

Richwoods grad gets taste of Germany

By Sarah Storey Smiles

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There was a time, not long ago, when Justin Saboury thought only about his own little corner of the world. The 18-year-old Richwoods High School graduate made plans for college, went to work and hung out with friends in Peoria. He liked his lifestyle just fine, and while he knew other cultures existed, he never experienced them firsthand.

The summer of 2004 expanded Saboury's view of the world. On Aug. 6, he and 20 other Peoria-area teenagers returned from the Friends of Friedrichshafen youth exchange trip to Peoria's sister city in southern Germany.

On his first day in Germany, Saboury said his host family took him on a tour of the main harbor surrounding the village of Immenstaad. The young American took in the beauty of Lake Constance, situated on the Rhine River at the borders of Germany, Switzerland and Austria. During his three-week adventure, Saboury said he golfed, shopped and partied with his German partner, a 17-year-old named Cyril Pietsch.

Saboury said Pietsch was an "amazing violinist," and saw him perform in concerts at the famous Church of Birnau and in a castle in Tettmang.

"The acoustics of the rooms in the castle were perfect," Saboury recalled. "The castle was very old. Parts of it were destroyed during World War II, but it had been refurbished. There was a central courtyard, a fountain and gargoyles in the hallways. It was ornate, it was a really nice castle."

During a violin concerto in the city of Markdorf, Saboury videotaped his German friend while a reporter took copious notes nearby. The next day, Saboury read about himself in the local newspaper. Apparently, his presence at the concert provided a good intro for the article.

"The journalist wrote: 'This must be good, because he's videotaping it and he's going to show it to his city, which is close to Chicago, in the U.S.,'" Saboury said with a grin.

Saboury not only enjoyed his partner's violin



Going abroad: Richwoods graduate Justin Saboury, 18, stands with his host, Cyril Pietsch, in Munich, Germany.

solos, but also checked out the nightlife at German techno clubs. In contrast to American clubs, which are spacious, "crazy" and filled with distractions, Saboury said, nightclubs in Germany are small, dark underground rooms where "everybody's really into the music, not just there to meet people."

His host family took him to Switzerland for a day, where the American filmed the Rhein Falls from a boat. And Saboury visited the land of the "Sound of Music" when the whole group of students spent a day in Austria, and went up on a lift to Pfander Mountain.

On a daytrip to Munich, Saboury said he saw people from all walks of life converge on the city to shop and commute, much like Michigan

Avenue in Chicago. There he discovered a record shop that sold rare drum and bass techno music from the United Kingdom, and bought 10 vinyl records.

Saboury said one of the big differences he experienced was how the Germans handle their liquor.

"One of the biggest culture shocks for me was how much (Germans) drink and don't let it go to their heads. You come from here, and everybody goes crazy when they're drinking. You go there ... when they are drunk, they act completely normal."

The legal drinking age in Germany is 16.

The legal age to drive a car, on the other hand, is 18. Saboury described the Autobahn as "crazy," with drivers getting arrested for driving slow in

the left lane. He said gas costs about four times more than in the United States, which accounts for the high number of bicyclists in Germany.

Saboury said there were pros and cons to living a German lifestyle. He said he didn't see a single obese person (presumably because of daily biking to work and the grocery store, etc.), and the air is clean. But the cost of living is high in Germany, Saboury pointed out.

Seeing how other cultures live has opened up a new world for Saboury. "Before going on this trip, I was only used to my lifestyle. I went there and saw a completely different lifestyle. It's like — wow — we're not the only ones on this planet."

As for his new German friends, Saboury said they all spoke English when he was present and made him feel welcome. And the American student is thinking about returning the favor next summer, when he might be a host to a German teenager. His partner, Pietsch, was an exchange student last summer, and loved motor biking with his host family in rural Bartonville.

"Cyril liked our lifestyle," Saboury said, and added that his partner wants to return to America, rent a Harley and go on a road trip from Chicago to Peoria, and cross-country to California.

In its 25th year, the Peoria-Friedrichshafen program is the longest continuous-running youth exchange in the United States. According to exchange coordinator Eric Hoadley, the goal of the program is to build stronger ties between Peoria and its sister city by sending local students to Friedrichshafen and bringing German teenagers to Peoria the following summer.

"While the kids had a wonderful time, they're not done. The program comes full circle when German students come to Peoria next year," Hoadley explained. "We may think of Peoria as ordinary, but they're just as fascinated with our way of life as we are with theirs."

For more information on hosting students from Germany, contact Hoadley at 266-6820 or visit the Friends of Friedrichshafen Web site at www.peoriasistercity.org.