

**German American Day
Seattle, WA
October 5, 2014 (as prepared)**

Guten Tag meine sehr geehrte Damen und Herren und willkommen in Deutsch-Amerikanischen Tag! Also Hon. Consul Walker hat gesagt, bin ich Lieutenant Governor Owen. Ich kenne ein bisschen Deutsch, weil ich an Frankfurt-American High School meinen Abschluss gemacht hatte. Aber, weil das vor langer Zeit war, ist mein Deutsch ein bisschen eingerostet und so jetzt werde ich auf English reden.

Thank you to Guinevere Saenger for your excellent piano playing. It was great to hear all of your voices sing the American and German National Anthem. Honorary Consul General Petra Walker, I appreciate the invitation to be here and our friendship over these many years. Congratulations on receiving the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in June, a very distinguished honor.

On German American Day it is especially appropriate to recognize that the opening line of the German National Anthem "Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit" which means unity and justice and freedom. It is similar to a line from the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance: "With Liberty and Justice for All." It also bears similarity to the closing line of our National Anthem: "O'er the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave."

Today we celebrate that the Berlin wall came down 25 years ago next month, with the reunification of West and East Germany ratified less than a year later. Since that time when the historic Brandenburg Gate opened as the Berlin wall fell, the gate has stood as a symbol of a new, free Germany.

It is good to be here at the Seattle Area German American School, where German is spoken everywhere, all of the time. I may know a little German, but what you all know from the SAGA School immersion program makes my knowledge seem small by comparison. You will hear much more about the SAGA experience from your next speaker, but as one who has been a few places in the world I recognize the value of knowing a second language, and knowing it well.

Perhaps some of the students who are studying here will go on to attend college in [Deutschland](#). Higher education is about to become a great bargain news just broke last week that Germany is scrapping its tuition fees. I applaud the republic for making higher education more affordable.

We are fortunate that the United States and Germany are such stout allies. I attended Frankfurt American High School in 1967 and 1968 due to my father's being stationed there in the Army. Southern Germany was regarded then as a strategic location for a strong U.S. military presence then, just as it is now. As a state and nation we are entirely grateful for our continuing relationship with Germany that allows for us to remain on German soil in order to protect our common interests.

Across the United States we can look around and see the enormous influences that Germany and Germans have had upon us through the centuries. These influences can be found in our music, literature, sciences, architecture, engineering and the arts. They are everywhere.

Germans have a passion for recreation and it can be argued that German immigrants are responsible for changing our weekend recreation. In Colonial times Sundays in America was reserved mostly for church-going and rest. Early German immigrants brought to America their tradition of organized Sunday recreation, along with a penchant for picnics, bandstands, sports clubs, playgrounds and family excursions. The addition of Saturdays to complete the weekend came later, and that's a whole different story.

Germany's passion for education influenced America early on, with the introduction of kindergarten by German immigrants in Wisconsin and physical education and vocational education to our public schools.

Germany has definitely made its mark on America over time and continues to do so. Some of the ways that we observe Christmas, Easter and other traditions were adopted from our friends in Germany.

In Washington we have our own German traditions. We flock to the Bavarian-themed town of Leavenworth to celebrate the German tradition of Oktoberfest, again in December for the tree lighting festival and again for the hugely popular Maifest.

Some of our state's largest businesses have German roots.

William Boeing, the founder of the airplane company that is our state's largest employer, was the son of a wealthy German mining engineer, Wilhelm Böing from Hagen-Hohenlimburg. Perhaps it is fitting that earlier this year the Boeing company delivered its 1,500 747 jetliner to one of its bigger customers – the Frankfurt, Germany-based Lufthansa. More than 100 years ago German-American timber mogul Friedrich Weyerhäuser founded the Weyerhaeuser Company in a small office in Tacoma. It went on to become one of the world's largest private owners of timberlands, employing thousands in our state and contributing greatly to our economy.

Porsche SE just invested \$55 million for a 10-percent share of the Kirkland-based company Inrix, which provides advanced traffic information technology used by many automakers, including BMW, Volkswagen and Mercedes. A BMW affiliate has a carbon fiber threat plant in Moses Lake. The threads are then weaved into the tough body of the company's latest line of electric cars.

Speaking of cars, Honorary Consul Walker tells us of another story about how Phil Smart, the legendary Mercedes Benz dealer and philanthropist who died last year at the age of 93, came to sell Mercedes after selling Chevrolets for years. Long before he was in the automobile business, Mr. Smart was a soldier in World War II, fighting in a detachment in North Africa against a highly regarded German adversary. After the Americans won, our soldiers – including Phil Smart - saluted their captured German counterparts as a sign of respect.

Rolling the clock forward a few years, Mercedes Benz began courting Phil Smart to convert his dealership to sell their product, but he resisted. The corporate leadership at Mercedes sent a senior vice president to try one more time. The vice president, it turns out, was one of the soldiers that Smart had fought against in North Africa – and saluted. The two found out they had a lot in common from those days, became friends and, well you know the rest of the story.

Another quick story is about the Seattle Monorail, which made the news again just this week because of a new campaign to extend services west to Ballard. Did you know that the monorail

was built and serviced by Alweg, a company based in Germany? According to Honorary Consul Walker the original concept of an elevated street car, also called suspension railways, dates back to 1890s in Germany. Long before the Seattle monorail was constructed in 1961 for the World's Fair there were visions of creating a suspended railway system from Seattle to Tacoma.

There are many more stories of our state's strong ties to Germany and I am sure that each of you have your own stories too. Helping to tie it all together in our region is the German House, which serves as the home of the German Heritage Society. The society promotes the preservation of heritage, language and culture of all German speaking people, and those of German ancestry.

So on this German American Day we celebrate 25 years since the destruction of the Berlin wall and the 24th anniversary of reunification. But we also celebrate the close friendship between Germany, the United States and the state of Washington. This day that was once a holiday in the United States to celebrate German heritage now continues as a time when we mark the outstanding contributions made by the German people and to reflect on a future that can be nothing but long-lasting and strong.

Thank you.