

# 26th Annual Outreach-KONTAKT recognizes German-American friendships

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Photo credit **Spc. Adam Garlington**

*Ceremony Host Brig. Gen. Nadja West, the commanding general for the Europe Regional Medical Command, continues building German-American friendships at the 26th Annual Outreach-KONTAKT Awards Ceremony Sept. 10 at the Village Pavilion on Patrick Henry Village. The ceremony honored groups and individual members for their volunteer efforts as goodwill ambassadors for both the U.S. and Germany.*

HEIDELBERG, Germany -- The U.S. Army in Europe recognized more than 50 Outreach-KONTAKT club members and groups Sept. 10 during the 26th Annual Outreach-KONTAKT Awards Ceremony at the Village Pavilion on Patrick Henry Village Sept. 10.

The ceremony recognized awardees for their volunteer efforts as goodwill ambassadors for both the U.S. and Germany.

Ceremony Host Brig. Gen. Nadja West, Europe Regional Medical Command commanding general, said for more than 40 years Outreach-KONTAKT has served as a bridge for Americans and Germans alike to learn about and understand the differences between cultures, such as language, customs, food, politics, and educational systems.

The differences between the American and German educational system were noticed by Birgit Thomas.

Thomas, an Outreach-KONTAKT Heidelberg club member, said that the American education system gives students the freedom to choose and switch their studies at anytime as opposed to the German education system which sets students on a predetermined course for future studies.

Experiencing and learning the differences between American and German cultures aren't the only benefits of Outreach-KONTAKT, because it provides many opportunities to volunteer in the community too.

Outreach-KONTAKT members volunteer an average of 80,000 hours each year to foster friendships between the U.S. and Germany by supporting USAREUR Soldiers, Families, programs and events.

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Staff Sgt. Lonnie Silk, the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment radar section noncommissioned officer in charge, who volunteered more than 570 hours with Outreach-KONTAKT last year, said that his most memorable Outreach-KONTAKT experience was the Vilseck Christmas Breakfast.

Silk, who was separated from his two children during the holidays, recalls local KONTAKT members inviting him to a buffet brunch on Christmas morning.

"It got my mind off of spending the holidays by myself," said Silk. "Now, it was the holidays, and I was with a bunch of people that cared about me."

Outreach-KONTAKT builds German-American friendships and promotes interaction between cultures by sponsoring and supporting community events that attract approximately 500,000 participants each year.

There are 13 active Outreach-KONTAKT clubs in Germany that give Soldiers, Family members and civilians an opportunity to learn about Germany and its culture. In return it also provides information about the American way of life to Germans and citizens of other countries. For more information about Outreach-KONTAKT, contact your garrison public affairs office.