

New Exchange Program

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After hours spent on flights and in airports, 19 German Club members and students arrived in Munich, Germany, on June 5 to study abroad for 17 days.

German teachers Wendy Langer and Andrea Turner worked together to develop an exchange program available to their students. Through the German American Partnership Program (GAPP) Millard West was partnered up with Salier Gymnasium, a school in Waiblingen, Germany. This partnership offered students from both schools the opportunity to travel to the other and study abroad. This past summer was the first time the partnership was put into action.

The group spent the first six days of their trip in Munich as tourists. Activities ranged from a city-wide bike tour to a self-guided tour of Dachau Concentration Camp to summer bobsledding in the Alps.

“The bike tour through Munich was my favorite part,” senior Skyler Tucker said. “It was neat to see and hear about all of the history behind Munich. Every building had a unique significance from some point in history and are way different than the buildings we see in Omaha.”

The last 11 days of their trip were spent in Waiblingen, Germany. Each student stayed with a host family and became a part of their daily life, including going to school at Salier Gymnasium. Besides classes being taught in German, the class schedule and rules made it evident that schools operated completely different than what the group was used to.

“Phones aren’t allowed whatsoever,” senior David King said. “We couldn’t even use our phones in the hallways, the only place you could use them was in a specific room. Their dress code is a lot less strict though, you could even wear hats.”

A typical day living with the host families included anything from grocery shopping, sports practices, doing homework, or a trip to an amusement park. Each student had their own unique, personal experience with their German families. As an entire group, they toured the Mercedes Benz Museum, learned how to make traditional German pretzels at a bakery and cooked homemade Käsespätzle, German mac and cheese.

This experience was life-changing for everyone involved. While it was hard at first to adjust to a new way of life, the time spent in Germany was beneficial in several different ways. For instance, after living with a German family and experiencing their culture firsthand, it was evident that the two had more similarities than differences.

“Everyone used and improved their German skills because they were reading, hearing and trying to speak it constantly,” Langer said. “It was amazing to see them learn and grow throughout the trip, from being nervous on the first train ride from the airport, to navigating the public transit system very comfortably. Traveling and living with a German family has impacted these students in ways that will be evident for the rest of their lives.”

This partnership is crucial because it allows students to gain real life experience with the culture and language in which they study so tirelessly. It is a way to merge the two cultures, while building new friendships that will last a lifetime and at the same time teaching important life skills that will benefit each individual in the long run.

Come September 3, it will be the students from Salier Gymnasium’s turn to immerse themselves into a different culture because they will be traveling all the way to Nebraska. They will live with and attend school at Millard West with the same Wildcats that stayed with them in June.