



Texas Alliance for Geographic Education

Fall 2010 Newsletter

Texas Alliance for
Geographic Education

TEXAS ALLIANCE FOR
GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF
GEOGRAPHY
TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY -
SAN MARCOS
601 UNIVERSITY DRIVE
SAN MARCOS, TX 78666
WWW.GEO.TXSTATE.EDU/T
AGE

Distinguished Mentor's Award

Matt Patton, Grosvenor Center for Geographic Education

Inside this issue:

NCGE Award Recipients	1
Geo-Travelers	1
FOG Conference Schedule	4
Summer '10 Advanced Leadership Workshop	8
2010 Geography Summer Academy	22
Grant Writing Tips	26
2010 Poster Contest	33

Special points of interest:

- Welcome new Texas Alliance for Geographic Education members
- 2010-2011 Grosvenor Scholar
- Grant writing tips
- Revised Social Studies curriculum standards in Texas
- National Geography Bee

I am pleased to announce that the 2010 National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) Distinguished Mentor's Award has been awarded to Dr. Richard G. Boehm! Dr. Boehm is Professor and Jesse H. Jones Distinguished Chair in Geographic Education, Director of The Gilbert M. Grosvenor Center for Geographic Education, Texas State University-San Marcos and Co-coordinator of the Texas Alliance for

Geographic Education. He has also served as president of the NCGE and most importantly, he is a mentor to many young students and professionals in the arena of geographic education.

Dr. Boehm earned his B.S. in Social Studies and his M.A. in Geography from the University of Missouri-Columbia. He then earned his Ph.D. in

(continued on page 9) —>

Germany: A Modern Geographer's Journey

Wendy Sierra, Georgetown Independent School District

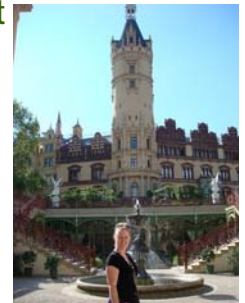
I was honored to participate in the Goethe Institut's Transatlantic Outreach Program (*T.O.P.*) Study Tour of Germany in June-July. For 2 weeks I traveled in a group of 16 teachers from all around the US to Germany, the trip was completely paid for by the German Government and German businesses sponsors. I had visited Germany twice before, although I was looking forward to going to Europe again, I honestly didn't anticipate I would gain any grand insights or epiphanies from my travels. I was so wrong!

The trip allowed me to see a wide range of German terrain and culture. We arrived in über-modern Frankfurt, the powerhouse of German finance and banking. We soon continued on to "low Germany", to the northern town of Schwerin. From there we went south to Berlin; reunification was so striking at every turn, along with issues of

immigration (*mainly of Turkish guest workers*) and what it means to be a pluralistic member of the European Union. We traveled to "high Germany" and saw the lasting strength of regionalism in the contrast of Franconian/Lutheran Nuremberg with Bavarian/Catholic Munich.

Throughout the trip I was struck by subtle and blatant changes in physical landscape, food, language, politics, religion and culture. I had wrongly assumed Germany was a monoculture; from what I saw just about the only thing Germans were in complete unity about was cheering on their team during the World Cup.

(continued on page 15) —>



Wendy Sierra in Germany sponsored by the Goethe Institut

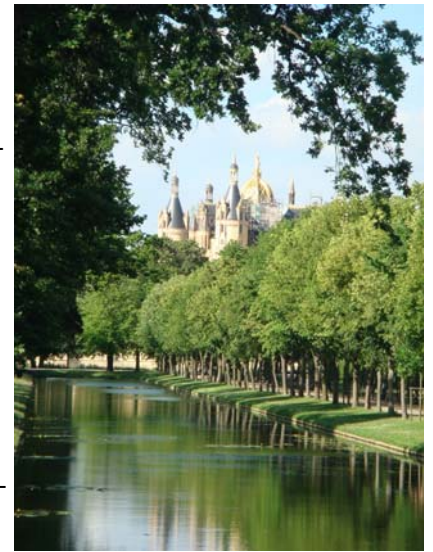
We spent 4 days in Schwerin (*population 95,000*) in the federal state of Mecklenburg. When I saw it on our itinerary I imagined it would be a complete snore, but actually it was the high point of our trip! It was less than 15 miles from where my father's family emigrated from - I saw bits and pieces of my family's traits everywhere I went. Not only did the whole town look as if they might be my cousins but the food was identical to what my grandma and aunts would serve at our family get-togethers, right down to the caraway seeds in the fresh sauerkraut and the vinegar-based potato salad with parsley (*unlike the warm mustard-based potato salad found in the South*). We visited a high school (*Gymnasium*) in the nearby town of Neukloster where the regional dialect of Plattdüütsch is still spoken and taught; that's what my grandfather spoke before he came to the US. To my surprise a little saying of my dad and uncles, "ah-so," was in widespread use throughout the state of Mecklenburg; outside my family, I'd never heard anyone else use it in my life. It's amazing how strong culture is!

