

American Junior Year Turns Fifty

BY MICHAEL KRESS

On Thursday, June 5, 2008, alumni from all corners of the world began arriving in Heidelberg, Germany. For some, it had been only a year since their studies here--for alumnus John Marx, however, it had been half a century since he arrived with the first Junior Year group in 1958. The alumni came to reconnect with old classmates, to relive their student days, and to commemorate the program which has now touched more than 1800 students' lives.

The celebration began even before students re-entered the American Junior Year study center for registration. They met on the streets, in cafés and in their hotels. Others came early to sightsee or were a part of Heidelberg College's tour group of more than 50 trustees, alumni and friends. Then, one by one, or in their newly reunited groups, they ascended the stairs to the study center where some familiar faces were waiting to reminisce over scrapbooks with vintage photos. They quickly identified themselves, old friends and acquaintances and retold stories of their semester or year in Heidelberg. We were especially honored that Mrs. Margrace Prugh Grotefend, daughter of Junior Year founding director Prof. Charles Prugh and his wife Mary, was able to join us in Heidelberg for these celebrations.

Early that evening, the discussions continued over champagne and orange juice with canapés at elegant *Haus Buhl*, located just below the castle. President F. Dominic Dottavio of Heidelberg College, the Director of the University's International Office Dr. Joachim Gerke, and Resident Director Dr. Brian Tracy greeted former students, faculty and friends of the American Junior Year at Heidelberg and Heidelberg College students, faculty, alumni, and trustees. Former Resident Directors Prof. Al Fink and Prof. Robert Berg, former AJY secretary Kathleen Lance, former Program Assistant Shaun Leibfried were back in Heidelberg

for this occasion. All were eagerly awaiting the joint concert of the Heidelberg College Concert Choir and the Camerata Carolina of the University of Heidelberg at the Providence Church. More than 200 people attended this moving and very beautiful *a cappella* musical event.

Friday June 6, began with a panel discussion about the future of the University of Heidelberg by deans and faculty members in the *Senatsaal* of the Old University. For many, the German university system has drastically changed since their days in Heidelberg. The official designation of the University of Heidelberg as one of Germany's ten 'elite' universities will result in additional federal financing of 30-40 million Euros per year for the next five years. The challenges of switching over to a B.A./M.A. system and of redesigning the curriculum to meet the demands of the 21st century are also considerable. The panel discussion was followed by informal class reunions on the top floor of the *Marstallcafé* where alumni shared memories over coffee and cake.

Late Friday afternoon an audience of more than 300 alumni, faculty, staff, friends and family of the program gathered in the *Alte Aula* of the Old University, the same room where the first American Junior Year student group led by Prof. Charles Prugh was officially welcomed in 1958. By serendipity, the date selected three years ago for this event (June 6) turned out to be Prof. Prugh's 102nd birthday. The Heidelberg College Concert Choir opened the celebration with Rector Bernhard Eitel of the University of Heidelberg and President F. Dominic Dottavio of Heidelberg College welcoming the guests and recognizing the importance of the partnership between their two institutions. Mayor Dr. Gerner of Heidelberg spoke on the topics of U.S.-German relations in Heidelberg over the past 50 years. Deputy Principal Officer Mr. Richard Aker of the U.S. Consulate in Frankfurt congratulated the program and placed it's history in the context of the tradition of U.S.-German academic exchange. Resident Director Dr. Brian Tracy focused upon the fact that the most important part of the program is the students—and that the Junior Year program has been particularly

successful in attracting students qualified to meet the academic challenge of studying at one of Europe's finest educational institutions, the University of Heidelberg.. Senior Distinguished Professor Detlef Junker, Founding Director of the University of Heidelberg's Heidelberg Center for American Studies, gave a keynote address on the topic of U.S.-German relations until 1990, when American support played a major role in facilitating the reunification of Germany. As a demonstration of the cooperation between 'the two Heidelbergs,' the Heidelberg College Concert Choir and the Camerata Carolina joined in a finale *Freut Euch Alle* by J. S. Bach. A reception in the *Bel Etage* of the Old University gave all those who took part in the event a chance to mingle and to give their best wishes to the program.

That evening, all the current and former American Junior Year students as well as guests, friends and faculty met at the restaurant *Backmulde* for a festive dinner. Many celebrated past midnight, recanting old stories but also hearing new ones from current students.

Saturday June 7, was a day of discovery. Two buses took alumni, students and guests to the Schwetzingen palace gardens, a reflection of Baroque ideals. Tour guides introduced guests to the splendors and the surprises planned by garden architect Nicolas de Pigage for Prince Elector Carl Theodore's summer residence in the mid-18th century.

Though rain threatened, it did not put a damper on the next high-point of the weekend, a river cruise down the Neckar River into the Neckar valley and back for the *Schlossbeleuchtung*, fireworks and a re-enactment of the burning of the Heidelberg castle by the French in 1693.

On Sunday June 8, alumni gathered for brunch at *Max Weber Haus* on the banks of the Neckar river and for a performance by IDEFix, a German-language student theater group for international students at the University of Heidelberg. Resident Director Brian Tracy closed

the celebrations with well-wishes for all students, alumni and friends of the American Junior Year.

Though these celebrations are over, American Junior Year alumni have another chance to gather—this time in New York city from October 10-12, 2008. The University of Heidelberg will be celebrating the founding of its program Heidelberg Alumni United States (HAUS), an alumni office for all those who studied at the University. For more information see <http://www.zuv.uni-heidelberg.de/AAA/alumni/haus/termine.html>.

Alumni have now departed Old Heidelberg. All of us at the American Junior Year are left with happy memories after seeing old friends and making new ones. Initial responses to the event have been very positive. Watch the AJY Alumni website for photos and additional information about the celebration. We look forward to hearing from even more alumni and friends in the coming months and years.