

Hollnagel returns to Holyoke for brief visit

Written by April Peregoy

“It feels like I never left,” said Gustav Hollnagel when asked what it is like to be back in Holyoke after eight months of being home in Germany.

Hollnagel was a foreign exchange student at Holyoke High School during the 2007-08 school year. Living with host parents Jon and Tancy King, he became known around the community for his athletic abilities, especially as a football and basketball player.

After spending nearly a year in the U.S., he returned to Germany this past summer. Now on a two-week spring break from school, he decided to revisit Holyoke during his time off.

Though he was considered a senior at HHS, Hollnagel has to attend one more year at his boarding school in Dresden, Germany before he can officially graduate. At the school, he continues to play basketball, and his team is about halfway through the season.

Like all seniors, Hollnagel is spending most of his school year trying to figure out what his next step will be after graduation. In Germany, all males upon graduation from high school must serve at least nine months in the armed forces. However, Hollnagel said he has been excused from serving because of surgery he had on his ACL.

This gives him the advantage of starting his college education immediately, which is one of his reasons for coming back to the U.S.—to visit possible colleges he might like to attend.

Hollnagel said he enjoyed his stay in the U.S. so much, he wants to return to get his college education. However, he has run into a snag the past couple of weeks while visiting local colleges: most scholarship application deadlines have already lapsed.

As such, he is thinking of taking a year off school to work in the U.S., so he can be closer to the colleges and have more time to apply for scholarships. He hopes to play basketball at whatever college he attends, and is thinking of majoring in either sports management, broadcasting, marketing or a related field.

When Hollnagel left Holyoke last summer, he said it was very hard on him. “I like it here,” he said. “In Germany, everybody is kind of in their own worlds, but here I felt everyone accepted and supported me. I felt like part of the community.”

Surprisingly, he said returning to his German diet was also really hard on him, adding he actually ate better while he was here than he does in Germany. “I was sick for a while in Germany,” he said.

However, he said he was happy to return to some of the big city luxuries. “Since I went back I feel like I appreciate the things I have there a lot more,” he said.

According to Hollnagel, Germany is also currently suffering from a recession, and inflation especially has become a problem. “Germany is going through the same difficulties as America right now,” he said.

During his time in the U.S., the nation was going through a historic election campaign, which Hollnagel said he continued to follow when he left. When asked what most Germans thought of the new president, he replied they feel it is a good choice.

“It’s not that Germans wouldn’t have necessarily liked McCain,” he added, “but they like that America has overcome all its history and elected a black president. It shows how much the country has progressed.”

Besides looking at colleges, during his past two weeks in Holyoke, Hollnagel has been staying with the King family again and even attended HHS for a couple of days as a guest of sophomore Preston King. He’s also been able to watch his former teammates, the Holyoke Dragon basketball team, play in a couple of home games.

“I was surprised. I got accustomed to being here again fast,” he said. Though he spoke in perfect English throughout the interview, with only a hint of an accent, he said he did stumble

Hollnagel returns to Holyoke for brief visit

Written by April Peregoy

over some words his first couple of days back in the states. However, it didn't take him long to pick it up again.

As he prepared to return home to Germany, Hollnagel had a message he wants to share with the community:

“Thank you everybody for your support and for accepting and including me in your town. Thanks to my host family for the opportunity to live an American life. Thanks to my coach and my close friends, who continue to support me and keep in touch.”