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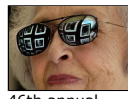
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Sharing the American spirit

German students get a taste of the states at IVC homecoming

Photos



DIANA GLENN/JOURNAL STAR

Marco Fuhrmann, 16, along with German exchange students and their host families, play ladder golf, also known as hillbilly golf, during a picnic at Shore Acres Park on Sunday. The students are here for three weeks as part of an exchange program with Illinois Valley Central High School. Over the weekend they experienced IVC's homecoming game and dance and have trips planned to Chicago and St. Louis.

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By **Erin Wood**
of the Journal Star

Posted Sep 28, 2008 @ 09:00 PM

Last update Sep 28, 2008 @ 11:22 PM

CHILLICOTHE — After just three days of being in a new country, Christian Weinand already has learned a thing or two about school spirit.

"It's great," he said. "Everyone is proud here. In Germany, no one likes school."

Weinand got his first taste of an American high school pastime this weekend at Illinois Valley Central's homecoming football game, dance and bonfire.

"If our school had a bonfire, nobody would come," Weinand said with a laugh.

The 18-year-old, 20 of his classmates and two chaperones from Max-von-Laue-Gymnasium in Koblenz, Germany, landed in central Illinois on Thursday, beginning their three-week stay in Chillicothe as part of the German American Partnership Program.

Each German student is paired with an IVC student, with whom they live, go to school and socialize. Since 1980, when the partnership between Chillicothe and Koblenz began, German students travel to central Illinois on even-numbered years and their American counterparts travel to Germany on odd-numbered years.

"The whole goal is for the students to understand that there are different cultures," said Dan Stoyak, IVC's German language teacher and coordinator for the exchange program.

The German students and their host families gathered at a picnic at Shore Acres Park on Sunday. From "hillbilly golf" and American football to Avanti's gondola sandwiches, there were a variety of things for the Koblenz students to try for the first time.

"It's different here," said 17-year-old Claudia Blukot. "It's interesting to see how people live, how the schools are different - everything."

In her hometown, Blukot said, most people live in apartments and don't drive SUVs or pickup trucks. Teens can drink when they turn 16, but they can't drive until they're 18.

"It's a good experience for the kids and a good experience for us," said Claudia's "host mom," Melody Lapayne.

"How close the kids get when they're here, it's amazing."

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During the stay, the students will visit Caterpillar Inc.'s Mossville branch, the Peoria Police Department and the Peoria County Courthouse, among other destinations. They'll also venture outside central Illinois and to Springfield, Chicago and St. Louis.

But it's the average, day-to-day occurrences that give them the most insight to American life.

"I like having them here," said 17-year-old IVC student Mackenzie Cox, a host for one of the German students.

"They're easygoing and up for anything because they just want to experience all the normal stuff we do."

Erin Wood can be reached at 686-3194 or ewood@pjstar.com.

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