

SISTER CITY FIREFIGHTER EXCHANGE PROGRAM

If you are reading this essay, you will have the opportunity to learn about a fantastic program available to Indianapolis firefighters, but because very little is known about it, the support for the organization which selects and sends the firefighter, is minimal. I am composing this with the hope and mission of raising awareness of this phenomenal group and experience!

When I reflect back on late 2015, I contemplated whether I should make yet another New Year's resolution. I, like so many others, had often made somewhat empty promises to myself that I would: get in shape, lose weight, read more, etc. Sometimes I had been successful and other times....not so much. I decided that for 2016 I was going to make a VERY uncharacteristic resolution for the year. I promised myself the following: **DO THINGS THAT SCARE THE HECK OUT OF ME AND TAKE ME WAY OUT OF MY COMFORT ZONE!!** I was not exactly sure what that would look like in reality, but that was my goal and I was determined to live up to it. I did not share the resolution with anyone else, but I knew I had made it, so IF I failed to achieve it, I would feel very defeated.

Then it happened. An e-mail was sent out to all members of the Indianapolis Fire Department to announce the application process for the "Sister City Fire Fighter Exchange Program" with Cologne, Germany. When I saw this e-mail, I remember thinking that it would be a great experience. I am friends with the first IFD member who made the journey to our sister city of Cologne and he had a wonderful time! My New Year's resolution was tapping me on the shoulder and saying, "Are you paying attention, Sue? THIS is your opportunity! APPLY FOR THIS PROGRAM!" But my tendency to doubt my abilities crept into my mind and I started creating reasons (excuses) as to why I just could not do it. "Too busy. I have a dog. Who will take care of her for a month? I don't speak fluent German." (The application clearly stated that you did not need to know the language, but it would be a benefit.).

Fortunately, I have several very close friends who were relentless with me about applying. They told me to stop coming up with excuses and they would help me with all of the logistics. I submitted my general application, along with an essay that needed to demonstrate why I was the best candidate to be selected to represent IFD, the city of Indianapolis, and as I see it.....represent myself in a professional, proud way to the members of the Cologne Fire Department, my host firefighters (and their families and friends), as well as the citizens of Cologne, Germany. While I was out of state teaching a class to some

Ohio firefighters, I received a phone call to let me know that I had been selected. It was a pivotal phone call. This trip to Germany was now a reality!

I have composed this account of my experience (from the point of contemplating the application, all the way to the return to Indianapolis after a month in Germany) to share what an AMAZING opportunity this is for any firefighter. And I could never have made the journey if it were not for the tremendous amount of generosity and faith which the Sister City Exchange Committee extended to me. They trusted me, based on the application and essay which I submitted, that I would make them proud and satisfied with their selection. My round trip airfare was covered and I must say that very rarely did I have to reach into my wallet while in Germany. My hosts and their friends were beyond generous and kind when we went out.

My journey was all-inclusive, meaning that I was able to enjoy the “work” aspect of being a Cologne firefighter, as well as enjoy the “off day” life. I believe that it would not have been a complete cultural immersion if I did not do both. My main host firefighter, Uwe Siemons, picked me up from the airport and we were off and running for my first day (with terrible jet lag, of course). Uwe was the first Cologne firefighter to be selected to come to Indianapolis for the exchange program several years ago. He has taken on the challenging work of being a VERY big participant in selecting appropriate host firefighters with whom the Indianapolis firefighter will stay. That is a critically important selection, as the hosts must provide opportunities for the Indy firefighter to visit different sites, go to work with the host, be mentored at work to fully appreciate the possible similarities and differences between departments and even cultures, do fun things on the off days from work, all while providing a very welcoming and comfortable physical and emotional environment. This whole concept was NOT lost on me. I was very aware that I was coming into a family’s living space and potentially disrupting all normal activities. I had four different hosts, all with the most genuinely open, warm, and friendly personalities. They each lived in different regions, which offered a fun perspective for me. They each also had somewhat different living circumstances and relationship statuses, along with a little bit of an age span from one host to the next. I had not even considered what a great thing that variability would be. The one factor that all had in common was that they and their families and friends truly welcomed me with open arms and attitudes.

