

Honouring a true European

Christine Dietz receives the Hohenstaufen Medal
in recognition of her voluntary work

In recognition of the “European Year of Volunteering”, Minister Peter Friedrich yesterday honoured eleven Baden-Württemberg citizens for their achievements in the cause of Europe. One of those receiving the Hohenstaufen Medal was Christine Dietz from Horb.

By Claudia Salden

Horb/Stuttgart. At a ceremony in the Villa Reitzenstein – home of the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of State and official residence of the Prime Minister – Peter Friedrich, the Minister responsible for European and international affairs, yesterday presented Christine Dietz from Horb with the Hohenstaufen Medal. The medal is awarded by the state's Prime Minister for outstanding services to Baden-Württemberg. In 2011, which was designated by the European Commission as the “European Year of Volunteering”, a total of eleven people from Baden-Württemberg were honoured for their voluntary work in the field of European relations. For their services to international twinning, the care of the elderly, the environment and culture, they each received the medal, a certificate and a bouquet.

“You have shown true public spirit,” said Europe Minister Peter Friedrich in his address. He went on to say that the dedication of all those involved had contributed to social cohesion and that, for some, what started as a simple job to be done had turned into a lifelong commitment. “We thank you for the initiative, imagination and energy you have brought to your task not only for years but also for decades,” said the Minister. Their commitment was invaluable and benefited all citizens. Research had shown that communities where work was undertaken by volunteers were both economically and socially healthier as a result. “With 40% of its population involved in voluntary work of one kind or another, Baden-Württemberg can claim a higher proportion of volunteers than any other German state,” he said. The commitment of those being honoured was not without relevance to the current crisis in Europe: “Europe requires active Europeans, and it needs friends – in these difficult days more than ever.” All those receiving the medal could consider themselves role models for European values.

Christine Dietz was honoured principally for her devotion to the town twinning between Horb and Haslemere; she had played a decisive part in setting up the partnership with the English town, and since 1990 had led the organisation of the twinning. “In view of the current crisis in Europe that cannot be an easy situation,” remarked Minister Friedrich before handing over the medal. For in recent days several British towns – Bishop's Stortford near London, Wallingford near Oxford and Doncaster near York – had broken off their twinning with German towns as a protest against Europe's policy for dealing with the crisis. [This is not strictly accurate: the decisions were taken up to two years ago, either to save the councils money, or because the links were becoming inactive.] “It is especially in times like these that your commitment is necessary,” said the Minister.

The initial recommendation for honouring the 65-year old Christine came from Horb's Mayor, Peter Rosenberger, who was present in Stuttgart for the ceremony. He said: “The idea came to us during the 20th anniversary celebrations of our twinning with Haslemere, which coincided with our Garden Festival.” Christine, a retired grammar-school teacher, has also given voluntary service to the community in many other ways: for 24 years she sat as a Social Democrat on Horb Town Council; she was an 'ambassadors' for the Garden Festival; and she plays an active part in the Association for Promoting the Public Library, the Auerbach Literary Circle, and the Supporters of the Former

Synagogue in Rexingen. In addition, she campaigned to save the 'Kloster' in Horb from demolition, and is involved in managing the Paul Kälberer Art Foundation in Glatt, which displays her late father's works and promotes his artistic legacy. “It really is amazing, how you seem to turn up everywhere,” said Rosenberger in his tribute to her.

The Hohenstaufen Medal came as a complete surprise to Christine: “Of course one doesn't do it in the hope of receiving a medal,” she said, “but because one feels it is necessary and because one enjoys doing it.” But she was delighted that her services had been recognised in this way. After the ceremony and the reception which followed, Christine and her husband Ludwig were able to enjoy an impromptu guided tour of the Villa Reitzenstein. In Haslemere too, people have been very pleased to hear of Christine's achievement: “In the last few days I have received many congratulatory emails”, she said. The date of the next visit to Horb's English twin town is already fixed: at the beginning of June, a group from Horb will travel to England to take part in the celebrations marking Queen Elizabeth II's diamond jubilee.

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