

# WPSCA Sister Cities celebrate partnership

## 30-year anniversary observed with Altenburger Land

BY NEWS-TOPIC STAFF

HICKORY — Western Piedmont Sister Cities Association (WPSCA) celebrated its 30-year anniversary with Altenburger Land on Friday, March 24 at the Western Piedmont Council of Governments' office.

The official signing date of the partnership took place on March 24, 1993. Mayors and delegates representing the four Western Piedmont Sister Cities counties read

their official city proclamations to colleagues in Altenburger Land Germany via WebEx while sharing an anniversary cake and a celebratory toast together virtually.

Items from all four counties and from Altenburger Land will be displayed and placed inside a time capsule commemorating the special anniversary year. The time capsule will be officially buried this October when the Altenburger Land official delegation visits during Oktoberfest celebrations and business and partner meetings in our region.



WPSCA made international history by connecting four counties located within the Western Piedmont region of North Carolina (Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba), together with the Altenburger Land, a region located in the central part of Germany in the former East German Feder-

al State of Thuringia. Sister Cities programs promote peace and understanding through joint exchanges that focus on arts and culture, youth and education, sports, business and trade, government and municipalities, and community development, all of which are essential in creating, growing, and maintaining people-to-people relationships and diplomacy around the world. These programs and exchanges enrich the lives of many and provide cultural opportunities for those living in our four county communities.

There will be additional activities taking place in 2023 with an in-person delegation visiting from Altenburger Land in October.

For suggestions about additional items to place inside our time capsule or are interested in getting involved with WPSCA and participating in our 30-year anniversary celebrations, please visit [www.western-piedmontsistercities.org](http://www.western-piedmontsistercities.org) for more information or contact Tracey Trimble, WPSCA Chair & Catawba County Designee at [ttrimble@hickoryfurniture.com](mailto:ttrimble@hickoryfurniture.com) or 704-502-5932.

## GERMAN

FROM PAGE A1

High School (1350 Panther Trail, Lenoir) and spending time doing daily activities, like shopping at the supermarket, with their host families.

Sascha Sanderlin, the German and Spanish language teacher at Hibriten High School, has also organized a great activity program for students to participate.

"I feel great that we are able to offer this experience to the students from Germany," said Sanderlin. "Being able to stay in another country is a life-changing experience that enriches people's lives."

Right now, there are about 10 host families in Lenoir that have graciously welcomed these students into their homes.

"I think the main experience is what the students get here with the families, because they have the chance to live together with them, to do the daily businesses with them, to go to the high school," said Fuetterer. "Also, of course, they get to experience the Southern hospitality, which is just always outstanding. This is something special that they'll never get to do again."

The German students have expressed immense gratitude and excitement about staying with their host families and experiencing the daily life of an American teenager.

"My host parents are very great," said Marlene. "They are so friendly, and they're taking good care of me. They share everything with me and are always willing to pick me up or drive me somewhere. I'm very grateful to be here."

"I had a lot of contact with my host family before I got here, but still, I was so nervous to meet them," said Skrollan. "But now, I feel so comfortable with them. I feel like home, actually. My host siblings are like new friends, we're hanging out all day whenever possible."

"I think the thing that hit me the hardest was actually the hospitality and the wholesomeness of the American family I am staying at," said Tobias. "I was really, really surprised at first how open they were to me."

"Hopefully, they create lasting friendships where students can visit one another when they are older," said Sanderlin. "I would love for the students to eventually have a chance to visit Germany, as well. Hopefully, they will stay in touch and continue to learn from one another after the Germans go back to Germany. Learning about another culture is so much better when you can talk to the people and see them. Now, our students will have a better perspective about German and American culture."

The city of Lenoir recognized the German students and staff during the City Council meeting on Tuesday, March 21. Lenoir Mayor Joe Gibbons and the council gifted staff a small city flag, a coin, and lapel pin, and gave all the students a city flag lapel pin.

The German students all mentioned how fascinated they are with America's large cities, particularly New York City, which is where they first arrived in the country. They were also able to tour Washington,

D.C. and Williamsburg, Virginia.

"I think when we arrived it was a surreal feeling, because it's our first time," said Felix. "It was very great that we had a great view in New York of the World Trade Center ... We had time [to explore], fortunately."

The students said they also experienced a major culture shock upon entering an American supermarket for the first time.

"For me, it was the size of food packages," said Marlene. "For example, we have milk at [my host family's] home, and it's like double the size of our milk in Germany. Everything is like twice as big."

"The biggest one for me was the cashiers at supermarkets," said Svenja. "They're so talkative. In Germany, we are used to just throwing our business on and just finishing your job, not really catching up much. But when I was going to the supermarket with my host mother, she was just so talkative, I was overwhelmed."

Other major differences the students recognized included the use of cars in our daily lives. One student, Maren, said she was shocked when her host sister drove them to school in her own car.

"In Germany, a lot of students ride their bike to school, and if they do not ride their bike then they take public transport. In Germany, you're allowed to drive a car by yourself when you're 18, so not a lot of students go to school by car," she said. "I thought it was so crazy to come to a carpark where just student cars are, and there are so many. It's common for students here to go to school by car. I really like that."

The students will be returning home on Friday, March 31.

