

McClain's diplomacy earns medal

STRONGER TIES:

The German professor will be the second woman to receive the Lucius Clay honor.

By Kristina Thomas/Staff Reporter

On Oct. 6, Meredith McClain, a Texas Tech associate professor of German, will receive the Lucius Clay medal in Düsseldorf, Germany, making her only the second woman in the world to receive the honor.

The Federation of German-American Clubs presents the honor annually to someone who has strengthened the bond between Germany and America. Not only is McClain the second woman to receive the award in the last 20 years that it has been given, but she also is the only person to ever get it who is not a politician, diplomat or a member of the media.

The medal is named after Gen. Lucius Clay, who McClain said saved West Berlin and symbolically saved West Germany with his airlift in 1948. McClain said Clay is an admired man and to receive an award established in his name is a great honor.

The first award was presented in 1980, two years after Clay died.

McClain said her interest in Germany came from a life-altering experience she had when she was in college. She said she studied music at Oberlin College in Ohio and the entire junior class had the opportunity to study in Austria.

"I was 19 years old and went to do my junior year when I was in Vienna for three months, learning how to speak German," she said. "I finished out the year in Austria when I realized that this had changed my life. I finished my music degree and then went to (the University of Texas) and started learning German."

McClain has been at Tech for 25 years, and in that time, she has worked with many student organizations to bring German and American students together. She said her most successful program was a group of German dancers who became the Texas State German Dancers.



JEREMY MOORE/Staff Photographer

MEREDITH MCCLAIN'S EFFORTS to strengthen the bond between the United States and Germany earned her the Lucius Clay Medal, making her only the second woman in the world to receive the honor. She said her interest in Germany came from a life-altering experience she had while in college.

McClain has studied works by author Karl May, a German author whose stories took place in the Llano Estacado. She said for a long time, she worked at taking people from West Texas to Germany and recently realized the people in Germany want to come to Lubbock. Since 1995, she has held tours that introduce groups of people from Germany to Lubbock, Amarillo and areas of New Mexico.

"The first tour that I did in 1995 was completely full and a Greyhound (bus) holds about 43 people," she said. "There was a lot of interest in the West Texas area and the Indian areas of New Mexico."

McClain said a man who saw her when she first started doing programs between Tech and Germany nominated

her for the award. She said his organization in Germany nominated her without her knowledge and got all of the information needed.

McClain said she is honored to be awarded this and hopes that Tech will share with her in that.

"I am hoping that Texas Tech, whoever Texas Tech is, will be happy about this," she said.

P.G. Christiansen, chairman of the department of classical modern languages and literature at Tech, said he is excited about McClain receiving the award.

"I am very much impressed because I am old enough to remember who Lucius Clay was and the honor that comes with this medal," he said. "It is an important recognition given by the country of Germany."

Christiansen said McClain has brought a lot to Tech's modern languages program.

"She has done a lot of work related to working out relations between people in Germany and West Texas," he said. "Throughout her career, she has helped her students appreciate and understand German culture."