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July 15, 2015 9:35PM

Friedrichshafen exchange includes firefighter

PEORIA — Later this month, teenagers from Peoria's sister city in Germany are to arrive in town for an extended stay.

Later this year, so is to arrive a 20-something Friedrichshafen firefighter.

The teens are part of the annual youth exchange between Peoria and Friedrichshafen, located along the shore of Lake Constance in southern Germany. The exchange began 37 years ago. It's considered the longest continuous exchange in the United States.

What Tim Hoffman appears to have in mind is a bit more novel. The 24-year-old intends to arrive Oct. 12 from Friedrichshafen and spend until Nov. 20 working with the Peoria Fire Department.

"He wanted to have a chance to understand a little bit more about what things are like in America," said Alan Dickey, a member of Peoria-based Friends of Friedrichshafen.

During a meeting Wednesday, Dickey told the Peoria Sister City Commission about Hoffman's plan.

Hoffman wouldn't be the first young adult from the Friedrichshafen area who has come to Peoria recently for a different kind of job experience.

Earlier this year, Lukas Schenck spent three months working in the city finance department. Schenck's superiors accorded him high praise for his performance.

"He was looking for an internship, and it's the same thing with this guy," Dickey said. "There's people that understand there might be other ideas.

"Things are different. It doesn't mean that they're better or their worse, but you can learn from the fact that they're different. It forces you to think about where you live and what you do."

Such municipal international internships might not be common in Peoria. But Rex Linder, the commission chairman, appears to believe they should be.

"It's a cultural and educational exchange," he said.

As for the Friedrichshafen teenagers, their exchange is to begin July 28 and continue with local host families until Aug. 16. The group this year is to consist of 19 teens. Capacity is 20, but one participant had to drop out because of illness, Dickey said.

In odd-numbered years, a Friedrichshafen youth contingent has been visiting central Illinois. In even-numbered years, a similar group from Peoria has been heading east.

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