

Dear guests, dear alumni exchange students, dear host families, dear friends from San Luis Obispo,

As we enter the 64th year of our partnership between SLO High School and the German School Committee on one side of the Atlantic and Ebelu on the other side, we are so proud, happy and grateful to have the wonderful opportunity to welcome you all here at the Jubilee Gala on the special occasion of the 325th anniversary of our Ebelu and of course, on the extraordinary birthday of our partnership.

I especially want to welcome the members of the German School Committee, and in particular Amy Kardel and Carol and Warren Sinsheimer, who as the presidents of the GSC, have given a lot of their attention, caring and dedication to this unique partnership.

We really feel honored and thankful that you, dear friends from SLO, have made it to head over to Good Old Germany to join our celebration for this significant birthday.

Tonight we have come together for the Gala Ball and tomorrow we'll all attend the joint concert of the choirs of our two schools and the Ebelu Orchestra here in this hall.

It is such a great, overwhelming and unforgettable experience for us all to have you here with us sharing with you these great events. Thank you so much for coming. We are really thrilled to attend this reunion.

"This was truly the best year of my life."

"It's not just one year; it's a life-changing, incredible experience, a milestone in my life."

"A year full joy and adventures, but also full of emotions and challenges."

"A year to remember, a year full of memories and cherished friendships."

"Across the years, a lasting lifelong connection."

These are the words full of enthusiasm and gratitude you can hear students from both schools say every year.

And the alumni's reflections and statements in the Festschrift for our anniversary and in your GSC Newsletter testify that their year abroad and their experiences, the new cultural context, the new people and friendships have had a tremendous impact on their personal lives, even on the course of their studies and their professional career.

But not only their lives have been affected but also the lives of all those who have participated: exchange students, host families and friends.

More than 120 students have had the opportunity to study abroad and more than 120 families have been hosts to these students.

Many others in both cities have contributed to the success of this special and unique exchange, the longest continuous one-on-one exchange program founded in the United States and in Germany. No other German or American school has had such a long and treasured tradition.

We are all tremendously proud of this active and thriving partnership and the big wonderful GSC-Ebelu Family.

In today's global society, more than ever, the understanding and friendship is needed. It is important to open our homes and hearts to those from other countries and nations.

This outstanding exchange program began after the Second World War, in 1948, when San Luis Obispo High School's Dean of Girls, Miss Ethel Cooley, learned from a German Gymnasium in need and found a way to help. She started a student exchange program, the German School Committee, in an effort to promote international friendship, understanding and peace. She and her students began sending packages of school supplies and everyday necessities to our school in war-torn Stuttgart.

In 1953 the two schools began a yearly student program. The first German boy went to SLO and the following year the first American boy came to Stuttgart.

1956 marked the beginning of the two-way exchange and the program has been in existence continuously since. At that time these students were real pioneers who made all their way across the United States and on the ship over the Atlantic to get to their new homes.

I still remember Ethel telling me wonderful stories about those astonishing brave ventures when she was accompanying the American boys on their journey across the US from California to New York teaching them the German language and giving them instructions in how to behave in Old Germany.

While SLOHS and Ebelu, through the German School Committee exchange student program have long been sister (or better at the beginning brother) schools, the contact between our two schools have become stronger and broader through new commitments.

I myself made two linguistic group exchanges in the 90s together with my dear colleague Irmgard Latham, at that time German Teacher at SLOHS.

In the last few years the musical alliance and friendship between the SLO choirs under their former director Gary Lamprecht and the Ebelu orchestra under their former conductor Peter Bachofer and the Ebelu choirs under Andrea Amann have further enriched our close bonds.

In 1998 we celebrated the memorable 50th anniversary of our school partnership in both cities where the week of friendship and celebration culminated in wonderful joint concerts.

In 2000 the Ebelu Choir and in 2005 the Ebelu Orchestra visited SLO again and in the summer 2006 students from both schools performed together with the Choir of the German School in Cairo in Peter Bachofer's retirement Concert.

That was the 6th time our schools had experienced music sharing either in SLO or in Stuttgart.

Tomorrow it will be the 7th time and we hope and wish it will nurture the relationship between our two schools and their new directors Paul Osborne, Dirk Siegel and Gereon Müller. Of course, Andrea Amann is still a member of the team.

It gives me great pleasure to take the opportunity to thank all those who have given their time and energy to make this unique partnership possible all over the years; our thanks go to the two school communities, their principals and the teachers and all the Members of GSC involved in this exchange program.

I would very much like to thank the German School Committee , the Association of the Alumni of Ebelu and the parents of Ebelu for the ongoing financial support of this exchange. Without their generous donations this time-honored program would not have been possible.

Moreover, I would like to express our deeply felt gratitude to the great many host families in the past and at present. Thank you all for your warm welcome, your great hospitality and your kind support.

A very, very big thank-you goes especially to my dear friends Amy Kardel and Carol Sinsheimer for their tireless efforts to breathe life again and again into our partnership despite many a hurdle in the past few years.

I personally am infinitely thankful for every single aspect that this extraordinary cherished partnership added to my personal life over the past almost 30 years, for all the experiences I have shared and most importantly, for all the people who I met and connected with. Thank you for this special friendship.

We all highly value the special close bonds between our two schools and GSC. May they remain strong and thriving.

Thank you.

Now I would like to ask Amy and Carol to come onto the stage. I'd like to thank them for our wonderful friendship.