



## Arzberg, Germany, South Bend's Sister City

Arzberg is a quiet, provincial town of about 6,500 inhabitants, situated in the Roslau Valley of the Fichtelgebirge mountain range, only a few miles from the famous natural spas of the Czech Republic. An ancient town, its first documented mention was in 1268, and it has survived many rules, including Prussia, France, and Bavaria. Its most important industries, mining and porcelain production, date back centuries and have earned Arzberg fame well beyond the German borders. In addition to porcelain and mining, other early trades included the weaving of linen and wool and the gunsmith trade. Products of gunsmith Gesell and the potter Stöhr are even to be found in large museums. In addition, the town is well-known for its excellent gingerbread and meat and sausage products, and boasts the oldest nail polish factory in Bavaria, as well as a factory for melting glass, companies for stone construction, building firms, and woodworking.

South Bend's connection to Arzberg was forged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as 10% of the Arzberg population immigrated to America, most of them coming to South Bend. Immigrants from Arzberg have played an important role in the development of South Bend. They were among the first to start the many businesses, services, and trades that make up a center of commerce. The area around Marion and N. Michigan streets was called "Little Arzberg" at the time, much of which is now Memorial Hospital. On the east side of South Bend around Zion church, then at the edge of town, was the "Hoyt," named after the Haid, a remote area around Arzberg. Many family names, such as Muessel, Elbel, Troeger, Lan, Koehler, Rockstroh, Fredrickson, Ginz, Kamms, Nickels, Hagens, Knoblocks, Koenigs, Kuesperts, Kunstmans, Lederers, Mainers, Sacks, Weiss, and many more are still prominent both in Arzberg and South Bend today.



In 2001, Dr. Gabrielle Robinson, Director of International Programs at Indiana University South Bend, visited Arzberg to research her book on German immigration to the South Bend area in the nineteenth century. She invited Herr Ervin Scherer, archivist at the Lutheran church in Arzberg and local historian, to South Bend to research the archives of letters and manuscripts at the Northern Indiana Center for History, which document the historical bonds of family and friendships between the two cities.

In 2002, Dr. Robinson led a delegation of twenty from South Bend to Arzberg to celebrate South Bend's heritage and revitalize the contact between the two cities. The Arzberg-South Bend celebration at the Arzberg City Fest included the opening of a 10-panel exhibit on the South Bend-Arzberg connection, and the unveiling of a permanent memorial in front of City Hall, which reads in German:



The citizens of the city of Arzberg and the citizens of the city of South Bend, Indiana have set here a symbol of friendship and solidarity between the German and American people.

They were citizens from Arzberg who, in the middle of the nineteenth century, left their home in search of a new existence. In South Bend in Indiana they found a new home that enabled them to lead a life in freedom and peace.

They were citizens from South Bend who, in the year 2002, came to Arzberg from Indiana in search of their historic roots. In Arzberg they found citizens who welcomed them in friendship and thereby expressed their thanks to the American people.

Correspondence and visits continued between the German and American families, and in June 2003, Arzberg returned the visit, bringing the Mayor of Arzberg, Winfried Geppert, and ten of its citizens to South Bend. In 2005, Mayor Geppert and a delegation of Arzberg residents returned again to South Bend, this time to celebrate the formalization of the Sister City relationship.

**For more information on Arzberg, visit [www.arzberg.de/index2.html](http://www.arzberg.de/index2.html) and click on the British flag for the English version of the site.**