



Sister Cities of Jasper, Inc.

Jasper, Indiana · Pfaffenweiler, Baden-Württemberg

Pfaffenweiler's mayor stops in to celebrate continued partnership with Jasper February 10, 2023

Pfaffenweiler Mayor Lukas Mahler and his assistant Diana Treyer made a special visit to Jasper last week.

This is Mahler's first visit to Jasper. The 25-year-old was elected into office last September and began serving as mayor of the 2,500 residents of the German town in November. According to the mayor, 25 years old is the minimum age to be elected to office in Germany. He previously served as Pfaffenweiler's clerk-treasurer, an appointed position. He has a degree in municipal management and will serve as mayor for an eight-year term.

Treyer, whose maiden name is Eckerle, has visited Jasper several times and has family in the area.

During the event, Mayor Mahler said he felt the impact of the connection the Partnership has created in his short time in Jasper. "We are so warmly welcomed. It's like five minutes after you meet the people, it is like you talk to them every day," he said, adding that this is a shared feeling between the residents of both cities.

The pair arrived in time to celebrate the renewal of the partnership between the two cities and attend the special Wine and Dine Event held Saturday evening with the Wine Queen of Germany, Katrin Lang, and the Wine Queen of Baden, Jessica Himmelsbach.



Mayor Luka Mahler (left) and Jasper Mayor Dean Vonderheide (right)

During a press conference held Friday morning in the Pfaffenweiler Room at City Hall, Jasper Partnership Commission president Max Verkamp noted the celebration of the 37th anniversary was an extension of the 35th anniversary that was postponed due to the pandemic.

On December 31, 2022, the partnership commissions of Jasper and Pfaffenweiler signed the Unified Declaration for the future of the Partnership between Jasper and Pfaffenweiler. This declaration was the finalized output from discussions that started back in July when Pfaffenweiler and Jasper celebrated the 37th Anniversary of the Partnership.

As part of the anniversary activities, the Pfaffenweiler Partnership Commission hosted members of the Jasper Partnership Commission, Sister Cities of Jasper, and the Jasper German Club in an engaging brainstorming session centered on how to continue strengthening the relationships between the two communities.



These watches bearing the logo of the Sister Cities Program were created to celebrate the 35th anniversary. A special clock featuring the same logo was gifted to Jasper recently.

As a follow-up to the July session and over the back half of 2022, the declaration, which created the road map for the future, was created and refined through discussions between all of the parties.

The declaration identified three guiding principles..

The first is the sustainability of personal contacts. The groups want to make the personal encounters and exchanges sustainable and find ways these short-term contacts can be turned into long-term relationships.

"I think Lukas and Diana being here today is evidence of that and demonstrates the importance of how we can continue to do that," Verkamp said.

The second is a common financial foundation.

"We are aware that the activities to strengthen the partnership will require a solid financial foundation and want to explore various possibilities to support the mission," Verkamp read from a prepared statement.

And the third principle is exchanges and encounters. The groups want to maintain personal contacts and student exchange and build upon them with additional exchange formats. These formats can be remarkably diverse just like the life of our communities.

“For example, the student exchange started in 1986. So one year after the start of the partnership, I, fortunately, was one of the first five Jasper students that had the opportunity to go to Pfaffenweiler and really created a foundation from which I’ve been able to be engaged in this partnership,” Verkamp said, adding that he’s been able to provide that experience to his own children.

Whereas some cities announce their relationship with another city through the partnership program, Jasper and Pfaffenweiler have built a relationship over the years that includes the student exchange, annual trips and some shared projects. “When I was one of the first students to go over, that was just the beginning of the roots of the program,” Verkamp noted after the announcement on Friday. “Now the roots have grown and we have become this larger tree with very deep roots between our two communities.”

Mary Leah Siegel, President of Sister Cities of Jasper, is a first-generation U.S. citizen on her father’s side. She has close connections to family in Germany. Speaking of the importance of reestablishing those connections between the two communities over 37 years, she noted how important they were for the future.

I don’t personally want to lose that for my family, and I want for everyone to be able to know where they came from,” she said. “And, even if they’re not from Germany, (I want them) to have that relationship with the sister cities and the experience.”

The cultural connections are written in stone. While she was on a trip to Pfaffenweiler last summer, Siegel was touring a church there and noticed marks on the stones of the church. “Certain stone carvers make marks on stones just in the way they carved,” she said. “And those same marks are in St. Joseph Church.”

Shared thumbprints with an ocean between the two that connect both communities.

This signed declaration shows that both Jasper and Pfaffenweiler are truly committed to the partnership and have the desire to see it continue.



Pictured front row, from left: Lisa Bower, John Eckerle, Patti Goepfrich, Diana Treyer, Sandy Wehr, Steffi Schmücker, Mary Leah Siegel, and Kim Lottes.

Back row, from left: Bürgermeister Lukas Kahler, Mayor Dean Vonderheide, Max Verkamp, Matthias Hilger, and Stan Jochum.

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