

## **EARLY BIRD 29 December 2012 – 4 January 2013**

### **LIFESTYLE**

#### **2,100 Three Kings' Day carolers ("Sternsinger) meet in Würzburg (Dec. 29)**

Colorful costumes, golden crowns, imaginative turbans and hundreds of golden stars gathered on the Residenzplatz in Würzburg. The Germany wide "Sternsinger" campaign 2013 opened in Würzburg last Friday with an all-day program. This year the campaign title is "Bring a blessing – be a blessing." The purpose of the campaign is to bring health to Tanzania and to the whole world. Tanzania is the main goal of this year's campaign. The 2,100 boys and girls from twelve German Catholic dioceses were welcomed at the square of the Würzburg Residenz. Together with a band they sang a variety of songs including African rhythms and for the first time the motto song of this year's campaign: "Thumbs up." Würzburg's Bishop Friedhelm Hofmann and Bishop John C. Ndimbo from the partner diocese Mbinga in Tanzania welcomed the carolers. In his speech Bishop Hofmann stated: "If the church is represented by young people like you - it will convince people, even those who are skeptical. You are able to carry the "good news" to the families." The largest group of 1,500 "Sternsinger" came from the diocese Würzburg – the others came from Augsburg, Bamberg, Dresden-Meissen, Essen, Freiburg, Fulda, Mainz, Munich and Freising, Paderborn, Regensburg and Rottenburg-Stuttgart. Bishop Ndimbo praised the carolers for their missionary spirit and for supporting the cause of children who are less fortunate. He stated: "You, dear carolers are a blessing for all those to whom you carry the good news about Jesus arriving in our world. You also will become a blessing for all children in the world for whom you pass along the donations which were collected to sooth their illnesses and their distress."

#### **USAG Schweinfurt's Lt. Col. Chad Sekutera & Family (Dec. 24)**

"The pig is good" - American family Sekutera celebrates Christmas – no sign of home sickness.

Their first year in Germany the Sekutera family already celebrated "Nikolaus" day like the Germans – and it worked, said Lt. Col. Chad Sekutera, a member of the U.S. Army in Schweinfurt. Lt. Col. Sekutera and his family have been living in Germany for four years – two years in Heidelberg and two years in Schweinfurt. They will celebrate two more Christmases in Germany then, after closing of the USAG Schweinfurt, they will return to the States. Different than many of their fellow Americans, they never had the desire to fly home for the holidays. Maria, Chad's wife only went to the States once during their four years in Germany.

Of course they Skype with their relatives in the States during the holidays but Christmas is not connected with a location for the Sekutera. "The family, that's us here" states Chad, including his wife Maria and their four children, the twins Lucas and Ben 14-years old, Abby 12-years old and Josh 10-years old, in his gesture. "What's important – that we are together" he said.

Chad is from Nebraska and therefore he loves smaller towns. Maria is from New York City and therefore loves smaller towns even more. And that's the reason that the family feels so good living in Schweinfurt. Chad said: "The rhythm of life is just calmer." In the States everything is open around the clock, there is something going on all the time. Chad sees the fact that here in Germany the stores are closed on Sundays as a blessing: "There is more time for the family."

The Sekutera are not homebodies. Different than many of their fellow Americans in the Army they leave the secure environment of the Army as often as possible. They know several guest houses in the area where they serve "great German food." Maria said, "The pig is good" and she does not only mean the food. They enjoy visiting the various Christmas markets in the region. Chad said, "There is so much to see you cannot see it all." They always try to find activities outside of the military community. Maria said, "Many of the ladies are just afraid to go out (on the economy)" – and she added: "They make it easy

for you – you really would not have to leave the garrison.” She also experienced that the first year in Germany was hard. She had left all of their friends in Colorado Springs, where the family lived before. She did not speak any German and did not know her way around. However, she handled this aggressively and convinced the coach of a German soccer club in Heidelberg to let her two older boys try out. He was skeptical at first but eventually gave in to Maria’s persistence.

Today in Schweinfurt Lucas and Ben play at the “Freien Turnern” soccer club and Abby even made it into the U13-team of the FC 05 Schweinfurt soccer club. And differently than many of their fellow Americans, the Sekutera family travels Europe frequently. Maria said, “As soon as he has off some days – we are on our way,” pointing to Chad. Chad was stationed in Honduras and Korea before – that’s where he met Maria, who was in the Army then. In Europe, the family already travelled to Greece, Italy, Spain, Poland, Czech Republic, Austria, Switzerland, Norway and Tenerife. They want to use their remaining time in Germany to get to see even more of Europe.

