



Madison and Freiburg Sister Cities since 1988



Madison, Wisconsin



Freiburg im Breisgau



Madison has ten sister cities around the world. Our sister city in Germany is Freiburg im Breisgau, located in the southwestern corner of the country not far from the borders with France and Switzerland. It is approximately the same size as Madison and is also a university town like Madison. Freiburg is known as the “Gateway to the Black Forest” and Germany’s “Green City”.

Madison is the capital of the State of Wisconsin and location of the University of Wisconsin. Like Freiburg, Madison has many nicknames as well, such as “Four Lakes City” and “Mad City”.

In the mid-1980s the mayor of Freiburg, Rolf Böhme, approached Madison mayor Joseph Sensenbrenner, about the possibility of creating an official sister-city partnership. The official proclamations took place in Madison on May 31, 1988, and in Freiburg on September 8, 1988. We have been sister cities ever since.

One reason we are sister cities is because our two universities, the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, have had a professional relationship since the mid-1960s. In 2022 members of the Academic Year in Freiburg (previously “Junior Year in Freiburg”) celebrated 60 years of their experiences living and studying in Freiburg.



Mayors Böhme & Sensenbrenner in 1988

In 1991 Madison held the first “Freiburg Fair,” where artists from Freiburg performed in various venues throughout Madison. Also in 1991 Freiburg gave Madison the pair of mosaics that are now on public display next to the City County Building.

In 2003, a new Freiburg mayor, Dieter Salomon, visited Madison for the first time. He visited Madison again in 2013. He remained in office until 2019 when he was succeeded by the current mayor, Martin Horn.

Since 1988 three Madison mayors, Joseph Sensenbrenner, Paul Soglin, and David Cieslewicz, have visited Freiburg. In a Zoom call on July 6, 2021, Mayor Horn invited current Madison Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway to visit Freiburg. Mayor Horn himself visited Madison in September 2022.



Mayors Rhodes-Conway & Horn with Guenther Ruch of the Madison Männerchor

Over the course of the past 30+ years, various groups from Freiburg have visited Madison in an official capacity. In addition to the Freiburg Fair mentioned above, in 1997 the University of Freiburg Symphony Orchestra visited and performed at Mills Concert Hall on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus. In 2005 the Rathaus Band from Freiburg visited Madison as part of our "Freiburg Fair". In 2007 the Freiburg Youth Jazz Orchestra performed in Sun Prairie and at Madison's Overture Center. In 2012 the Freiburg Cathedral Girls' Choir performed in Overture Center under the auspices of the Catholic Dioceses of Madison and Freiburg. In 2013 Freiburg Mayor Dieter Salomon visited with a city delegation from Freiburg while friends in our sister organization, the Freiburg-Madison Gesellschaft, participated as well.

Groups from Madison visited Freiburg in 1994, 2001, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015, and 2017. Three of these (2001, 2004, 2006) were organized by our late president, John Jacoby. The others were coordinated directly between our two cities. Plans to visit in 2020 were cut short by the COVID pandemic. We were finally able to organize a visit to Freiburg in 2022 and hope to do so again in 2024.

In 2017, as part of that year's Partnerstadtmesse in Freiburg, we created a pull-up banner with images of Madison that we donated to our friends in Freiburg. We created one for ourselves as well, with images of Freiburg to display at the Farmers Market, the International Festival, and at other events in and around Madison. Also, as part of our visit to Freiburg in 2017, we co-sponsored the appearance of the Madison College Big Band at the festivities in Freiburg.

We have helped find accommodations for individuals from Freiburg who wanted to visit for extended periods of time. Between 1998 and 2001 we were able to facilitate exchanges between three individual high school students in Madison with three in Freiburg. The events of "9/11" put an end to one-to-one student exchanges. In 2017 two interns from Freiburg worked with Madison Mayor Paul Soglin's office in Madison. Then in 2019 an exchange was created between Theodor-Heuss-Gymnasium in Freiburg and two Madison high schools, West and Memorial, with students from Madison visiting Freiburg in June and students from Freiburg visiting Madison in October.

Starting in 2012 the City of Freiburg offered the City of Madison a scholarship available to students of German in Madison who want to study in Freiburg. The Madison-Freiburg Sister City Committee was given the assignment of ranking applicants for the scholarship and forwarding them to Freiburg.

Since 2006 we have set up an information table on the Capitol Square during Madison's summer Farmers Market, the largest of its kind in the USA. Every Saturday morning from June to October visitors can stop by to learn about our sister city program as well as those of Madison's other nine sister cities. In addition, we organize a so-called "Stammtisch" at a local brewery, usually on the last Sunday of the month from June to October.



West High School students visiting Berlin in June 2023



Theodor-Heuss Gymnasium students visiting Chicago on 27 September 2023

In 2017, following the death of our former president, John Jacoby, we established the John W. Jacoby Memorial Scholarship Fund to support pre-collegiate students who show an interest in projects related to our relationship with Freiburg. To date the Jacoby Fund has sponsored trips by high school students to Freiburg. We hope to do more of this in the future.



Theodor-Heuss Gymnasium students visiting Mayor Rhodes-Conway on 2 October 2023

On January 31, 2020, our Vice President at the time, Barbara DeMain, joined President Charles James to purchase paintings by local artists at ArtWorking in Madison. We planned to send the paintings to Freiburg for an exhibition of art works from their twelve sister cities. A week later Barbara passed away. The paintings were finally sent to Freiburg in 2021 and displayed as part of “Art Encounters – An Exhibition with Freiburg’s Sister Cities” in 2022. With these paintings we honor Barbara for all of her contributions to the Madison-Freiburg Sister City Committee over the years.



Romano Johnson - 24" x 36"
Silver Top Trophy Car - \$700



Charles James & John DeMain, 10 March 2024



Ben Fleischman - 20" x 16"
Spring Flamingo

In addition to Madison’s relationship with Freiburg, Dane County has a “sister county” in Landkreis Kassel, located in Wisconsin’s “sister state” of Hessen in central Germany. We work closely with our colleagues in our sister communities, as well as with the other nine sister city organizations that Madison supports.

For further information, see our website at www.madisonfreiburg.org.

