



INDEPENDENT PHOTO BY STEPHANIE PRICE

Students from Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, are visiting Woodstock for 14 days as part of a student exchange program between Woodstock High School and Werdenfels-Gymnasium.

## German students visit Woodstock

By Stephanie Price  
THE INDEPENDENT

Toni Klausmeyer had only been in Woodstock for four days, but he already noticed distinct differences between the city and his hometown of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany.

"In Germany, there's a big gap between the students and the teachers," said Klausmeyer, one of 20 exchange students visiting Woodstock from March 5 to 18. "The teachers here are very friendly."

Klausmeyer and his fellow students also noticed American students are much more relaxed and casual when dressing for school. Back home in Germany, students are more concerned with what they are wearing and how they look, he said. "Here, they wear anything, like sweat pants," he said.

The students laughed as they shared some of their personal experiences with their advisers, Thomas Kaufmann, who teaches English and physical education, and Gaby Maus, who teaches economics and physical education at their school, Werdenfels-Gymnasium in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, located south of Munich along the border of Germany and

Austria.

All the students are staying with Woodstock host families, which offers them an opportunity to expand their English skills and learn more about American culture and lifestyle. During the day, they attend some classes at Woodstock High School and also spend time together to discuss their experiences.

The group of 14 teenage boys and six teenage girls has made an excursion to the city of Chicago, where they visited the Willis Tower, Trump Tower and the Bean. A second trip is planned to visit some of the museums.

"I like everything so far," one student said. "Especially the food. All the food."

Woodstock is comparable in size to Garmisch-Partenkirchen, they said, but their hometown is located in the mountainous German resort area in Bavaria.

"It's more like Colorado," Kaufmann said.

Some of the German students will make presentations about themselves and their lives in Germany to WHS students enrolled in German courses. WHS German teacher John Walsdorf also finds creative ways for the students to interact, such as an after-school card game. The visiting

students help expand the Woodstock students' knowledge and understanding of Germany, Walsdorf said.

"It introduces them to things that can't be learned in a textbook and brings much excitement into the classroom," Walsdorf said. "They also get an opportunity to use their language skills in an authentic situation. Each of the Americans has a chance to hear directly from the Germans about their country's ways and customs."

The German students typically arrive in the states with a wealth of information about our country, Walsdorf said, which they have picked up through the media, movies and music. What they learn from their visit is to separate fact from fiction.

"They are excited to explore on their own what is fact and what is fallacy," Walsdorf said. "Hollywood gives them many images about America but not all of them are all that accurate. The Germans are pretty dialed in with our society, so it's exciting for them to live it firsthand."

The WHS and Werdenfels-Gymnasium exchange has been a yearly program since 2007. A group of WHS students will travel to Germany this summer.