

County Case Study #3

German Partnership

In April 2002, Walworth County was approached by officials from a German county to enter into a partnership agreement. The county was the Landkreis Waldeck-Frankenberg, located in the state of Hesse, Germany. Hesse is the sister state of Wisconsin.

The overture was preceded by a visit by then-county board supervisor Tom Lothian to Germany. Lothian's visit had been sponsored by the Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA). He was serving as the WCA's president at the time. The German delegation that arrived in Walworth County was comprised of the following officials:

Helmut Eichenlaub, Landrat (County Executive)
Manfred Steiner, Deputy to the Landrat Eichenlaub
Klaus Briel, Business Development Leader
Dietmar Plesdenat, Director of Administration
Peter Niederstrasser, Manager of the Administrative Law Office
Karl Briehl, District Leader, Volunteer & Youth Fire Brigade
Dr. John Gatto, International Business Consultant/Translator

The itinerary for the delegation was fairly limited during the first visit. The Germans toured the City of Elkhorn fire station and county jail and were also invited to the Board's annual dinner. A lunch meeting was held with County Administrator David Bretl, County Board Chairperson Bill Norem and County Board Vice Chairperson Jerry Grant. The topic of that meeting was Walworth County's experience with the state's Wisconsin Works program. The Germans were interested in implementing a similar program.

On October 8, 2002, the County Board passed Resolution 59 – 10/02 by a voice vote, approving a partnership between the two counties. The resolution prohibited county payment of international travel, however. A copy of that resolution is attached.

In June 2003, at the invitation of the Germans, County Administrator David Bretl traveled to Waldeck-Frankenberg. A "twinning" ceremony was held on June 14, 2003 in the City of Bad Arolsen. This ceremony coincided with Hessentag, which is the equivalent of the Wisconsin State Fair, but which travels from city to city. Bretl was the guest of Karl Heinz Keudel, who was then the headmaster of the Alte Landesschule, the Gymnasium in Korbach. A smaller German delegation returned to Walworth County for a visit from July 9-12, 2005. Visitors then included Helmut and Claudia Eichenlaub, and Killian Emde. A more extensive itinerary was planned during this visit with the assistance of the Walworth County Visitors' and

Convention Bureau. The Germans took a narrated mail boat cruise on Lake Geneva; a trolley ride on the East Troy Electric Railroad; visited Black Point Historic Preserve estate and the Walworth County Historical Society museum; held discussion regarding economic development opportunities during lunch at Ye Olde Manor House Bed and Breakfast and supper at the Porto Restaurant at the Abbey; and, met with Elkhorn Area School District officials to hold dialogue concerning a school partnership.

In November 2005, County Administrator David Bretl traveled to Waldeck-Frankenberg with his family. During this visit, he toured a German elementary school to learn more about special education and also took part in a meeting with all of the Landrat's cabinet. A meeting was also arranged between Bretl and leaders of the Alte Landesschule. Alte Landesschule officials included Robert Gassner, the headmaster, and two teachers, Beate Schmidt-Graß and Gabriele Sommer. The Alte Landesschule officials expressed a desire to enter into a school partnership with a high school in Walworth County. Upon his return, Bretl attempted to solicit interest from a county school. Elkhorn Area School District eventually expressed interest.

Bretl and Deputy County Administrator Crawford visited Waldeck-Frankenberg in September of 2007. That visit included meetings with Gassner, Schmidt-Graß and Sommer, as well as with Landrat Eichenlaub and the counterpart of the our Health and Human Services director, Peter Niederstrasser, who oversees Waldeck-Frankenberg's human services programs. Later that year Walworth County hosted officials from our sister county, in November 2007. The focus of that visit was business exchange opportunities between Waldeck-Frankenberg and Walworth County. Officials attending the business reception sponsored by Walworth County included Landrat Helmut Eichenlaub; Herbert Günther, owner of Günther Hot Runner Technology; officials of the Elkhorn Area School District; State Assemblyman Tom Lothian; and, several Walworth County Board supervisors and appointed County officials.

On January 28, 2008, three school officials from the Alte Landesschule visited Walworth County. The county hosted a "meet and greet" breakfast reception to welcome Headmaster Robert Gassner and two teachers from the Alte Landesschule, Beate Schmidt-Graß and Gabriele Sommer. County officials held discussion regarding a proposed school exchange program intended to enrich secondary students' study of both the English and German languages. Attending the reception were County Board supervisors, department heads, officials and teachers of the Alte Landesschule, and teachers from the Elkhorn Area School District. Following the breakfast reception, Alte Landesschule officials were given a tour of the new Lakeland School followed by a lunch with school officials at Elkhorn High School, a tour of the school and observation in high school language classes. Alte Landesschule officials also attended that evening's Elkhorn School Board meeting and had supper with school officials.

Summer 2008 marked the fifth anniversary of the official beginning of Walworth County's partnership with Waldeck-Frankenberg and the first visit to our sister county by a member of our elected county board. Supervisor Dave Weber and his wife Ellen visited the Landkreis Waldeck-Frankenberg in mid-June, as representatives of our county. The purpose of the visit was to formally "kick off" a school partnership between the Alte Landesschule and Elkhorn

Area High School. In addition to Dave, two Elkhorn High School teachers, Kyle Gorden and Rhinehart Lintonen made the trip to Germany, the first visit by Elkhorn High School officials. Visitors from Walworth County were greeted by teachers from the Alte LandesSchule in Korbach upon arrival. Activities during the visit included touring an approximately 1,000-year-old building that has been used both as a church and parliamentary building, that took one hundred years to construct. The Webers met with Helmut Eichenlaub, the governor of Waldeck-Frankenberg, and discussed the development of the sister county partnership and future economic development opportunities between Waldeck-Frankenberg and Walworth County. In Korbach, the Webers and Elkhorn school teachers attended the Alte Landesschule Gymnasium's graduation ceremony, and Gorden and Lintonen met with Alte Landesschule administration staff. The special needs school for 89 students in the Landkreis region was built using design criteria similar to Walworth County's new Lakeland School. During the visit, Supervisor Weber and the Elkhorn school officials were informed of plans for students of the Alte Landesschule to visit Walworth County in the summer or fall of 2009.

In October of 2009, nineteen students and two teachers from the Alte Landesschule visited Walworth County. They were hosted by families of Elkhorn Area High School students. While in Wisconsin, they visited the state capitol in Madison and met with State Assembly Representatives Thomas Lothian and Stephen Nass. The county hosted a luncheon for our German friends one afternoon. In addition, County staff took our visitors to Chicago for a day of shopping.

Waldeck-Frankenberg County



The State of Hesse

Waldeck-Frankenberg is located north of the city of Frankfurt. Its population is approximately twice as large as Walworth County's. The county seat is a city called Korbach. Tourism and agriculture are important industries in the Landkreis.