers as well as the Las Cruces-Nienburg coordinators, every part of our journey was perfect. Now two years later, Marina’s and my parents have been able to meet, and they get along great! The Moore family will even visit with us in Germany. I think this is what a foreign exchange program should be about. It is so much more than just visiting a country as a tourist.“

Sophia Moore: “After I heard about my sister’s GAPP experience, I wanted to join the exchange group as well! The pictures she showed me of Nienburg/Germany were beautiful and so green, a stark contrast to the desert around Las Cruces. She described the wonderful food and how you can never really choose anything that doesn't taste good! The people my sister talked to were very kind and many spoke English, making communication easy. The curriculum at Albert-Schweitzer-Schule is very advanced, and I am excited to participate in the math and science classes! I cannot wait until my German exchange student, Maya Holzmann, comes this fall because we plan to go to the Albuquerque balloon festival and to a concert among all the things we will do with the GAPP group. I am looking forward to meeting her family in Germany, making friends with her younger siblings, and seeing their new aviary!”

Marina Moore: “Upon my return to the United States from my pleasant and successful trip to Nienburg, I began looking for opportunities to return to this charming country. Berlin/Germany is Europe’s main innovation hub and because of my interest to pursue a degree in chemical engineering, it is my dream to take up an internship in Berlin. Recently I have found out that the Department of Languages and Linguistics at New Mexico State University has a summer internship program offered to Juniors and Seniors majoring in Engineering; it is my dream to travel back to Germany and work with great engineers in my field of study. I would have never thought about interning in a foreign country -- stepping into the unknown is sometimes a challenge. However, during my exchange stay in Germany last year, the people were very friendly and respected my efforts to speak their language and experience their culture. If it hadn’t been for the exposure that I received through the German American Partnership Program, I would have never considered such an opportunity. I am thrilled to know that I will have many more opportunities to travel back!”