

## CURRICULUM VITAE

### **Wilhelm Werner (Bill) Seeger**

6977 Alaska Avenue S.E.

Caledonia, MI 49316



- Born May 7, 1936, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Son of W. and Emilie Seeger (Schnitzelbank Restaurant)
- Attended Immanuel Lutheran School (spoke only German until he entered school)
- Grand Rapids Central graduate, 1954
- BA,MA University of Michigan
- Studied at the University of Bonn , Germany, 1960-61
- Ph.D., U of Wisconsin
- Professor emeritus of Modern Languages, 2005, having taught at Grand Valley State University from 1965 to 2005
- Chair of Modern Languages Department
- Advisor of Grand Valley State University Alumni Association
- Led numerous study abroad programs for Grand Valley State University students
- President of Michigan American Association of Teachers of German, 1972-74
- Outstanding professor, Michigan Association of Governing Boards, 1997
- Life member, Society for German-American Studies; coordinator of international conference, 2001, 2005; Special award, 2005
- Grand Rapids Historical Society board, 1980 to present; chair 1987-90
- Various publications and presentations on the Germans of Grand Rapids and on German brewing in GR

## GERMANS, SWISS & AUSTRIANS

**Countries or Regions of Origin:** Provinces of Westphalia, Swabia and Bavaria in Germany, Switzerland & Austria

**Languages Spoken:** German

**Geography and Politics:** Austria and Switzerland are located in central Europe and share borders with Germany, their larger neighbor to the north. The Protestant Reformation that established the Lutheran and Reformed Churches began in Germany and Switzerland. Germany remained a series of smaller states until unification began under Prussia and was completed in the 1870's. Two World Wars and the Jewish Holocaust brought devastation throughout the former territories of the Austro-Hungarian and German Empires. Following World War II, Germany was split into zones, administered by the victorious Allied powers. The Russian Zone became East Germany, located behind the communist "Iron Curtain", until Germany was reunified in 1990.

**Leaving and Arriving:** Some of the earliest German immigrants were farmers who came in the 1840's from the region of Westphalia. Many were also middle class merchants, grocers and craftsmen who settled in towns throughout the region. German immigrants continued to arrive throughout the 19th century, seeking better jobs, and fleeing religious conflicts, heavy taxation and military conscription. German immigration stalled during World War I but picked up again during Germany's financial crisis between the Wars.

**Settlement in West Michigan:** By the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a large German neighborhood was established along Bridge Street north of downtown Grand Rapids, and extending onto the west side of the Grand River. German speaking Austrians generally assimilated into larger German congregations and populations. A group of Russian Germans settled around the St. Joseph area. Swiss families settled in rural Vergennes and Grattan Townships in Kent County during the 1880's.

**Population Size:** During the 2000 census, 398,431 people of German descent lived in Western Michigan, making them the largest ethnic group in the region. There were also 5,163 people of Swiss and 2,828 of Austrian descent in Western Michigan, making a combined total of 406,422. The largest populations were in Kent County with a combined total of 71,872 and Kalamazoo County with 35,217. Nearly one-third of the population in Bridgman and St. Joseph claim German ancestry.

## DIVERSITY & INCLUSION AT KENT COUNTY

At Kent County we recognize the value and the many benefits that are afforded by embracing and sustaining a diverse workforce. Those values and benefits include, but are not limited to:

- An awareness and understanding of those within our community allows us to fulfill the mission of Kent County by effectively serving the needs of our diverse community and customer base.
- Workforce diversity is essential to our ability to attract, recruit and retain qualified employees.
- Diversity among our employee base and cultural understanding among employees gives us a competitive advantage and will allow us to remain an employer of choice.
- Workforce diversity fosters greater innovation and creativity among employees and enhances communication and relationships with the community we serve and among our employees.
- Minimizes Kent County's exposure to costly and unnecessary lawsuits and reduces interpersonal conflicts.
- Maximizes our operational effectiveness... *team members are at their creative and productive best when they are valued for their contributions and are included in their organization's progress.*

Kent County's primary vehicle for advancing diversity and inclusion in the workplace is the Kent County Cultural Insight Council (CIC). Formed in January 2001, the CIC is a self-directed, interdepartmental work group sponsored by the County Administrator/Controller's Office. The mission of the council is *"To act as a catalyst to foster a culture which recognizes, accepts and values the individual differences of its employees and is responsive to the changing needs of our diverse community."* The council's vision is *"To have a culture where employees understand, value and sustain diversity and inclusion."*

If you are interested in helping to advance Kent County's mission of being a diverse and inclusive employer of choice, please e-mail [cic@kentcountymi.gov](mailto:cic@kentcountymi.gov) for a membership application before November 15 in order to be considered. Membership is open to all Kent County employees regardless of race, ethnicity, gender and other classifications. Supervisor permission is required to join the council. The CIC meets on the first Friday of each month (excluding December), usually from 9:30 a.m. until 11:30 a.m. All members are expected to attend meetings on a regular basis and to contribute to efficient functioning of the council. Membership preference will be given to those who represent departments who do not have currently have members serving on the CIC.