

A profitable exchange — Teacher brings German group to county

By Leah Boyd • DAILY PRESS & ARGUS • April 2, 2009

Markus Muennix knows the value a foreign exchange program can have on a person's life.

The Kensington Woods High School teacher and native of Germany — who came to the United States for the first time through a yearlong exchange in 1992 — has begun sharing that value with his students.

Muennix independently organized an exchange program, which recently brought seven German high schoolers and one teacher to the Howell area for two weeks. The visitors, some of which hosted Kensington Woods students in Germany last year, will return home Friday.

students from Muennix's hometown of Cologne, came to them.

The German exchange students have lived in the homes of Kensington Woods students during their trip. The group, along with their host families, have traveled to Detroit and Chicago since their arrival.

Lisa Winzer, the one "exchange teacher" on the trip, said although her students haven't yet mastered English, they have learned important lessons about culture.

"This is a totally new experience for them," Winzer said. "It's intercultural learning. You challenge your own views. You stop making judgments from what

you might see on TV."

Like-wise, students at Kensington Woods — located near Cleary University in

Genoa Township — have learned the same.

"Aside from the language, they are just like us," said Andrew Gasiorowski, an 11th-grade host student at Kensington Woods. "They laugh at the same jokes as we do. But I am learning a lot about their culture. Just being around them has increased my (German language) speaking abilities."

Although the students will experience a short-term exchange relative to most programs, Muennix said a two-week experience can have a long-term effect and possibly interest them in participat-



Teacher Markus Muennix, standing, works with German students and their hosts at Kensington Woods High School in Genoa Township. Muennix organized an exchange program that recently brought German high school students and a teacher to the Howell area for two weeks. (Photo by ALAN WARD/DAILY PRESS & ARGUS)

ing in longer exchanges, something he hopes to plan in the future.

Muennix returned to the United States a year after his first experience in the country and attended the University of Michigan, where he met his wife, Sarah. He said his English was better than his wife's German, so the couple decided to stay in Michigan rather than move to Germany.

Muennix's personal intercultural experiences have allowed him to impact the lives of his students, such as the through the exchange program, and encourage them to think outside of the box.

"When you are immersed in another culture, you become more tolerant," he said. "I don't have to judge people by my own standards. People are different and that's OK."

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German students socialize with their American student hosts at Kensington Woods High School in Genoa Township. From front left: Carla Volz, Nora Kakonja, Lisa Wilms, Nina Altmann, teacher Markus Muennix, Laura Vallo, Nathan Hinkle, Dan Smith and Dario Banazak. Muennix, a native of Germany, organized the exchange program. (Photo by ALAN WARD/DAILY PRESS & ARGUS)

"There is a lot of value in doing these exchanges," said Muennix, who teaches German, Spanish and social studies. "It takes being able to live in a culture to understand the differences. I want to make sure my students get more exposure to the world."

Muennix took six of his students to Germany last year. This year, German