

Blue Ash Delegation Visits Sister City

(Blue Ash, OH 7/8/2011) A delegation of Blue Ash government, education and cultural leaders has returned from an exchange program in Ilmenau, Germany. Blue Ash and Ilmenau have been sister cities since 2000. The trip included discussions on how to continue to improve and grow the exchange of ideas and understanding between the two cities.

The eight day trip began June 16.

The Blue Ash delegation also met with US Consul General Katherine Brucker in Leipzig. Brucker complimented the two cities on their strong relationship. She stressed the importance of citizen-to-citizen diplomacy in forging stronger relationships between countries.

"This is an important relationship for Blue Ash," said Blue Ash Mayor Mark Weber. "It gives us a unique perspective on different ways to provide service to our citizens and allows for a distinctive cultural exchange."

Since Blue Ash and Ilmenau began the sister city program, several high school and college students have participated in exchange programs. The educators on this year's tour focused on that facet of the relationship and officials discussed exploring new ways to strengthen the exchange. Debbie Page, Department Head of Foreign Languages at UC Blue Ash; Kurt Olausen, Director of the University of Cincinnati's International Programs; Adrienne James, Sycamore Community Schools Superintendent; and Renee Hevia, Assistant Principal at Sycamore High School, met with the Ilmenau counterparts.

Page and Olausen worked with Ilmenau representatives on how to continue the student exchange program as U.C. transitions to a semester calendar. They also began exploratory discussions on starting a new faculty exchange program.

The delegation first stayed in Berlin. Delegates toured the historic Reichstag, which houses Bundersrat, Germany's federal parliament. Blue Ash government officials learned more about how Germany's federal government functions. This understanding can be helpful to Blue Ash in recruiting German companies to expand to the city.

Blue Ash government officials on the trip included Mayor Weber, Councilmembers Rick Bryan and Tom Adamec, City Manager David Waltz, Assistant to the City Manager Kelly Osler, Deputy Treasurer/Tax Commissioner Sherry Poppe and Recreation/Sports Superintendent Kathy Swensen. Members of the administration met with representatives of Ilmenau's Sport- und Betriebsamt (Sports and Operating Department) to discuss how municipalities provide recreation amenities to citizens.

Rabbi Gary Zola, Executive Director of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives and Blue Ash resident, also was a delegate. Rabbi Zola received personal tours of several Jewish facilities including the region's oldest Temple. Rabbi Zola also toured Buchenwald, a Nazi-era concentration camp.

Three members of the Blue Ash/Montgomery Symphony Orchestra were also on the delegation. Director Michael Chertock and musicians Laura Proffit (violin) and Glenn Proffit (trombone) joined forces with musicians from an Ilmenau music school and entertained Blue Ash and Ilmenau delegates with a mixture of Bach and Gershwin. Finding a common language in music, delegates from both countries sang *Oh Christmas Tree/Oh Tannenbaum* in their native tongues.

At a reception hosted by Ilmenau Mayor Gerd-Michael Seeber, Blue Ash Mayor Mark Weber spoke of the city's commitment to this international relationship. "May the distance between us get smaller and our friendship continue to grow," Mayor Weber told delegates from both cities.

This trip was just one activity this year between the Blue Ash and Ilmenau. Blue Ash's Tuesday Concert Series will feature the Oktoberfest sounds of the Klüberheads in honor of the sister city program on Tuesday, August 16. A tour group from Ilmenau will visit Blue Ash in September. In October, high school students from Ilmenau will take part in an exchange program at Sycamore High School.



US Consul General Katherine Brucker and Blue Ash Mayor Mark Weber. (Photo Credit: Liz Dufour, *Cincinnati Enquirer*)



Blue Ash Mayor Mark Weber receives a gift "the Blue Ash/Ilmenau Express" from former delegate (to Blue Ash) Rolf Macholdt. Also includes Ilmenau Mayor Gerd-

Michael Seeber and Ilmenau Councilman Horst Zink. (Photo Credit: Liz Dufour, *Cincinnati Enquirer*)



Michael Chertock, Director of the Blue Ash Montgomery Symphony Orchestra, entertains the delegation with his superior piano skills. (Photo Credit: Liz Dufour, *Cincinnati Enquirer*)