However, Christmas is a kind of calm anchor during the year. Maria said, “Ben is a real good baker.” “We walk around Askren Manor and distribute his cookies.” At home they have the Italian Christmas cake “Panettone” and hot chocolate, a tradition in Maria’s family who originally came from Peru. Of course there are presents and the children cannot make up their minds which strategy for the wish list is the best: To put many wishes on the list hoping that as many as possible will be acknowledged (Abby and Josh) or only one big wish, expecting that it will be granted (the twins). The parents smile but stay tight-lipped. Chad states: “I only threaten them jokingly that they only will get socks and underwear if they do not bring home good grades.”

And what about the manger? The family has one – but it is stored somewhere in the States. Here are so many nice ones – maybe the family will buy another one – a German manger for the last two Christmases in Germany. The conversation about Christmas here and across the Atlantic ocean slowly turns into a conversation about Germany as seen by an American family – with quite surprising insights. Maria and Chad have noticed that the people in Franconia are friendlier and more open towards them than the people in Heidelberg. But also that in order to succeed in Franconia you have to be a little “pushy,” an experience that others probably have also made. Apparently the anticipation about returning to the States is not that big. Chad said, “We feel at home here.” The twins will miss “Schnitzel” and “Bratwurst” and of course soccer. Abby will miss the clean and smooth roads and Maria the bicycle paths (“that’s a great thing here”) as well as the train rides. Chad adds, “Give her a Bayern ticket and she is gone”.

## **LEADERS/POLITICS**

### **Nuclear Power has no more chance (Jan. 3)**

Peter Altmaier, Federal Environment Minister, sees no chance for a renaissance of nuclear power in Germany. Altmaier stated that he is confident that the promise made by the Federal government to build a national final disposal site for nuclear waste by 2030 can be kept. “We can make it by 2030 if we can establish a law prior to the federal elections. This law will have to be carried out by the government and the opposition. The time window is very small. Decisions will have to be made before Easter,” he said. Altmaier is still talking about one central disposal site for all of Germany. During the past 30 years, the search for a suitable site suffered because of arguments between the different parties.

### **Unemployment rate increases in December (Jan. 3)**

In December, 8,703 people were unemployed in the Main-Rhön region. The number increased by 542 bringing up the unemployment rate from 3.4 percent in November to 3.5 percent in December. A year ago the unemployment rate for the region was 3.3 percent.

### **Lord Mayor Remele on U.S. Army real properties: Biggest ‘caesura’ since 1945 (Jan. 2)**

Lord Mayor Sebastian Remele stated in an interview published on the city’s homepage in regard to the drawdown of the U.S. Army which was announced in February 2012 – “one of the biggest ‘caesura’ in the history of Schweinfurt after World War II.” On one hand, the Americans have been here since 1945, and there are strong ties. On the other hand, there is an area of 100 hectares which is a “giant area” for Schweinfurt with its limited space for expansion. At first Remele expected negative consequences for the housing market, job market and the service industry. But how other cities have proved these losses also offer great opportunities for city development. After the drawdown in September 2014, the real properties should be available at the earliest in March 2015, according to Lord Mayor Remele. The city can only make theoretical plans for those large areas, since the Federal government is the owner. According to his estimation, the properties will be ready for re-use at the earliest 2016/2017 after completion of the environmental remediation. Nevertheless, the course will be set in January in regard to planning laws and the city council will receive suggestions for legal strategies. At the same time there will be negotiations with the Federal Real Estate Agency (BImA) in regard to a cooperation model. Furthermore, the city is in contact with other conversion cities such as Hanau, Augsburg, Regensburg and Münster. For a thinkable use, Lord Mayor Remele stated nothing new: Askren Manor remains a residential area, Kessler Field and Yorktown Village – residential area and sport facilities, Ledward Barracks a mixed use for the College for Further Education (FH) and industry.

### **The city will pick-up Christmas trees during the week Jan. 7 – 11 (Jan. 2)**

The city refuse collection department will pick up Christmas trees during the from Jan. 7 – 11. On the days the garbage is regularly picked up i.e. Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. The trees should be outside at 6 a.m. on the pick-up day.

