

German ambassador bear attends party in Taipei

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Director-general of the German Institute in Taipei Birgitt Ory, German expatriates and their Taiwanese friends unveiled the "Buddy Bear" for Taiwan at German Night in Taipei on Saturday.

First created in Berlin in 2001, the Buddy Bear — a sculpture about 2m tall — serves as Germany's ambassador of friendship, traveling around the world to promote peace and international understanding.

There are 1,300 Buddy Bears and 140 are on exhibit around the world, with each having a unique name and decoration.

The Buddy Bear in Taiwan is painted black with plum blossom-shaped sunglasses, two clasped hands forming a white V-shaped strip across its chest and pants decorated with images representing Germany such as a German soccer player, the German high-speed ICE train and a picture of Albert Einstein.

The bear arrived last month and was unveiled on Saturday after being painted in Kaohsiung by students of the Fengshan and Fenghsin high schools, as well as students of the German School in Taipei, Ory said.

"The plum blossom is Taiwan's national flower, the V-shaped strip is a feature of the Formosan black bear and the shaking hands symbolize friendship between Taiwan

and Germany," Ory explained.

She said the Buddy Bear would have a busy schedule in Taiwan.

"He will meet the German athletes at the World Games in Kaohsiung [next month] and at the Deaflympics in Taipei, and will make a brief stop at the German School in Taiwan," Ory said, adding that the Buddy Bear would also attend a concert featuring German music, and an event to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in October.

Another reason the Buddy Bear was brought to Taiwan is the theme of this year's Taipei Film Festival, which began on Friday and will last until July 12.

After the unveiling ceremony, guests were treated to German cuisine and a screening of the movie *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis*.

Ory invited everyone in Taiwan to submit suggestions for Buddy Bear's name.

Richard Pfenning, a native of Berlin studying at National Chengchi University, quickly made his own suggestion: Taibear.

"Taibear" is a combination of Taipei, Berlin and the bear itself," Pfenning said. "It also reflects my own life as I'm from Berlin and I'm studying in Taipei now."

"It's interesting to find a film festival featuring movies about my city when I'm tens of thousands of kilometers away from it," he said.



Germany's representative to Taiwan, Birgitt Ory, explains the significance of the decorations on Buddy Bear after he was unveiled in Taipei on Saturday. PHOTO: LOA IOK-SIN, TAIPEI TIMES