AGP STUDY TRIP TO GERMANY

A long time plan on our wish list of new programs to initiate, we finally had our take off in the summer of 2018. From June 17-22, we explored engineering student exchange programs between Germany and Alabama, were introduced to the German apprenticeship system, took two plant tours, networked for business development opportunities, and explored German history and culture.

The trip was sold out with twenty participants, reflecting the diversity of AGP’s functions – representatives from Business, Economic and Industrial Development, Workforce Development, the Community College system and Alabama Universities.

Our program started in Wuerzburg, where we met Dr. Robert Grebner, President of the University of Applied Sciences Wuerzburg-Schweinfurt, and several colleagues involved with the engineering exchange between FHWS and Auburn University. We toured the three campuses, various labs, and learned, among other things, about the many international exchange programs, with a special focus on business and engineering. We took a tour of the city, experienced the Southern German hospitality and cuisine, and went to a beer tasting at one of the oldest German breweries.

The next day, we left for Feuchtwangen, where we were kindly hosted by REHAU AG+CO. Thomas Schoppik, HR Director, gave us a fabulous tour of the plant and training center, and apprentices presented their experience with various levels of the education system, from practical training to university degrees. The informative visit at REHAU was followed by a tour of the Staatliche Berufsschule Dinkelsbuehl (vocational school), where we heard a presentation by the Director of Studies, Walter Kress, and observed classes in control and process engineering.

We spent the night in beautiful Rothenburg ob der Tauber, toured the city, and experienced an outstanding Franconian wine tasting.

The next day, we departed to Sindelfingen, where we were graciously hosted by Mercedes-Benz. We enjoyed a tour of the Daimler plant, and heard from Stefan Abraham, Head of Operations CASE, and colleagues about the future of electromobility, research and development, and requirements of human resources. Students from the University of Alabama presented on their exchange program with Mercedes-Benz.

We spent the last couple of nights in Stuttgart. We met Ola Kaellenius, member of the Board of Management of Daimler AG, and Heinz Neunzig, member of the original Mercedes site selection team, at our Mercedes-Benz appreciation dinner, sponsored by Tuscaloosa County Industrial Development Authority. Plus we attended the German-American Business Forum and Global Connect conference for export and internationalization. Arndt Siepmann, Deputy Director for Economic Development at the City of Auburn, who was very involved in making our study trip a success, commented: “I am very proud of Alabama’s presentation at the Deutsch Amerikanische Wirtschaftstag Conference in Stuttgart as part of the AGP delegation program. The Minister of Economic Affairs, Labor and Housing, Dr. Nicole Hoffmeister-Kraut, made very complimentary remarks about Alabama at the gathering of about 250 officials and company representatives”.

In the evening, we hosted a wine reception with Baden –Wuerttemberg State Officials, including our guest of honor Dr. Nicole Hoffmeister-Kraut. And for our last night, we followed a gracious invitation by our colleagues from the GACC Atlanta to a VIP reception at the Porsche Museum.

For all y’all who missed out on this splendid opportunity, here comes the good news: the inaugural study trip was such a success (Thank you, TINE!!) that we will follow up with study trip number 2 in June 2019. It will be kicked off in Berlin, the site for the 2019 German-American Business Forum and Global Connect conference. Mark your calendars!