The purpose of this essay is not to go into a lot of details about differences and similarities between the Cologne and Indianapolis Fire Departments from an operational standpoint. There was SO much more to my personal and

professional journey! I simply want to bring significant attention to the Sister City Exchange Committee by sharing pieces of my experience so that perhaps city officials and companies in the city of Indianapolis will recognize what a fantastic program this is and offer to donate funding to them so that the program continues to thrive and send deserving firefighters on the cultural immersion journey of a lifetime. When I went to my first meeting of the committee, it became very evident that they were struggling to fund a trip for a couple of musicians who were making the trip. The committee also sends individuals outside of the fire service, so the program touches many culturally diverse groups. My hope is that as the awareness and education component increases about this amazing committee and program, there will also be an increase in all types of support of them. I also sincerely believe that as awareness and education improve, there will be a larger and larger pool of enthusiastic applicants wanting to have a life transforming experience! This can only serve to broaden one's perspective on appreciating not only differences between other cultures and ours, but also to realize that there is often a common thread woven throughout our cultures that brings us together. I discovered that thread and I think it changed me in a positive direction for my profession, as well as my personal relationships.

I have included photos which can only capture a fraction of the depth of my journey, friendships, and the bonds created during the time I was in Germany. This was so much more than a "trip to Germany." It challenged me, it took me way out of my comfort zone, it taught me about what kindness really looks like, regardless of your home country, language differences, or work practice differences. This program reinforced one of my favorite phrases: "IF IT DOES NOT CHALLENGE YOU, IT DOES NOT CHANGE YOU." I experienced both and I will forever feel blessed for the opportunity which I was given. My words cannot accurately convey my gratitude to the Sister City Committee, my hosts, their families and friends, and the German media. From start to finish, I cherish EVERYTHING about my journey of a lifetime. There are SO many mental images I love, from my days of working at the firehouse to hanging out at home with my hosts and their families and friends, going on day excursions to sightsee, spending incredibly fun time with the German press, touring the Rhine River with the Cologne Fire Boat, and enjoying the sweet farewell party my new friends hosted for me. My hope is that MANY more people have the chance to feel the same way! This essay just lets you take a peek through the lens of my mind and eyes so you can appreciate what I was fortunate enough to experience!



Sue Shepherd Represents IFD and the City of Indianapolis In Cologne, Germany



Freundeskreis Köln-Indianapolis e.V.

Home Über uns Aktuelles Galerie Grußworte Rückblicke DAG Maps Kontakt

Klein ...aber Oho!

Ja, sie sieht zierlich aus zwischen den beiden Riesen Klaus Kirchner und Uwe Siemens von der Kölner Berufsfeuerwehr, die am 15. Juli 2016 Sue Shepherd vom Indianapolis Fire Department begrüßten. „Firefighter Sue“ ist die diesjährige Teilnehmerin (und erste Frau) unseres Feuerwehr-Austausches zwischen Köln und Indy, der inzwischen schon zu einer dauerhaften Verbindung zwischen den beiden Feuerwehren geführt hat. Sue ist seit 16 Jahren im Einsatz bei Unfällen und Katastrophen und arbeitet neben ihren täglichen Pflichten als Firefighter auch als Fitness-Trainerin sowohl für ihre Kollegen im Fire Department als auch für private Kunden. In Köln wird sie von Woche zu Woche wechselnd in verschiedenen Feuerwehrfamilien betreut. Also aufgepasst: Freunde bei der Kölner Wehr...sie ist klein, aber oho!



US-Kollegin aus Indianapolis zu Gast

Super-Sue mischt Kölns Feuerwehr auf

von PHILIPP J. MEYER

chombärenden Trucks der „Firefighter“ aus dem Kreis, in Köln ist alles eine Spur kleiner: „Das ist gut so. Unsere Fahrzeuge“ würden in dem engen Kölner Straßen weit über Kopfsteingel abmanövrieren.“

In ihrer Heimatstadt sind unter 1200 Einsatzkräften etwa 55 Frauen. In Köln im Vergleich viel weniger (Unbekannt). „Ich werben Frauen an den Colleges und im persönlichen Umfeld an. Jede Frau muss zu uns passen. Inunterhalte repräsentiert sie unseren Beruf, unsere Werte, unsere Werte.“

In Köln war Sue schon bei mehreren Einsätzen dabei. Besonders gerne trinke ich hier Bier. Aber Kölnisch trinke ich richtig gerne. Und Kölns Altstadt – einfach wunderschön!“

Oben: Sue mit Kolleginnen auf der Wehr. Mitte: Sue bei der Arbeit. Unten: Sue bei der Arbeit.

Frauen in der Feuerwehr in Köln nur vier von 1000

Nur vier Einsatzkräfte der Berufsfeuerwehr sind weiblich. In Indianapolis sind es 55 Prozent. Die Feuerwehr hat in Köln 4000 Mitglieder. Die Feuerwehr hat in Köln 4000 Mitglieder. Die Feuerwehr hat in Köln 4000 Mitglieder.