## **THE YEAR IN REVIEW**

### **Schweinfurt: A Review of 2012 (Dec. 31 December, 2012)**

- Always problems at the “Rossmarkt” bus station – the police are constantly in action.
- In January rumors about a possible drawdown of the U.S. Army condensed.
- AFZ Markt in district Gartenstadt closes due to lack of customers.
- Construction workers find historical cellar from the 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century during excavation work for the new underground garage at Hadergasse.
- The Protestant dean thinks about selling buildings, one of them the youth club building at Martin-Luther-Platz
- High water at the end of the month. The bikers on the Maintal bicycle path get wet feet.
- A young elk cow is purchased for the Wildpark as a companion for elk Lasse.
- Beginning of February the drawdown of the U.S. Army has been confirmed.
- Argument about St. Anton church. The financial situation suggests having the large church demolished.
- The roof of the ice dome is in poor condition – in case of heavy snow the ice dome has to be closed.
- Concerns about the planned “Mc Donald’s parents’ house” swimming on the Main river increase.
- The city council selects the Friedrich-Rückert building as domicile for the “knowledge workshop”.
- 35,000 visitors came to see the “Fasching” parade on Shrove Tuesday.
- A 22-year old girl is chosen as Schweinfurt’s first wine princess.

- Bishop Friedrich Hofmann of Würzburg visits Schweinfurt for a week and wins broad sympathies.
- 250 women working for “Schlecker” demonstrate against closure of all stores.
- A flop – the plans for the McDonald’s parents house are dismissed.
- The new concept for the weekly market is well received.
- After two-and a half years – Schweinfurt has once more a “Meedämpferle” (tourist boat).
- The senior technical college FHS, which was renovated for almost €15 million, has a new president. Robert Grebner sees expansion possibilities for the FHS in Ledward Barracks.
- Lord Mayor Remele apologizes to residents of Obere Strasse for the extended road construction that lasted longer than expected.
- On April, 19, about 4,000 metal workers go on strike.
- The second construction phase of the industrial “Maintal” begins.
- Only 500 people attend the 1<sup>st</sup> of May celebrations of the German labor union at the Zeughausplatz.
- On May 3, about 5,400 metal workers go on strike.
- Thieves are active at night – digging up plants and flowers that the city gardening office had just planted at Gutermann-Promenade a few days before.
- After the victory against Portugal in the European Soccer Cup there the fans celebrate downtown Schweinfurt.
- City and police combine efforts in June and take actions against binge drinking in public areas.
- In July the senior citizen council gets annoyed because it was not included in decision making in regard to hiring of personnel in the city office for senior citizens.
- 13,000 people participate in the Honky-Tonk festival
- Only a few invited guests attended the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the nuclear power plant in Grafenrheinfeld.
- Schweinfurt celebrates 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with its partner city Motherwell in Scotland.
- The Bavarian Association of Cities discusses representative democracy in times of facebook and twitter.
- According to a study Schweinfurt retail stores are rated at the top for the region – taking place 4 in all of Germany.
- The city utilities company announces a subsidiary for wind power project.
- The parties “Schweinfurt List” and “Pro-Schweinfurt” have plans to unite.
- In August the farmers selling products at the weekly market threaten to boycott since they were supposed to move to another location during the street festival – the problem was solved at the last minute.
- The street festival started slow on Friday but reached record numbers of visitors on Saturday.
- 24,000 people attend the “Bavaria- I Summer Journey” (a festivity sponsored by Radio Bavaria I) at the Willy-Sachs-Stadium.
- Participants in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marathon – relay (for a charity cause) were not able to make the world record in September.
- What took 9 years is now displayed in front of the city theater – a giant “antifriction bearing” monument.
- The Georg-Schäfer-Museum welcomes its 500,000<sup>th</sup> visitor.
- The College of Further Education (FOS) receives a new principal who makes headlines with his complaints about the desolate condition of the annex.
- More than 70,000 visitors at the UFRA.
- The “Zeughaus” becomes a youth center – and the former “Markthalle” now houses Woolworth.
- The SPD party sends Ralf Hofmann and the CSU party Anja Weisgerber in the election campaign for the Federal government.

- A decision was made that St. Anton church will not be demolished – since it is under protection for historic buildings.
- Bishop Friedhelm Hofmann of Würzburg holds a sermon at St. Johannis Church on reformation day.
- During the budget conferences in November Lord Mayor, treasurer and the CSU party enforce their plans: No new projects and subsidies, but also no cuts. Even though investments are reduced a deficit of 14 million Euros is predicted for 2013.
- The topping out of the second construction phase for the “health park” is celebrated.
- The “Nürnberg Christkind” visits the Schweinfurt Christmas market and the market place is overcrowded.
- A petition with 1,000 signatures demand better conditions for the College of Further Education.
- 15 couples get married at the city’s registrar’s office on 12-12-12.