Portion of Berlin Wall unveiled in Miami

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Andrea Silbermann Paskow, whose father was German, reaches out to touch the piece of the Berlin Wall. Miami Dade College unveiled a section of the Berlin Wall as a gift from the Federal Republic of Germany, on Sunday, November 9, 2014. CARL JUSTE/Miami Herald STAFF

One of the world’s most potent symbols of the Cold War has new a home in Miami.

A segment of the Berlin Wall traveled from the outskirts of its namesake city to Hamburg, then over 5,000 miles of water to Port Everglades, and finally to Miami. A crane lifted the 10,000-pound piece from a truck for its positioning at Miami Dade College’s Wolfson Campus.

Finally at its destination, the wall section sat covered in a black sheet while a man played polka music on the accordion and about 1,500 people undeterred by afternoon storms ate bratwurst and waved German flags to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The segment, unveiled Sunday, is a gift to the city of Miami by the German Consulate General in Miami to show gratitude to the U.S. for its support during the contentious 20th century.
“The political architects had a plan to have this wall forever to lock away their people from the free part of the world,” said German Consul General Juergen Borsch during the ceremony. “They failed in every respect. And today in Miami, we are going to have this piece of the wall, and this one will stand forever, and it will show us every day that we can tear down walls and frontiers just through the power of the people.”

Borsch came up with the idea to present the segment last year and brought the thought to Miami Mayor Tomás Regaldo and Miami Dade College President Eduardo Padrón, who were enthusiastic. Borsch began the process of locating an available segment and bringing it to Miami, and with the help of German-based logistics company TEfra Travel Logistics, it arrived three weeks before the ceremony, where it will remain on campus for the public to view.

“The fall of the wall is only positive. It’s nothing but joy,” he said. “It’s one of those moments in history where everyone remembers where he or she was in hearing about the fall.”

For Borsch, that moment was at the German Embassy in Demascus. At the time, the only way to get news in Syria was via shortwave radio, which is how he heard about the fall. Soon after, his parents mailed him VHS recordings of the coverage.

Fort Lauderdale resident Andrea Hoff-Domin remembered, too, while snacking on a pretzel at the ceremony. She and her husband, Henry, were glued to their TV watching from their home at the time in Hanover, Germany, which is in the middle of one of the corridors to Berlin.

“We were so excited,” she said. “Everyone was so excited.”

Years before, Hoff-Domin, 54, traveled to Berlin during her junior year of high school. From a window in the Parliament building, she could see the corridor separating the two countries — East Germany and West Germany — that came to be known as the death strip.

Hoff-Domin said she felt proud that her homeland donated the segment to the country she remembers helping Germany during tough times.

“Without the Americans, it wouldn’t even be possible to have the Germany we have today,” she said.
As Hoff-Domin spoke, celebrants dressed in the colors of the German flag — black, red and gold — formed a human flag. Photographers gathered on the second floor, snapping pictures as the participants waved miniature flags and drank from cups of Hofbrau beer.

One of them was Judith Koll, who bobbed to the music beside her fiancé, Guido Geuenich, both wearing red. The couple was vacationing from Germany and heard about the event minutes before from a woman who asked them for directions to the college.

“It’s such a great pleasure for Germany to do this,” said Koll, 42, while snacking on a pretzel that she said would’ve needed a bit more salt to taste like the pretzels from her homeland.

The party moved outside for the unveiling, where Regaldo, Padrón and German Parliament member Jurgen Hardt addressed the crowd.

“I want... to thank the Federal Republic of Germany for giving us the possibility of having a piece of history in downtown Miami but more important for having a symbol of freedom in the City of Miami,” Mayor Regaldo said.

The announcer invited the crowd to join in a countdown.

“5... 4... 3...” they yelled.

The black sheet lifted to reveal the wall segment as the crowd cheered and waved their flags. Families and friends posed and snapped photos next to the concrete slab, painted over in multicolored graffiti.

Hamid Ghassri, 16, walked up to the wall with his 6-year-old cousin, Christopher Moya, in tow.

“That was a wall,” he said, pointing to the segment. “It divided a whole city.”

“Wow,” Christopher said back, his eyes wide.

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