

Building the German International School in Toronto

State-of-the-art building will reflect the best of German and Canadian society and education, **NAOMI BUCK** reports

FOR YEARS, German policy-makers have looked to Canada as a multicultural success story and a model to emulate in their own struggles with immigration. Meanwhile, green-minded Canadians admire Germany for its environmental record and the success of its Green party.

These two national points of pride are to find a common home in the new German International School (GIST), whose doors will open later this year in Toronto. The school itself is not new—it was founded in 2000—but its new facility will come with a new message and outlook.

The new school, near Keele and the 401, will be a zero-energy building, deploying solar and geothermal energy combined with superior insulation and design to generate at least as much energy as it consumes. It will offer junior kindergarten through Grade 12 with instruction in French, German and English.

Architect Daniel Karpinski says the building will “go beyond LEED”, the green building standard, by teaching its clients (aged 4-18) how to appreciate the environment; in this case, learning about the building’s function and using its roof garden.

Polish-born Karpinski, who worked in Berlin before moving to Toronto after the Berlin wall fell, says ecological building was already the standard in West Germany in the 1980s; thirty years later, the merits of the approach are evident. “The GIST’s philosophy is not typical in Canada. They’re not just looking at the building as a commodity, they want to make a statement,” he says. Community involvement in the project is strong. Not only are families from the school helping out with the building and landscaping, the German business community is also rallying. The



Daniel Karpinski

Dimpflmeier family, of rye bread fame, is contributing the sports hall, German chemical giant BASF is donating insulation and air barriers, while engineering and electronics company Bosch is providing geothermal heat pumps.

Laurent Tainturier, President of BASF Canada, says showcases such as the GIST are the best way to remind Canadians that it’s time to “move the needle” on the climate change front. Thirty per cent of BASF’s business in Canada is in construction, a sector Tainturier says has a huge potential to reduce carbon emissions.

“Chemistry is about finding solutions, not creating problems,” says Tainturier, who works hard to counter the public’s negative views of the chemical industry. What better way to do so than by showing kids how chemistry is used to make biodegradable packaging and coffee cups or water-based paints—two areas where BASF has taken an industry lead.

Peter Marks, CEO of Bosch, North America, likewise sees the school as an opportunity to promote alternative energy technologies, which now account for nearly 40 per cent of the company’s global sales. Bosch recently contributed geothermal

and solar technologies and home appliances to an EcoPlusHome in Bathurst, New Brunswick, to demonstrate that a family of six can live comfortably and affordably in a home that does not use fossil fuels.

“In Germany, there is a very deep respect of nature, something Canadians tend to take for granted,” says Winz Casagrande, who grew up in both countries and now sends her two children to the GIST and sits on the school’s board. A sustainability consultant, Casagrande considers eco-consciousness the most important value a German education offers Canadians, with Canada’s ethnic diversity broadening the spectrum of a typical German education.

School principal Arnd Rupp sees the marriage of the German and Canadian curricula as “the best of both worlds” for the global citizens of tomorrow. The school intends to offer both the Ontario secondary school diploma and the International Baccalaureate.

The German business community has rallied to erect a school structure that produces more energy than it consumes

While the GIST is private, it does not want to be deemed elitist, and offers grants to families that can’t afford full tuition—which, ranging from \$7500 to \$13,500, is well below the cost of most Toronto private schools.

Germans, who constitute 10 per cent of Canada’s historical ethnic make-up, have been model assimilators here. Names like Justin Bieber, John Diefenbaker, Ralph Klein and Leslie Feist are familiar to most Canadians, but we don’t think of them as German-Canadians.

On the one hand, it’s a story of successful integration. On the other, it’s a story of lost culture and language. Addressing the German Chamber of Commerce last November, ambassador Georg Witschel lamented “the fading German contribution within Toronto’s multicultural fabric.” Witschel hopes the school will mediate against that, showcasing something that Germany does particularly well in a way that Canadians can both learn from and be part of.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

German diplomatic missions in Canada: www.canada.diplo.de.htm

Goethe-Institute: www.goethe.de/ins/ca/lp/enindex.htm

German International School: www.gistonline.ca

German Canadian Chamber of Commerce: <http://kanada.ahk.de/en>