In Germany, these 12 exchange students attend the school BBZ Stegen, which is a supra-regional state special education and counseling center with a boarding school that specializes in hearing. For more than 50 years, the BBZ Stegen has been offering hearing-impaired children and young people both a general and a hearing-impaired-specific school education with central qualifications as well as a wide range of advisory services in the context of hearing. In addition to the central location in the municipality of Stegen (Breisgau-Hochschwarzwald district), there are other external locations where educational and advisory services are provided close to home.

To learn more, visit <https://www.bbzstegen.de>.

Families that are interested in hosting a foreign exchange student are encouraged to contact Sascha Sanderlin by email at [ssanderlin@caldwellschools.com](mailto:ssanderlin@caldwellschools.com).

"The exchange program is important so we can continue to understand one another across different cultures," said Sanderlin. "It is a mutually-beneficial experience. I have already heard about the many conversations that have taken place where people young and old are learning from one another. We often learn best through relationships with people ... Having the group from Germany back in Lenoir this year reaches so much more into our community. So many more students from around the county are able to exchange perspectives and ideas with one another."

## US-Canada migration deal could end walk-around crossings

BY WILSON RING  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. JOHNSBURY, Vermont — The immigration deal expected to be announced Friday by U.S. President Joe Biden and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau would end a process that has enabled tens of thousands of immigrants from across the world to move between the two countries along a back road between New York state and Quebec.

Since early 2017, these migrants have entered Canada via Roxham Road outside Champlain, New York, where a reception center staffed by agents of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police has been set up to process them, about five miles (8 kilometers) from the official border crossing where they'd be returned to the United States.

The Mounties warn that they'll be arrested if they take one more step. Then they do — and without being handcuffed, they are processed and usually released to live in Canada while their asylum cases are pending, which can take years.

Trudeau's government is expected to announce as part of the agreement that 15,000 migrants from the Western Hemisphere will be given slots to apply to enter Canada. The policy applies to people without U.S. or Canadian citizenship who are caught within 14 days of crossing the border, and will enable both countries to turn away asylum seekers at their borders, according Canadian officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the deal before it was formally announced.

The deal comes as the U.S. Border Patrol also responds to a steep increase in illegal southbound crossings along the wide-open Canadian border. Nearly all happen between the biggest population centers in both countries, from Quebec into upstate New York and Vermont.

While the numbers are still tiny compared to the U.S.-Mexico border, it's happening so frequently now that the Border Patrol increased its staffing in the region and has begun releasing some migrants into Vermont with a future date to appear before immigration authorities.

Canadian officials have struggled to

**"We need to get something down so we know what we are going to do when these families arrive. We don't have a system set yet, so when we do I am sure this will all go a little smoother."**

— Tim Page  
police chief

cope with this since early 2017. Many northbound migrants said they were fleeing because they feared President Donald Trump's immigration policies were hostile to their presence in the United States. The process continued since the Biden administration took office.

These migrants have taken advantage of a quirk in a 2002 agreement between the U.S. and Canada that says asylum seekers must apply in the first country they arrive in. Migrants who go to an official Canadian crossing are returned to the U.S. and told to apply there. But those who reach Canadian soil somewhere other than a port of entry are allowed to stay and request protection.

Meanwhile, southbound migrants are straining U.S. border officials.

U.S. Border Patrol agents stopped migrants entering illegally from Canada 628 times in February, more than five times the same period a year earlier. Those numbers pale compared to migrants entering from Mexico — where they were stopped more than 220,000 times in December alone — but it is still a massive change in percentage terms.

In the Border Patrol's Swanton Sector, which stretches across New Hampshire, Vermont and a portion of upstate New York, agents stopped migrants 418 times in February, up more than 10 times from a year earlier. About half entering from Canada have been Mexicans, who can fly visa-free to Canada from Mexico.

About an hour south of the border, the police chief in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, population 6,000, alerted state officials that the Border Patrol had dropped off a vanload of immigrants with just a few minutes notice at the community's welcome center. The same thing happened several times before within

the last few weeks.

In a statement, U.S. Customs and Border Protection said the migrants dropped off in St. Johnsbury had been apprehended along the border after entering the U.S. without authorization, and were given a notice to appear for later immigration proceedings.

They were dropped off in St. Johnsbury because it has a station where migrants can take a bus to a larger city.

"In such circumstances, USBP works in tandem with local communities to ensure the safety of all parties—both community members and migrants—and to ensure stability in the community's resources," the statement said.

But local officials said they weren't given time to prepare. State officials are now working to set up a system to provide migrants services they might require.

On Thursday, a Haitian couple and their children, boys aged 17 and 9 and a 15-year-old girl, were dropped off at the welcome center. The family, who did not want to give their names, wanted to take a bus to Miami.

They said they'd been in Canada for two months, but wouldn't talk about what prompted them to keep moving.

They missed the Thursday bus that would allow them to connect to a bus to Boston, where they could catch another bus to Miami. A team of local volunteers spent the day getting them something to eat, finding them a place to stay the night and arranging for them to take the bus on Friday.

Police chief Tim Page said St. Johnsbury wants to help these migrants, but not on the fly.

"We need to get something down so we know what we are going to do when these families arrive," he said. "We don't have a system set yet, so when we do I am sure this will all go a little smoother."