

Oklahoma is blessed with a mix of cultures, German culture included. Learn more when John te Velde, a professor at Oklahoma State University, is the keynote speaker during a German-American Day event at 3 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 7, at the German American Society of Tulsa event center, 2301 E. 15th St. Te Velde was the recipient of an Oklahoma Humanities Council grant to support research related to German heritage in the state. His thesis was that German settlers (a few came directly from Germany; most came from German settlements elsewhere in the U.S.) were able to make significant contributions to the development of the state, even though they and their children made up only about 3 percent of the population in the early years. The contributions were disproportionate to the population percentage and some of the most notable contributions came from those in churches, schools and leadership positions, according to te Velde. "In towns like Okarche, Kingfisher, Okeene, Fairview, Enid, Shattuck and many others, they established churches and schools that remain to this day and are often the most notable in these communities," he said. "There have also been a number of very notable businessmen and community leaders, such as the Classens in Oklahoma City, and many others too numerous to mention." Te Velde said the resilience of German settlers and their descendants can be seen in their ability to rise out of humble beginnings. He said most were farmers who started out with virtually nothing and had to survive through difficult times: droughts, depression and then the animosity against them during world wars. "The strategy of the Germans since World War I has been to blend in as much as necessary to reduce the friction with their fellows Americans," he said. "Despite the obstacles and sentiments against them, they were able to maintain many elements of German culture, such as farming practices, management of crops, livestock, churches and schools. Many of these were combined with American culture, creating a German-American "brand" to the point where many people no longer recognize the German origin of these elements. Others are overtly German, such as the Oktoberfest in Tulsa and German festivals elsewhere in the state.

The bottom line is that today we can safely say that more than 3

percent of this state's wealth has German roots. • Te Velde isn't German, but his

roots link to the Dutch farmers of Iowa and Minnesota. Because there is not

much demand for the Dutch language, he has been teaching German for 27 years

at OSU and other institutions. Te Velde also will present information on Mennonites in

Oklahoma while at the German-American Day event. He said they have a Dutch-German background

and a unique dialect of German: Plautdietsch. German-American Day was established by President Ronald

Reagan in 1983 in conjunction with the 300th anniversary of 13 German families from

Krefeld landing in Philadelphia. The families subsequently founded Germantown, Pennsylvania, the first German set

in the 13 colonies. German-American Day honors German-Americans who excelled in the fields of

science, business, politics and arts. Jimmie Tramel 918-581-8389 [jimmie.tramel@tulsaworld.com](mailto:jimmie.tramel@tulsaworld.com) Twitter: @JimmieT

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