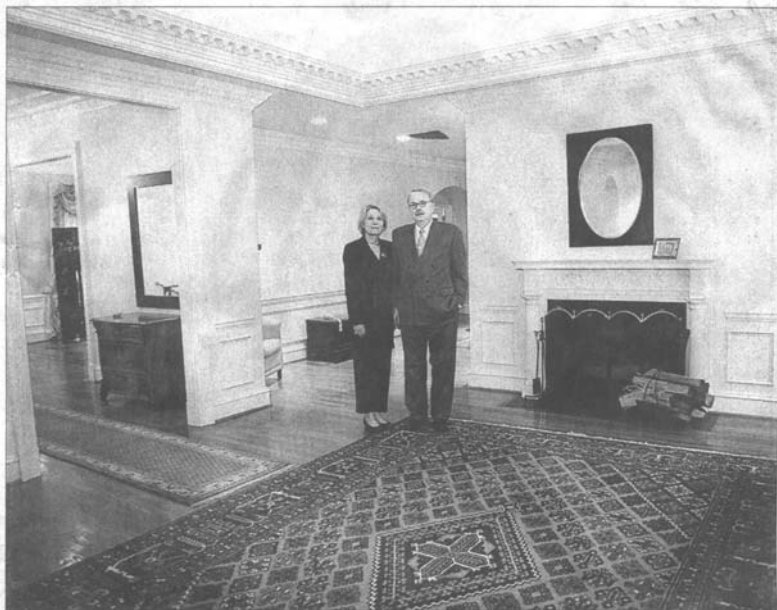


COMMENTARY



Photos by MONIRA AL-HAROUN / Special

German Consul General Heinrich-Peter Rothmann and his wife, Leonor, standing in their nearly empty Atlanta home Monday, prepare to say goodbye after more than three years.

Atlanta must foster international focus

By HEINRICH-PETER ROTHMANN
For the Journal-Constitution

"Internationally, the city and the state have more to offer than locals and foreigners often know."

HEINRICH-PETER ROTHMANN
German consul general

When I arrived in Atlanta in June 1999 as the new German consul general for the southeastern United States, almost unlimited economic growth and solid consumer confidence were the order of the day.

As I prepare to leave at the end of my term, the world has changed.

My advice in the present economic situation is that Atlanta and Georgia should look even harder for more international trade and investment.

Georgia attracted 38 new international companies in the year 2000. In the year 2001, even though the downturn was already clearly visible, 48 new international companies came. Eight of those were German, which made my country the one with the biggest increase that year.

We saw a similar development with Georgia's exports to Germany. In the year 2000, they represented 3.8 percent of total exports. In 2001, the figure rose to 4.1 percent of Georgia's total exports.

German companies invested \$1.25 billion in



Atlanta's hospitality and openness to newcomers are among its most important assets, say Leonor and Heinrich-Peter Rothmann.

Georgia in 2001. They provided about 15,000 jobs for the local work force.

There are many hands and minds in Georgia working to help increase foreign trade and investment. An important factor — if not the most important factor — in attracting more overseas investments and trade is the international appeal of Atlanta and Georgia.

Internationally, the city and the state have more to offer than locals and foreigners often know.

Take for example the schools, colleges, universities and other institutions of higher learning and research. They offer a wide spectrum of international subjects.

Let me name a few that I have been in touch with: the Southern Center for International Studies, the Carter Center and the Halle Institute as part of Emory, the European Union Center and the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs, both at Georgia Tech, the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State and the foreign language and civilization departments at colleges and universities.

These are supplemented by international cultural institutes such as the Goethe-Institute and the Alliance Française. Last but not least, there are also state-of-the-art language departments at public and private high schools and the International School, where students earn an international high school certificate (the so-called “international bacca-

laureate”) in English, German, French, Spanish and (maybe soon) Chinese.

This enables them to apply for and enter most of the universities worldwide without any special entrance exams or obligatory preparatory courses.

There are those — Americans as well as foreigners — who insist that there could be more public demand for some of those institutions.

In order to facilitate this, there should be more media attention about them and better public funding. This funding is often crucial.

Granted that public funds are scarce these days in all our countries, one might ask if the teaching of foreign languages and support for the International School and other institutions with international aims will still be accepted as a priority by the public.

As a foreign diplomat in Atlanta working on international relations, I would always lobby for it. I get calls from potential German investors prepared to come to Atlanta and bring their families with them if they can secure a place in an institution of international learning for their children.

Unlike immigrants, they would like — during their time in Atlanta — to enable their children to get into programs that will allow them to continue their education in any other part of the world if they have to move.

On the government front, since my arrival in Atlanta, there has been talk about the necessity of the state creating a special international office. (Mayor Shirley Franklin just created one for the city.) Recently, there were news reports that the secretary of state plans to open such an office to facilitate the arrival of foreign investors. This effort can only be applauded. But efforts shouldn't stop there.

One of the most important international assets of Atlanta is the consular corps. At present, members of the corps are attached to the Georgia Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism. This somehow implies to the public that foreign diplomats in Georgia are trade commissioners.

This is clearly not the case. A consul general in Atlanta is the ranking diplomat of his country in this part of the United States. He is in charge of the whole spectrum of his country's relations. He takes care of bilateral political, economic and cultural relations, and he has a broad mandate as far as public diplomacy for his country is concerned.

There is a general feeling in the consular corps that it would be preferable to have an international protocol office within the governor's office.

Let me finish on a more personal note. I am grateful to have lived and worked for over three years in a city that is widely known for its hospitality, its economic success and its openness to newcomers. We've enjoyed our interaction with Atlantans and the international groups that call this city home, such as the German Lutheran Church, the only church where sermons are in my native language.

My wife and I are leaving many friends behind. This makes our departure personally difficult and sad. But we are looking forward to a new challenge.

Thank you, Atlanta!

► **Heinrich-Peter Rothmann**, German consul general in Atlanta since 1999, and his wife, Leonor, will be leaving Thursday for Berlin.