

## History of the German House at the Univ. of the South

When Dr. Frederick Whitesell retired from the German Dept. in 1976, there were 135 candidates for the job and Dr. James C. Davidheiser of the Univ. of Delaware was



hired to replace him. During his interview in Sewanee with Dean Stephen Puckette Dr. Davidheiser stated that he could only accept the job if he could found a German House and an exchange program with the Federation of German-American Clubs. He had been instrumental in helping to establish the Deutsches Haus and the exchange program at the Univ. of Delaware and knew how important this was for the learning of German. A Renaissance man who was familiar with both German and French, Dean Puckete readily asented: "We need this," he said. There was already a French House (now Phillips

Residence Hall) and by chance Dr. Davidheiser and then Vice Chancellor Robert Ayres visited Emory Hall, a women's residence hall directly across from Phillips and next to the "old hospital," and chose that as the new German House. It opened in 1978 with 10 students. One of its many cultural forays was a "Party across the Rhein" as the open air get-together on the lawn between Emory and Phillips was called.

Although it possessed beds for 10 students, Emory had no living room or kitchen suitable for German cultural events. The House, after all, was envisioned by Dr. Davidheiser as both a language and cultural center. All events were dependent upon good weather and were held outside at that time. The first exchange student was Thorolf Karb from the Univ. of Mainz who was popular with students. Having turned 60 in August of 2016 he still fondly remembers his time in Sewanee. Like all those who came after him he helped students with speaking German and was present at the weekly Mittagstisch which Dr. Davidheiser introduced in 1977-1978 to give students another opportunity to speak German.

In 1987, the Bruton House on the corner of Louisiana Circle and University Ave. became available following he death of Mrs. Bruton, wife of the former Univ. provost. The Dean of Students, Mary Sue Cushman, called Dr. D and stated: "The Bruton House is available. You are at the top of the list for a new site. If you want it, come over quickly and make a decision." Dr. Davidheiser contacted Dr. Reinhard Zachau, his colleague in the German Dept. Both went over immediately and jumped at the chance to acquire this real family house with a large kitchen, dining room, living room and back yard as well as

five rooms upstairs. Since there were only two baths, Dr. D asked that a large closet upstairs be turned into a third bath. This was granted and the house was renovated for student occupancy. Dr. D had a three word sign “Das Deutsche Haus” made to hang over the front door and it still hangs there proudly to greet occupants and visitors.



Now in its 38th year the Deutsches Haus has flourished as a living quarter for seven female and male students wishing to practice German and to deepen their knowledge of German culture. There are periodic annual events in the Haus which range from lectures in both German and English on a wide range of topics from the world of German-Austrian and Swiss culture, open houses which provide opportunities for members of the student body and community to visit, Kaffeeklatsche, etc. An important gathering is the report each fall by the students who have spent a year, semester or summer abroad to their classmates and faculty. Dr. Zachau has been especially engaged in bringing good German-language films to the Haus. Dr. Davidheiser, National President of Delta Phi Alpha National German Honor Society has held initiations in the Haus since the chapter's founding in 1995. There have also been festivals such as Oktoberfest and the Weihnachtsfest, the most popular of all Haus events, each year in the Haus. The addition of Dr. Richard Apgar and Dr. Liesl Allingham to the faculty in recent years has brought new colleagues there too to enrich its offerings and opportunities for speaking German.

2016-2017 marks the 38th year of the successful operation of the German House. Its success has not only been due to the German faculty but also to the many engaged students who have lived and thrived there and left their mark on this learning adventure.



*Dr. Davidheiser bought the piano for the students to have music nights, photos of past German House residents are seen on the bookshelves capturing a bit of the history.*

