



## German economic development director visits St. Charles to gain knowledge of sister city.

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The sister city program St. Charles has with Ludwigsburg, Germany, has benefited numerous young people from the two cities who have participated in student-exchange programs. But the budding relationship may soon result in more tangible, economic benefits.

Wolfram Schoeck, Ludwigsburg's economic development director, was in St. Charles recently to study how economic development is done here and establish contacts with local companies and local and state officials. St. Charles Economic Development Director Nadine Boon and numerous business and government officials escorted Schoeck to various companies and other sites in the region.

"In general, the factors for companies locating in Ludwigsburg are the same as here," he said during an interview. Those factors include a quality work force, a location in proximity to good transportation and a good quality of life.

Ludwigsburg and St. Charles are similar communities in many ways. St. Charles is close to Lambert-St. Louis International Airport, and Ludwigsburg is only 15 kilometers from Stuttgart and its major airport.

Ludwigsburg is slightly larger with a population of approximately 85,000 but, like St. Charles, has an educated populace that works in service industries such as banking, financial services and electronics. "We also have a small but growing film industry" that does post-production work. In fact, a technician from one of the companies in Ludwigsburg got an Oscar for his work on the movie 'Independence Day,'" Schoeck said.

"Most of our population has good qualifications with university degrees." Generally, both husbands and wives work, he added.

Like St. Charles, Ludwigsburg's economy is relatively prosperous. Just as St. Charles' jobless rate is lower than the St. Louis metropolitan area's rate, Ludwigsburg's unemployment rate is only 5 percent, about half that of Germany's rate. The community and surrounding area has some of the highest wages in Germany, Schoeck said.

And like St. Charles, Ludwigsburg is on the lookout for high-technology companies. "It's logical that our future lies in high-tech," he said.

St. Charles has seen an influx of Hispanic immigrants in recent years. But the amount of immigrants living and working here is negligible compared to the number of immigrants living and working in Ludwigsburg. Immigrants make up approximately 10 to 13 percent of the work force there, Schoeck said. Many of the immigrants are unskilled laborers and make up more than 50 percent of the work force in some companies, he added.

There are significant differences between St. Charles and Ludwigsburg. Schoeck said he visited the Fountain Lakes Commerce Center on Highway 370 and noticed all the warehouse space. That is one industry Ludwigsburg is not looking to attract. "Land is too expensive in Germany to do economic development the way it is done here," he said.

Another industry would produce more jobs per square meter, Schoeck said. Just one meter of undeveloped land can cost \$200. "I give you this figure to show you how precious land is," he said.

Also, "Our economy is very export-oriented," he said. "One-third of our income comes from exporting goods and services to other countries."