

MAYJUNE 2016

# art & society



## BRING BACK THE BEES

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# A Tale of SISTER CITIES

THE UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEORIA AND  
FRIEDRICHSHAFEN TURNS 40 YEARS OLD.

BY JONATHAN WRIGHT

An economic center and popular tourist destination, Friedrichshafen lies in the south of Germany along the northern edge of Lake Constance. A car ferry service links Friedrichshafen to Romanshorn, Switzerland, nestled beneath a breathtaking view of the Swiss Alps.

YOUTH EXCHANGE STUDENTS FROM  
FRIEDRICHSHAFEN WITH THEIR PEORIA  
HOSTS AND PEORIA SIMARDIS AT CITY



**I**N AND AROUND PEORIA CITY HALL, the signals of cross-cultural connection are unmistakable. Four road signs—one for each of Peoria’s sister cities—adorn a streetside light pole, the national flags of Ireland, China, Lebanon and Germany aligned beneath our own stars and stripes. Mere steps away, the Sister City Clock stands tall and proud, its four faces symbolic of the same. On the second floor of the red sandstone building, a glass case outside the mayor’s office displays artifacts and mementos from Clonmel, Benxi, Aytou and Friedrichshafen—a reminder of the bonds we share as citizens of the world.

Next door, beyond the glass atrium of the Peoria Civic Center, a silver airship hangs suspended overhead, its tail fins bearing the colors of the German republic. Built in Friedrichshafen and named for its inventor, Count Ferdinand Graf von Zeppelin, the LZ-127 Graf Zeppelin sparked international excitement in 1929 by flying around the world—the first commercial aircraft to accomplish the feat. Beneath the cylindrical replica, a relief sculpture by Delavan artist Morgan Elser adorns the brick wall, its contours revealing iconic images of Friedrichshafen and our own river city. Both are testaments to the long-running bond between the two cities—Peoria’s oldest sister-city relationship, which marks its 40th anniversary this year.

#### A MODEL OF EXCHANGE

Sixty years ago, as Cold War tensions were hardening, President Dwight D. Eisenhower had a lofty idea. Having



experienced directly the devastation of war, the former five-star general envisioned a global network of *citizen diplomats*—people-to-people partnerships—that would foster cultural ties between different communities around the world. These ties, he believed, would encourage peace and help prevent a third world war. In 1956, the president hosted a conference at the White House to promote the concept, and from that, the sister-city movement was born.

Twenty years later, a delegation from one of Caterpillar’s largest dealerships was visiting Peoria. “We got to talking,” recalls then-Mayor Dick Carver, “and I discovered that the Cat dealership was actually owned by the City of Friedrichshafen.” Noting their strong commonalities, Carver thought a more formal relationship between the two cities was in order, and began to draft a resolution to submit to the City Council. After some back and forth, Peoria and Friedrichshafen became “sisters” six months later.

Since that 1976 visit, what started as a simple business connection has blossomed into much more—an array of activities that includes the longest continuously running youth exchange among sister cities anywhere in the country. Over the years, there have been numerous exchanges of art, music and museum exhibits, as well as educational trips, internships and yearly delegations to and from Friedrichshafen. Most of these activities are coordinated through the Friends of Friedrichshafen, a nonprofit organization that helps plan the annual exchanges. Its enduring success has served as a model for Peoria’s three other sister cities: Benxi, China

**“WHAT STARTED AS A SIMPLE BUSINESS CONNECTION BLOSSOMED INTO AN ARRAY OF ACTIVITIES THAT INCLUDES THE LONGEST CONTINUOUSLY RUNNING YOUTH EXCHANGE AMONG SISTER CITIES ANYWHERE IN THE COUNTRY.**





(adopted in 1994); Clonmel, Ireland (1998); and Aytou, Lebanon (2014).

Attorney Rex Linder chairs the Sister City Commission, which serves as a liaison between Friends of Friedrichshafen and the City of Peoria. A longtime supporter of Peoria's sister cities, he and his wife Laurie have visited the German city more than 30 times since the mid-1980s. "I'm afraid if I go any more, they're going to make me start paying taxes!" he jokes. "I've developed a number of wonderful relationships with people over there. We've hosted people in our home in Peoria... not only adults, but kids. This past year, we hosted a young man who was working at Caterpillar, the son of the president of the Zeppelin company. The year before, we hosted his sister, a law student who worked in our firm for five weeks. It's a very life-enriching experience."

