

PUBLICATION

Honorary Consul General's Corner

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Happy New Year and best wishes for 2017! Frohes neues Jahr !

This year promises to be memorable, as we look ahead to several important events and commemorations of interest not only to Germany but the world. 2017 is the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's posting his 95 Theses on the doors of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, which then ultimately set off the Protestant Reformation. Beyond the theological implications of Martin Luther's attack on certain then current practices of the Church, the long term social and political implications were transcendental. Europe was plunged into conflict as countries and leaders chose different sides. Regardless of one's faith, his actions are historically noteworthy and obviously continue to impact society today.

Martin Luther also had an important impact on German language. He was both a priest and scholar, and his translation of the Bible from Latin into German not only made it accessible to everyone. But this translation also served to record the vernacular German language of the time, creating certain standards and serving as an important historical linguistic record.

In terms of the US-Germany relationship, we hope that this year will see a continuation of the strong bilateral relationship and close collaboration. Germany is a leader in areas of climate change policy, renewable and alternative fuels, and awaits the direction of policies under the new US administration, as well as in other areas of military cooperation, NATO, joint security and economic cooperation. The US surpassed France last year as Germany's largest partner in bilateral trade and investment; free trade and movement of goods and capital have been the bedrock of our relationship. Chancellor Merkel has offered continued close cooperation based on common respect of the rule of law, respect for human and civil rights and other common areas of interest.

Over the last few years, we have seen the emergence of US adaptations of German-style "dual vocational" programs in Alabama and around the region. Many German companies in advanced manufacturing are actively seeking to address the skills gap by working with local community colleges, tech schools and even high schools to develop workforce development programs which combine classroom training with apprenticeships and practical on-the-job training. Continued success in attracting and retaining these manufacturers will require the expansion of such programs in order to ensure their long term success based on a highly skilled workforce.

As new challenges arise in the coming months, let us hope for continued close relations and strengthening of this vitally important partnership.

Best wishes to all.

Michael Johnson

Honorary Consul General