

# Area teen explores West German culture

By Victoria Najjar  
special writer

Greenpeace, acid rain, new wave music, politics and good grades are the major concerns of teen-agers in West Germany, says Trudy McGeachy of Union Lake who recently returned from a one-month stay.

McGeachy was one of 28 German Club students from Walled Lake Central High School who left for Garbsen, West Germany, in June.

Trudy traveled at the height of the Middle East hijacking crisis. Two days after her group landed at the Frankfurt Airport, a terrorist bomb exploded there.

The students began their visit by meeting their German "families" at the host school, the Gymnasium Garbsen. McGeachy's "parents" were Ziegfried and Eva Mona Kunze and their children, Karola, 17, Oliver, 18, and Bettina, 20. Her real parents are Yvonne and Duane McGeachy.

Everyday life in Garbsen is quiet, McGeachy said. Her host father is a pastor in the local Lutheran church. "Everybody bikes. Ninety-eight-year-old women are out there biking. After a while it gets in your blood. If I didn't bike one day, I would really miss it. You never see a fat person. Everyone eats so healthy and bikes so much, they're in great shape," McGeachy said.

Each family cultivates its own large vegetable garden, she said. Almost none of the mothers work outside the home. They prepare fresh vegetables each day; meat is expensive and served sparingly. The family ate casserole and stew and lots of home-baked bread.

"None of the cakes or cookies were sweet though," said McGeachy. "The cakes are loaded with plums and other fresh fruit."

NOTHING IS consumed between meals, McGeachy said. The main meal is served at 1 p.m. The parents and children meet midday for the large dinner. A very light meal is consumed in the evening, usually black bread and cheese.

Liquids are consumed warm, including milk. Refrigerators are very small, McGeachy observed.

"They don't use many spices; the food is really bland," she said. And fast food is practically unheard of.

The family was very anxious to practice their English, and McGeachy spent most of her time speaking English.

"The teen-agers love to learn English slang," she said, adding that they use the words "awesome," "great," and "naturally" a lot. Many of these students picked up slang while here in the states for a visit last summer. The slang sticks, McGeachy said.

One interesting social custom McGeachy witnessed while she attended a concert was that people did not applaud; they rapped their knuckles on the table tops instead.

NATURAL SEEMS to be the key word, McGeachy said. Natural foods,

plenty of exercise and fresh air.

"The girls wear no makeup. Even a large hall we were in, the girls wore no makeup or very little," said McGeachy. They wear their hair in blunt-cut styles with bangs. Curly perms are not the thing, she said.

And fashions? People own few clothes, McGeachy said. Quality not quantity is stressed. Most families in West Germany do not own a washing machine, so an outfit is worn many times before it is handwashed and hung outside to dry.

Water is expensive, McGeachy said. Most people bathe only once a week, although McGeachy's host family allowed her the luxury of a daily shower.

JOBS ARE SCARCE, so it's rare to find a teen with a part-time job, she said.

"They don't need money anyway," said McGeachy. "They can't drive until they are 18, they don't buy junk food. They have pot-luck home parties."

They do not see many movies (movie houses are few and far between) and they do not "ever spend the night at anyone's house; it is considered taboo," said McGeachy.

But they have one thing in common with American teens: They love music. "They are big music lovers, these Germans," said McGeachy. Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A." album is a favorite. They understand the lyrics

from their schoolroom English, McGeachy said.

They play "lots of new wave — Depeche Mode and Violent Femmes," she said. "They're more into dance. They go to discos often."

"Although they are allowed to drink at the age of 16, most teens don't," McGeachy said.

"They do not understand our fascination with getting drunk. Beer is like pop to them. It's no big thrill. They only drink if they are thirsty or if they like the drink," she said.

The teen-agers there are "more laid back," said McGeachy. "They are not nearly as materialistic as we are. They are more interested in music and politics. They view American teen-agers as being uninformed politically."

Greenpeace, the international environmental group, is a major influence in West Germany, McGeachy said.

"There are Greenpeace rallies at most of the large cities. In Hanover, large posters reading 'Save the Whales' are everywhere. Environmentalism is a major concern. Thousands of acres of lush German forests are dead from the effects of acid rain," she said.

SEEING THE Berlin Wall was really an eye-opener, McGeachy said. "First you see large signs printed in German which say, 'Warning! Halt!'," she said. "There are cement towers with huge guns sticking out of them."



Trudy McGeachy

The fence is electrified. Lights are scanning every minute.

Although McGeachy did not travel into East Germany, she spoke with students who had. "They told me everything there is drab and colorless. The border guards make you buy a certain amount of East German money. There was nothing the students wanted to buy so they gave their money to the children in the streets," she said.

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Under Community Development Manager Richard Lampi, the new division is responsible for building permits, inspections, code enforcement, housing rehabilitation, planning and community development.

FARMINGTON — CONSIDERED a developed community — issued nine permits for single-family houses and one for commercial so far this year. That's compared to 10 permits for single-family houses and four commercial issued in all of 1984.

Neither city has large industrial or manufacturing plants. Instead, commercial in both cities means retail shops, apartments, offices and light industrial or research facilities.

Although the number of single-family houses in both cities indicates a bedroom community image, the biggest taxpayers also provide housing.

In both communities, the biggest commercial taxpayers own large apartment complexes.

IN FARMINGTON HILLS, the top taxpayers and assessments are:

- Bemis/Berlak, owners of the Mulwood and Fairmont Park apartments — \$24 million.
- Independence Green apartments — \$9.8 million.
- Detroit Edison — \$9.1 million.
- Hunters Ridge condominiums and apartments — \$9 million.
- Manufacturers Hanover Mortgage Co. — \$7.8 million.
- Wineman Investments — \$7.8 million.
- John Umis of Green Hill Apartments — \$7.4 million.
- Alexander Hamilton Life Insurance Co. — \$6.6 million.
- Consumers Power Co. — \$6.6 million.

- Rosen/Hunter's Square — \$6 million.
- Jervis Webb — \$5.9 million.
- Baptist Manor, senior citizen housing — \$5.6 million.
- Samuelson Development Co. — offices — \$5.4 million.

- IN FARMINGTON, the top taxpayers and assessments are:
- Standard Construction apartments — \$10.4 million.
  - Chatham Hills Apartments — \$4.5 million.
  - Farmington Place Apartments — \$2.2 million.
  - Bemis/Berlak apartments — \$2.1 million.
  - Detroit Edison — \$1.6 million.
  - Downtown Center Association, shops — \$1.2 million.
  - Oak Hills Nursing Homes — \$1.85 million.
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