#### ZEPPELIN CITY

An economic center and popular tourist destination, Friedrichshafen lies in the south of Germany along the northern edge of Lake Constance (*Bodensee* in German). Across the freshwater lake—one of Europe's largest—a breathtaking view of the Swiss Alps provides a picturesque backdrop for the city's resort-like feel. Like Peoria, Friedrichshafen is anchored by a great industrial presence that encompasses much of its civic identity: "What Cat is to Peoria, Zeppelin is to Friedrichshafen," proclaimed the headline of a 2013 *Peoria Journal Star* article.

In the early 20th century, the Zeppelin company was renowned for its airships, a symbol of technological innovation and progress. But after the Hindenburg disaster of 1937 and Allied bombings of Friedrichshafen during World War II—which decimated its production facilities—the company had to transform itself. It did just that in 1954, becoming the exclusive distribution and service partner of Caterpillar Inc. in what was then West Germany. A series of acquisitions and expansions have since made the company, known today as Zeppelin Baumaschinen GmbH, one of Caterpillar's largest European dealers.

The links between Friedrichshafen and Zeppelin are intimate and



Youth exchange students from Friedrichshafen with their Peoria hosts and Mayor Jim Ardis at City Hall

inextricable. The company is owned by the Zeppelin Foundation, which is managed by the City of Friedrichshafen and provides about two thirds of its budget. The city-owned foundation also controls ZF Friedrichshafen AG, one of the world's largest automotive suppliers, originally founded to produce gears for Count Zeppelin's famous airships. All across the city where the Count launched his first aircraft in 1900, the Zeppelin name is writ large, from the Zeppelin Museum—the city's top tourist attraction and home of the world's largest aviation collection—to Zeppelin University and countless streets, businesses and memorials.

#### A LARGER WORLD VIEW

In early May, a delegation from Friedrichshafen will arrive in Peoria for a six-day visit. "We are expecting 37 people from Germany," Linder says, a group that includes the Friedrichshafen mayor, the Zeppelin chairman and his wife, and other company executives. During their stay, they will tour the Caterpillar Visitors Center, Peoria Riverfront Museum, Jump Simulation and Maui Jim; take a dinner cruise on the Spirit of Peoria; and share meals in the homes of various Peoria hosts. The City will host a luncheon at the Peoria Civic Center to officially recognize the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sister-city relationship, and a cowboy-themed party at Wildlife Prairie Park will bid the guests farewell.



Youth exchange students from Peoria with their Friedrichshafen hosts in Munich, Germany



Later this summer, nearly two dozen students from Peoria, Tazewell and Woodford counties will spend three weeks in Friedrichshafen, embedded in the daily lives of their host families. Each year, the youth exchange alternates between the two countries; this year, it's Peoria's turn to visit Friedrichshafen. For many supporters, the youth exchange is the most fulfilling part of the sister-city bond, offering the opportunity to visit a foreign country not as a tourist, but as a member of a community. It also tends to create long-lasting relationships.

"The youth who participate in this exchange come back changed," declares Patrick Roesler, current president of Friends of Friedrichshafen, who heads up the youth exchange with his wife, Tammie. "It brings a larger world view... They learn that they are quite a bit alike, even though they speak different languages."

The Roeslers got involved some years ago, when asked if they would be interested in hosting a young man from Friedrichshafen. A host family with a boy was needed, and their son was the right age. "We talked our son, Mitchell, into being a host, and he and Lucas have been great friends ever since," Roesler explains. "They really have a strong bond. Each has traveled to visit each other in their respective countries. They still play video games through the Internet."

Roesler and his wife have now visited Friedrichshafen three times, twice as youth chaperones. "I cannot say enough what a great experience it has been," he says.

"The people are so very friendly, welcoming and amazing hosts. We have become friends with many people in Friedrichshafen, and very close with two couples. We have traveled several times outside of the program... and talk often throughout the year."

#### TOWARD PEACE AND PROSPERITY

On September 25, 1956—just two weeks after his historic White House Conference on Citizen Diplomacy—President Eisenhower came to Peoria to deliver a major speech at Bradley University. Though focused on agricultural policy, the ideas that gave rise to the sister-city movement were not far from his mind as he urged progress toward "the kind of America in which we believe: an America whose prosperity flourishes when we are at peace."

From its origins in City Hall four decades ago, the bond between Peoria and Friedrichshafen is a lasting product of Eisenhower's vision—a gift that keeps giving through the generations. "As I look back on it, our lives have changed so much for the better because we said YES," Roesler notes. "And from there, we now have relationships and amazing friends in a town called Friedrichshafen."

"Our hope is that it continues on for another 40 years!" ■

*The Friedrichshafen delegation will be in Peoria May 3-8, 2016. Later this fall, a delegation from Peoria will travel to Friedrichshafen. For more information, visit [peoriasistercity.org](http://peoriasistercity.org).*

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