

## Dunlap students to experience Germany

**By Holly Richrath**  
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Dunlap, Ill. — Benjamin Greb, 19, visited Germany in 2005 with his family. This summer, he is returning to the foreign country, without his family in tow.

Greb, of Dunlap, is one of a group of 22 area teenagers participating in Friends of Friedrichshafen, a Peoria-based youth exchange program. The program sends teens to Peoria's sister city Friedrichshafen, Germany, where they stay with a host family for three weeks. Next year, the roles will be reversed and teens from Friedrichshafen will stay with families in the Peoria area.

The teens left for Germany Thursday and will return Aug. 5.

Though this is his first time traveling to Germany without his parents, Greb is no stranger to the program.

"I did the program last year and I had a lot of fun with the exchange student that came over here," Greb said. "I just wanted to go over there."

Greb is staying with Michael, the exchange student his family hosted last year, and his family while in Friedrichshafen.

He said he and Michael have kept in touch via e-mail over the past year.

Leigh Null, 18, and Kelly Nielsen, 16, both of Dunlap, are also in Friedrichshafen as a part of the program.

"I'm excited about being someplace new," Nielsen said. "I've been away from my family for a week before, but I was with friends, so this will be different. I'm definitely nervous."

Nielsen had not met the German family she is staying with before she left for Friedrichshafen.

"I'm most nervous about being away from my mom for that long," she said. "But I'm definitely excited."

Null also had mixed feelings before departing.

"I'm excited to see my friend who I stayed with two years ago and my friend who stayed with me last year," she said. "But I'm nervous about the language barrier. They speak English, but obviously it's Germany and so they speak German. My German's not so proficient."

The teens travel with two chaperons, who also stay with host families.

"Even years when we are hosting, we're having friends come stay with us," said chaperon Eric Hoadley. "This will be our fourth consecutive year staying in each other's homes. It's great."

Hoadley has been involved with Friends of Friedrichshafen for seven years. This will be his third trip to Germany, but his first without his wife, Theresa, as co-chaperon.

While he said he is a bit nervous about his first trip as chaperon without "his rock," Hoadley said he plans to keep in touch with his wife during the trip the same way the family has kept in touch with the German friends they have made from the program.

"Skype is a wonderful thing," he said. "We used it a lot this summer and I made sure my wife knew how to run it so we can keep in touch while I'm gone."

Hoadley said that while in Germany, the group participates in the daily-life activities of their host families, join in local community events and meet for eight or nine scheduled events. This year's scheduled events include a day trip to Munich and Cessna rides through the Swiss Alps.

"The neat thing about the program is the kids actually build friendships," said Theresa Hoadley. "The Germans are so hospitable, they go out of their way to welcome these kids into their homes and make them feel like family."

She added that while it is much easier for residents of Germany to hop over to surrounding countries and learn about different cultures, traveling internationally is more difficult and time-consuming for teens in the United States, but it is a great learning experience.

"When you travel in the United States, you notice little differences, but that doesn't compare to traveling internationally," she said. "It's a real eye-opener for our kids to see these differences."

The cost of the trip is about \$1,700, most of which pays for airfare.

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