

# A German translates to U.S. entrepreneur

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Willkommen: Any way you translate it, Susanne Evens is an ambassador for St. Louis

Thirty-four years ago, [Susanne Saur Evens](#), 55, who was born and raised in Allen, Germany, changed the course of her life. She sold everything she owned, took all her savings, quit her job at [Hewlett-Packard](#) and boarded a plane for the U.S. to spend a year traveling around the country.

Three weeks before leaving home, she met a soldier who was from St. Louis and reconnected with him here. Six months later, the two married. Because he was in the military, the couple moved all over the states, but in 1987 they went back to Germany. When her husband retired in 1992, they returned to St. Louis, although they later divorced. In 1994, Susanne lived the American dream and launched a global translation, interpretation and consulting business, AAA Translation Inc. Today the company has revenue of about \$1 million.

Evens was an only child born to Friedel and [Herbert Saur](#), both restaurateurs serving local Swabian fare. Evens had always been fascinated by other cultures and languages. In high school, she learned English, read voraciously about different countries and watched American TV, honing her English-speaking skills reading subtitles. After attending a business high school, she chose a two-year business college, then a two-year foreign language correspondence college, and, while there, learned French, Italian and Spanish on the side. In 1980 she graduated and two years later was on her way to the U.S.

“Susanne Evens’ story is the perfect example of how hard work and dedication can lead to success,” said Mayor [Francis Slay](#). “When I think of Susanne, I think of her deep association with and commitment to the St. Louis-Stuttgart Sister Cities Committee, the German-American Heritage Society, and the annual Winter Ball Karneval event. Susanne truly is a goodwill ambassador, fostering cultural understanding and beneficial exchanges between St. Louis and German-based businesses and organizations. She is a precious asset to our region.”

Lansing Hecker, Honorary Consul of Germany for Missouri and Southern Illinois, said “Susanne is unique in that she is one of the few citizens here who holds dual German and U.S. citizenship. She’s been president of the St. Louis-Stuttgart Sister Cities Committee since 2006. It’s one of the oldest sister-city alliances in the country. Quite an accomplishment. She’s a treasure.”

Susanne is the mother of Tiffany, 32, and Christina, 28. In 1996, she married Jim Evens, a partner at Trinity Wealth Advisors. They have a son, Alexander, 15, and live in Chesterfield.

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## Where you can find Susanne Evens

- Creve Coeur Park running with her dogs
- St. Louis Soccer Park watching a game
- At the Muny
- Jazz at the Bistro
- Veritas or Cielo for dinner
- Naked Vine in Chesterfield quaffing wine

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**What did you think when you moved here?** I was surprised at how European St. Louis looked because of the architecture. I started studying about the city and learned Germans comprise a substantial part of the population.

**When you moved back in 1992, did you work or stay home with the kids?** I went to work for Deutsche Financial Services and started my part-time German-English and English-German business. By 2000, I jumped into this full time, opened an office, and started hiring staff here and teams of translators on every continent who live in the countries where they do the translations.

**How do you find translators?** We have more than 300 vetted translators with a minimum five years of experience and a translation degree. Each goes through a background check and takes a translation test.

**For whom do you translate/interpret?** We've had more than 400 clients since inception and work in 150-plus languages. We did translations on the spot for the Pope during his visit in 1999. Enterprise was one of our first big clients. We work for law firms, manufacturing companies, small, medium and Fortune 500 companies such as Anheuser-Busch. We've done work for Hollywood.

**Who are some of your best clients today?** Meyer & Meyer Sports. We've translated books for them into English, mostly on soccer, for the last 15 years. Right now, we're doing translations for the Olympics. We do a lot for the Junior Chamber International here, translating newsletters that are distributed worldwide.

**Fun or unusual clients?** The "Phantom of the Opera" was in town at the Fox and we got a call from the actor who played the Phantom. He was going to perform at the Vienna Opera in eight weeks and needed help with his German pronunciation. Someone came in twice a week and gave him voice lessons in German for six weeks.

**What are your hours?** It's a 24/7 business. We also have an 800 number hotline (844.293.3519) and do translations over the phone, on Skype or FaceTime. Our website: [aaatranslation.com](http://aaatranslation.com).

**How many firms are there like yours?** The translation industry is a \$38 billion industry. There are a handful here, but every city has translation services. Our trade group is the American Translators Association.

**How do you charge?** We charge by the word, but it depends on the project. If it's an MS document, we might do layouts too using Adobe Illustrator or InDesign. Some languages grow from two pages in English to 2.5 pages when translated. Arabic is written from right to left — so when we give back materials...the photo might end up on the opposite side.

**Do you still do translations?** No. Although I speak six languages, I'm now the rainmaker and CEO.

**When doing a translation, how is the meaning retained?** Book translations are really challenging, and it's important to have the right translator for the project. I used to be a technical translator. Each translator has to be an expert in certain subjects to be able to relay the material like it's written and understood in the country of origin.

**What is one trap to avoid in doing translations?** We're working for an ad agency on the East Coast which sends everything piecemeal. If the translator can't see the entire package, it's difficult to pinpoint what the client is trying to convey. One company asked us to research its name in 40 languages to make sure it wasn't offensive in any way.

**What's been the best moment and most disappointing moment for you?** The year 2010 was bittersweet. My father passed away in Germany and I wasn't there. It was the 50th anniversary of St. Louis' Stuttgart sister city and we were part of the German prince and princess (Karneval) Mardi Gras here. It was the year I turned 50, I ran my first race in Germany, the mayor from Stuttgart came here with a big delegation, and I took a delegation including Mayor Slay to Stuttgart.

**Didn't you facilitate bringing two German companies to St. Louis?** Yes, but it took a team to get two manufacturing companies here, Schattdecor in 2008 and Cabka Group in 2011.

**What other interests or hobbies do you have?** I like to run and garden. I'm a nature girl. I collect German antiques, love to cook German food such as schnitzel and I have my mom's venison recipes. I also love art and collect Bryan Haynes paintings, and enjoy jazz. In 2010, I took the Bosman Twins to Stuttgart.

**Any other passions?** I am an avid ambassador for St. Louis touting our free zoo and art museum, Forest Park, botanical garden, Arch, Circus Flora, Grant's Farm. When I take visitors around, I show them different pockets of St. Louis — Soulard, the Loop, Central West End, Washington Avenue at night, some of the German churches, wine country and Hannibal.

**How do you give back to St. Louis?** I'm on several boards, including the World Trade Center and the St. Louis and German American Committee, and am a member of the St. Louis Mosaic Project Advisory Board.

**If not this, what would you like to be doing?** Be a flight attendant or maybe a zookeeper. As a child, my parents took me to the zoo in Stuttgart, which is half botanical gardens and half zoo. I can't wait to volunteer at the zoo here when I retire.

**What is something no one knows about you?** I wanted to be a jockey. I grew up in a small village and one of the only things to do was to ride horses. On Monday nights a group of friends and I would jump the horses and those who fell off had to buy a case of beer for everyone. I am also a huge David Bowie fan and own one of his original paintings.

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