

Sister Cities: Bringing the World Closer

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Tinley Park and the country of Germany shared a special connection long before the Village began its Sister Cities relationship with the west-central German town of Budingén in the late 1980s. Many of Tinley Park's founding families – including that of its first mayor, Henry Vogt – immigrated to the United States from Germany in the 19th Century and eventually found a permanent home here in Tinley Park.

Today, however, the bond between Tinley Park and Germany has gone far beyond a simple historical tie. Thanks to the Sister Cities program, which pairs Budingén residents visiting Tinley Park with local host families and vice versa, the relationship between the two communities has blossomed into a genuine and lasting friendship that transcends the thousands of miles that separate them.

“This is a lifelong relationship,” Sister Cities Commission associate member Reta Brudd said. “Most of the people (who have participated in the Sister Cities program) still communicate with their host families. It just gives you an understanding of another culture that you can't get any other way.”

Brudd, who also chairs the Community Resources Commission (CRC), said the Tinley Park Sister Cities program can trace its roots back to 1988 when former Village Clerk Patrick Rea was on reserve duty in nearby Frankfurt, Germany and struck up a friendship with Prince Ferdinand of Budingén.

Although a relationship already existed between the two communities as far back as the early '80s, it was when Rea asked Ferdinand if Budingén's band would like to perform in the Village's Oktoberfest celebration that the friendship reached the next level. Prince Ferdinand enthusiastically agreed, and more than 110 people from Budingén came to Tinley Park in October 1989, staying for about 10 days with host families and enjoying all the Village had to offer.

Former Tinley Park Mayor Ed Zabrocki and Budinggen Mayor Eberhard Bauner inked a Sister Cities partnership agreement in September 1989, and a friendship was born. Sadly, Prince Ferdinand died in a car accident the following year, and in his honor the Village formed the Sister Cities Committee as a subcommittee of the CRC. It branched out on its own as the Sister Cities Commission in 1995 following successful visits to and from Budinggen in 1990, 1992 and 1994.

As chairman of the CRC, Brudd was there to see the relationship develop firsthand, taking several trips to Budinggen herself and forming bonds with the residents there that she still cherishes to this day.

“Our motto is, ‘World peace, one family at a time.’ The Sister Cities program helps to bring the world a little bit closer,” she said.

Another Sister City was added to the family in 1999 after former Village Trustee Matthew Heffernan reached out to Mallow, a town in County Cork, Ireland. Then, in 2003, Mayor Zabrocki contacted Nowy Sącz, a city in Poland, to see if they’d be interested in forming a third Sister Cities relationship. Although talks stalled then, the Friendship Agreement recently was revisited and is finally reaching its final stages.

Perhaps the most tangible evidence of Tinley Park’s strong relationship with its original Sister City is the frog statue that sits in Zabrocki Plaza, a gift from Budinggen that sits as a permanent testament to the friendship that exists between the geographically distant communities. Artwork donated from Budinggen is available for viewing at Tinley Park Village Hall.

For more information or to get involved, please email Sister Cities Commission Chairperson Lucas Hawley at sistercity@tinleypark.org or call (708) 444-5000.