

Annemarie Fritz

Kontakt Club leader keeps Americans in touch with German culture

by Jen D. Rodriguez

Annemarie Fritz has built a reputation in the Heidelberg community as being the person to go to when you first arrive.

"She goes beyond the norm to make you feel at home and welcomed," said Sabine Baggett, who wrote to the Herald-Post suggesting that a story be written about Fritz's efforts to help new arrivals. "She devotes many hours and her own resources to make tremendous contributions throughout the military community to bring Germans and Americans together."

A native of Schwetzingen, the 53-year-old Fritz has a wealth of information to share with anyone relocating to Heidelberg.

Most Saturdays she can be found collecting food from farmers near Patrick Henry Village for the homeless, or introducing a group of Heidelberg newcomers to breakfast at Ikea, or taking them to visit one of the open-air markets in Schwetzingen.

When not working as a full-time referral assistant for Heidelberg community housing, Fritz volunteers her time to orienting newcomers to the Heidelberg community.

In May she was honored as one of Heidelberg's Volunteers of the Year.

"If a small family comes in," Fritz said, "I take them to the Walldorf petting zoo. It's nice for the little kids. I show them (Americans) our culture so that they feel comfortable while stationed here."

Fritz's goal is to keep Americans involved in Germany. "It would be a loss for Americans to go home in three years and say that there was nothing to do in Germany," she said.

"I have to show 'em there are so many nice places to see here," she said, rather than staying in Mark Twain Village and Patrick Henry Village and watching TV.

Fritz's relationship with Americans dates back to about 1955, when she was 3 years old and her mother worked in the Tompkins Barracks mess hall, as dining facilities were known then. "I would play with the American kids at Christmas parties or at events with the command group," she



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Heidelberg's Kontakt Club German president Annemarie Fritz (left) visits with longtime friend Alfons Faist, owner of the Landeck farm deep in the Black Forest, to inquire about renting the cottage behind them for a future Kontakt Club trip.

said. "This is how I learned English. I had lots of problems later in school, because I'd learned the American English."

Over the years, Fritz has helped the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts plant 500 trees in Rhineland-Pfalz following a tornado; volunteered with the 43rd Signal Bn. family readiness group; offered cooking classes in her home; organized Christmas parties for single Soldiers and families away from home; and organized European excursions and events through the Heidelberg Kontakt Club,

which she serves as the international president. She is also a board member of the German Federation of Kontakt International Clubs.

"I believe Annemarie was placed here to enrich our lives," Baggett said. "She truly makes me believe in angels. She is a very beautiful person that brings out the best in people."

"Friendship and love, this is all we need in life – someone to love you and be your friend," said Fritz. In this tough time, it's more important than ever.