

NEW ORLEANS

# The Times-Picayune

Thursday 11 June 2009

is  
ord  
'bit  
co-  
an.  
vo-  
  
:h  
rch  
on  
..m.  
ion.  
  
for  
igel  
xes  
mits  
  
food  
per-  
e at  
n or  
lant  
rvey,  
  
p on  
.  
s 1.5  
ts, 2  
ds of  
unds  
s, 28  
ravy,  
eef, 1  
es of  
es of  
broc-  
ter, 1  
pinto  
ne, 32  
ilk, a  
m.  
avail-

## German Jazzfest helps local musicians

*Festival director has shrine to New Orleans*

**By Brian Friedman**  
Contributing writer

As a boy growing up in western Germany just after World War II, Elmar Hoff's musical options were limited to the German folk and country tunes broadcast over domestic radio. When he was 12, however, he heard Fats Domino sing "Jambalaya" broadcast from a ship in the North Sea.

From that moment on, "I've had a New Orleans influence," Hoff said. And while his father, an opera singer, might have initially disapproved of his son's new love for jazz and blues, that lucky encounter with Fats via pirate radio would end up paying

See **GERMAN**, Page 8



Liam [unclear]  
Counc  
Scout  
relate

**WHAT'S | IT'S YO**

# \$40,000 donated to group since 2005

**GERMAN**, from Page 1

dividends for Hoff, German music fans, and scores of New Orleans musicians, artists and students.

Hoff would go on to serve 25 years as head of the German Cultural Department, developing and running Jazzfest Gronau — one of the country's largest jazz festivals — for 20 of those years.

His home would become a virtual shrine to New Orleans music, filled with posters and other artifacts, and with the help of fellow German and longtime friend, Thomas Gerdiken, aka "The German Piano Prince of New Orleans," they would form alliances with local musicians and help bring those acts to Germany.

"They're great people, and they're really committed to New Orleans," said Alfred Caston of Jamalar Entertainment, a Ninth Ward-based booking and production company specializing in gospel, jazz, and roots music. "It's not about the money with them; it's strictly about promoting the culture."

"Elmar is one of the best promoters we have ever worked with," said Floyd Turner, director of the West Bank-based Friendly Travelers gospel group. "There was never a problem, no kind of worries, very nice and cordial, and what-

ever the agreement is, he sticks to it. I have nothing but positive things to say about Elmar."

That cultural promotion extends into other arts as well. At a French Quarter Fest nearly 10 years ago, Hoff met painter and native Algerine Matt Rinard (Gallery Rinard, 738 Royal St.), a relationship that has led to numerous shows in Germany for the local artist.

"It's given me a lot more recognition, and it also helps with credibility when you're doing things across the pond," Rinard said. "And it also helps widen my audience."

After Hurricane Katrina, however, Hoff's love for New Orleans' culture took on a new urgency. Virtually hours after the storm, Hoff, with the help of Lillian Boutte, founded Help New Orleans, an organization that has raised approximately \$600,000 for the city and its artists and musicians.

The group's main goals are to "go to work for the people of New Orleans, for the musicians and for the painters," Gerdiken said. "and to get things in the press and mass media to inform people about the situation here, because all sorts of people in Germany think New Orleans is rebuilt and everything is fine."

Gerdiken, who joined Help New Orleans in 2007 and is the organization's first German musician-activist, has been collabo-

rating with Hoff since 1989, when he sent Hoff some tapes of his New Orleans-influenced music. Hoff responded by inviting Gerdiken to open for none other than Fats Domino at that year's Jazzfest Gronau. Needless to say, Gerdiken admitted to a sleepless night prior to that performance.

On the day after this year's Jazzfest, Hoff and Gerdiken were at the city's famous Deutsches-Haus to present a check to the New Orleans Musicians Clinic for more than \$9,000, the fruit of more than 10 benefit concerts held in Germany this past year by Help New Orleans, including one at the Bundeskunsthalle Bonn, Germany's official museum. Since 2005, Help New Orleans

— with the help of Hoff's local Rotary Club in Germany — has contributed over \$40,000 to the organization that provides healthcare and social welfare services for local musicians.

"It's not only that the fact that they raised money for us, it's the fact that we know that people all over the world really care," said Bethany Bultman, president and co-founder of the Musicians Clinic. "It means so much to the musicians and it means a great deal to keep our spirit, keep us going, because a lot of days it just seems overwhelming."

And for Hoff and Gerdiken, there is no sign of any impending letup in their commitment, as they are already planning something big for New Orleans' 300th birthday... in 2018.

**The Times-Picayune**