

Trip to Germany for history teach

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"It was the trip of a lifetime and there are not enough words to describe what I saw."

That was Thomas Bittner, a 10th grade global history and geography teacher at North Collins Jr/Sr. High School, reaction on his recent two week trip to Germany as part of the Goethe-Institute Washington's Transatlantic Outreach Program this summer.

Bittner, who has taught for 20 years, the past 13 years in North Collins, was one of 100 social studies teachers selected from across the United States and Canada to participate in this all-expenses-paid study/travel seminar.

The TOP Program has been in place since 2001 and according to their mission statement, their goal is to provide for some of the best social studies educators in the United States and Canada, global understanding from an international perspective using modern Germany as the basis for comparison and contrast.

"I knew about this program for several years before I applied," said Bittner. "I didn't think I'd be accepted, but I figured I'd give it a try this year. I couldn't believe it when I was told I was chosen in March. This is such an opportunity."

There were 14 in his group, led by Wood Powell, the program's coordinator, that left at the end of July. Places they toured included Berlin, Frankfurt (Oder), Cottbus (70 miles east of Berlin and formerly of East Germany), Kassel, Ostheim/Rhon, Stuttgart and Frankfurt am Main.

"There was so much to see and it was awe inspiring to walk through areas that had thousands of years of history attached to them," said Bittner. "This is history coming to life."

Not only did Bittner visit areas richly steeped in history, they were also introduced to the new and modern Germany.

"The industry was amazing. The cities were a mixture of old and new and it seemed to work well in most places," he said.

They went to Vattenfall Europe Mining and Generation, a Swedish energy supplier near Soidtberg, Brandenburg to observe open cast mining.

They also visited Bombardier Transportation, in Kassel, where the factory produces locomotives.

Another unique business was Bionade in Ostheim/Rhon, the manufacturers of a very popular non-alcoholic fermented drink from organic ingredients and an organic fruit farm in Frankfurt am Main.

The group visited several schools, including Europa-Universitat Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder), an elementary and/or a vocational school in Frankfurt am Main and the Goethe-Gymnasium in Frankfurt.

They also visited Hessisches amt fur Lehrerbildung (Institute for Teacher Training and Further Education) in Frankfurt am Main.

There were trips to the Mercedes-Benz Museum, the Brothers Grimm Museum, the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, a newspaper, a visit to the Goethe House and much more.

"I took hundreds of photographs and wrote down a lot of information," said Bittner. "I plan



is eye opening excursion cher from North Collins



Brandenburg Gate in Berlin

The Brandenburg Gate was commissioned by Friedrich Wilhelm II to represent peace and was constructed in 1791. It still stands today in Berlin, Germany and pictured in front of the gate are the social study teachers from the United States, including Thomas Bittner from the North Collins Jr/Sr. High School, fifth in from the left, who participated in this year's Transatlantic Outreach Program.

on incorporating a lot of this into my classroom this year and for years to come."

As an interesting side note, Bittner, who had studied German for a year in high school and comes from a pure German background, tried to speak as much German as possible on the trip.

"On one of the trains, we were talking to some students, who were being polite, but not too interested in what we were trying to say, until I mentioned Buffalo and John Maynard while trying to describe where I was from.

"Their faces light up then and they asked about John Maynard, a very famous poem by German author Theodor Fontane, recounting the deeds of a German helmsman who died saving others, as their ship sinks in Lake Erie by Silver Creek. We really connected because of that."

A four-foot-by-four-foot plaque of the poem in German, with an English translation by Hamburg resident Burt Erickson Nelson was installed at the Erie Basin Marina on June 10, 1998 and is visited by many German tourists annually.

According to Bittner, this trip has opened up a whole new world of possibilities to share with his students.

"I can't wait to share this experience with all my students, this year's and the years to come.

"I learned so much and I hope I will be able to pass on my enthusiasm to them."

For information on the Transatlantic Outreach Program, visit their Web site at www.goethe.de/top, or request a copy of the Modern Germany Update newsletter by sending an e-mail to top@washington.goethe.org.

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Buildings help tell history of Berlin

History lives in Germany and one can travel through time as one travels through its countryside. As an example, the Berliner Dom, left, a baroque cathedral was built by Emperor Willem II between 1894 and 1905 in Berlin. To the right is the much more modern Sony Center am Potsdamer Platz, also in Berlin. Construction for this office, living space, restaurant and entertainment complex began in October 1996 and a grand opening was held in June 2000.