Beyond my little voyage into family history, Schwerin was even more intriguing because it gave me a glimpse into what life was like under the German Democratic Republic (*G.D.R. - communist East Germany*). I knew that reunification was a major turning point in modern history, but because I came of age just as

the Cold War ended I never understood the full impact of communism on a people or on the environment.

As we toured the picturesque castle of Schwerin Schloss our guide explained the lake and canals surrounding it had only recently been restored - the communists had filled it in as an attempt to increase agricultural and industrial production. I could hardly fathom anyone having the arrogance to fill in a waterway that was such a historical and cultural landmark! The restoration had brought back numerous migrating birds and local plant life, plus it helped keep the area's water clean (*just another example of how wetlands are vital throughout the world!*).

Also in Schwerin, we visited a museum (*Landeszentrale Für Politische Bildung Mecklenburg-Vorpommern - try saying that 3 times fast*) which was a jail



Last year I absolutely dreaded starting our unit on Europe because I thought it was the duller of the year – this year I can't wait to dig in...



built under the Kaiser and mainly used for political prisoners. When the National Socialists (*Nazis*) came to power, they continued to use it for "enemies of the state" as well as a staging ground for eugenics and the Holocaust. During the post-World War II Soviet occupation the jail was used first for Nazi prisoners of

war, but it soon held anti-communists dissidents as well as innocent citizens who were just caught up in the political paranoia of the communists. Under the G.D.R., the Stasi (*communist secret police*) continued to use the jail for anyone suspected of anti-communist activities; they also added surveillance of public areas throughout Schwerin (*I had never realized that Orwell's "Big Brother" was real*).

After reunification, the Federal Republic of German (*formerly West Germany*) did not want to forget the crushing influence of dictatorship in their history, so they turned that building into a museum and monument to the victims of those dictatorships. Each floor of the former jail now shows how each dictatorship used the jail to oppress basic rights and freedoms. The shift in the building use from a jail into a museum showed me the profound difference between all of the previous regimes and the current government, far more than any constitutional document or diagram of governmental power ever could.

Watching the World Cup in the "Fan Zones" (*public viewing areas with jumbo-tron monitors for watching the game*) in cities across Germany was a major cultural event unto itself! I learned that following WWII, Germans had



deliberately reengineered their national identity by consciously dismantling their historical nationalistic tendencies, so now Germans are NOT flag wavers. Unlike Texas, showing off German pride and flag waving is highly frowned upon, the ONLY exception being supporting the German soccer team during the World Cup. Everywhere I went there were German flags, t-shirts, garlands and even car decorations!

Although the German fans were über-enthusiastic, I was shocked in the semi-finals when Spain beat Germany but the Germans seemed far less upset than the American T.O.P. fellows and myself. The crowds just shrugged the loss off and hopped on their bicycles or got on u-bahn to go home without any complaints or trash talking. For a country often accused of being hyper aggressive and overly competitive, they seemed to keep their sports in an "it's only a game" frame of mind (*a big contrast to Texas football fans!*). It was almost eerie that by the following morning ALL of the German flags and decorations were no where to be seen!

I am so grateful for the Goethe Institut's guides/translators and sensational connections because the T.O.P. Study Tour gave me access to people and places I would never have come in contact with as a typical tourist. I am also grateful to the other teachers who shared this trip with me - I am energized and inspired after collaborating with some of the most innovative and dynamic teachers in our nation. These interactions showed me a side of Germany that I know I have overlooked in my classroom. Last year I absolutely dreaded starting our unit on Europe because I thought it was the duller of the year - this year I can't wait to dig in to the juicy complexity of German physical, political and cultural geography with my 9th graders!