

## 15 Years of FwF: Welcome evening in the City Hall Ballroom



Tonight's welcome evening for the new foreign students in Erfurt was a very special occasion since we were also celebrating the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of FwF. In addition, I am retiring after 15 years as Project Director and co-founder of FwF, the Cosmopolitanism and Hospitality initiative in Erfurt.

The ballroom was well filled with hosts, foreign students and numerous guests of honor who accepted our invitation. In his opening speech, the Mayor of Erfurt, Andreas Bausewein, thanked our project partners, including myself for 15 years of successful work with FwF. Mirjam Kruppa, Commissioner of the Free State of Thuringia for Integration, Migration and Refugees, also paid tribute to the commitment of all those involved in the project in recent years.





Dr. Katrin Langer, Managing Director of the Thuringian Institute for Academic Continuing Studies (TIAW) and moderator of the evening, interviewed various people asking how they would describe the development of FwF from their point of view. In addition, she also asked how important they viewed the roles of the hosts and if they can share specific special experiences.



The Leu host family enthusiastically shared about their experiences and activities with their host students Jessica and Donovan Gregg from the USA. The students confirmed the great “hosting”, especially the direct connection to the Erfurt Chamber of Industry and Commerce (IHK). The fact that they can take part in many events organized by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry is very good for their professional career. Sahmeh, an FwF alumna from Egypt, emphasized the importance of the FwF initiative for foreign students. Other alumni including Ruben from Venezuela and Kanishka from Afghanistan reaffirmed this sentiment.



In honor of all of the hosts, we paid tribute to six of them in particular because for many years they have been committed to giving foreign students a little family security away from home. To helping the students familiarize themselves with Erfurt and the surrounding areas, to assisting them with learning the German language, and every day matters including visits to the authorities, doctors, looking for an apartment or a side job, amongst many other things. Those recognized were the Wieler Family, Wintzer Family, Kämmerer Family, Hartmut Schermer, Karl-Heinz Wegerich and Gert Gutberlet.



A few guests surprised me with gifts and messages of gratitude for the work I have done over the past 15 years. The future project coordinator Dana Kittel was also warmly welcomed to our FwF team.





The cultural framework of the event was provided by the Thuringian Folklore Ensemble Erfurt and the Drummer Group of the African-German Association for Culture and Education.



During the social gathering that followed, hosts and students got to know each other and made plans to meet afterwards. Of all the new foreign students who began their studies at the University of Erfurt or Erfurt University of Applied Sciences, 65 students from 32 countries registered with FwF. The personal relationships they will build with their Erfurt hosts will make their stay more pleasant.

After completing their studies in Erfurt, whether their stay is for a semester or longer, they will certainly take unforgettable memories back home with them. This includes to France, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Uzbekistan, Ecuador, Andorra, Rwanda, Japan and many other countries.



Petra Eweleit (FwF Director, 2002-2017)

Erfurt, November 3, 2017