

SUPPORTING OUR PARTNERS

partnering with our neighbors

For two consecutive years now, the District's annual partnering conference has been a huge success. Open forums, open arms, and open minds made way for the development and follow-through of some of the most progressive initiatives taken in recent history, indicating the direction to take on the road to success. Momentum is truly in the making. What will happen next?

*Story and photos by Justin Ward
Graphic by Marisa Richards*



Like clockwork, Europe District holds a partnering conference every year to discuss the development of previous or ongoing projects and to introduce new initiatives to its business partners. And for years, the feedback was the same – progress is good, now what?

But the past two years have been different.

Last year's annual partnering conference saw its share of action, with the District bringing forth 10 new proposals, many of which may have been deemed too progressive only a couple years earlier, said Gary Meden, the District's project management branch chief.

According to Meden, it was the first time such progressive initiatives intending to standardize some complicated and irregular processes throughout Germany were brought up publicly. Previously, Meden said he heard a lot of the same issues being discussed, but only during breaks.

"Last year was the first time I actually had a whole presentation on things we wanted them to do to help us," said Meden.

But there was some push back, Meden admitted. "That's OK. There's always going to be push back because change isn't easy."

At this year's conference, participants saw a continuation of that progress, said Meden. So much so, that the traditionally staid conference was alive with energy, taking on an air of openness

and directness not seen in the five years that Meden has been on the job.

"A lot of the things we brought up last year, they've been thinking about for a year and that's probably why they were a little impassioned about it," Meden said. "Once they saw it was OK to open up issues to the entire floor, it got everyone thinking that way. Hopefully every year will be like that."

According to Meden, it was "the best two-way communication we've had at any partnering conference."

The frank discussions at the conference, held Nov. 8 and 9 in Wiesbaden, started with a presentation of how the public law coordination process works and quickly led to an opinion-gathering session on the benefits and concerns of using such a process.

After the initial presentations, open and

candid discussions continued over the two-day conference. The desire to express ideas and discuss even previously dormant initiatives spread infectiously, said Meden. Discussions were encouraged even when they exceeded the scheduled times by more than an hour, he added.

One of the issues discussed was an initiative put forth by the Corps last year requesting that *bauamts*, or German construction agents, complete written evaluations of the performance of the

construction contractors. Although initially met with some rejoinders, the proposal was later accepted by the group as a topic for future discussion. The District will work with some *bauamts* in 2007 to start these evaluations on a trial basis.

"Any time you bring up 10 issues ... there's little to no chance that all 10 of them will move

"... the best two-way communication we've had at any partnering conference."

-Gary Meden, project management branch chief

Erhard Frey, assistant branch chief for the District's host-nation programs, presents to stakeholders at the partnering conference the new spreadsheet for the tracking of secondary services costs. The conference, held at the Ramada in Wiesbaden Nov. 8 and 9, made great strides in building rapport among the attending organizations.

