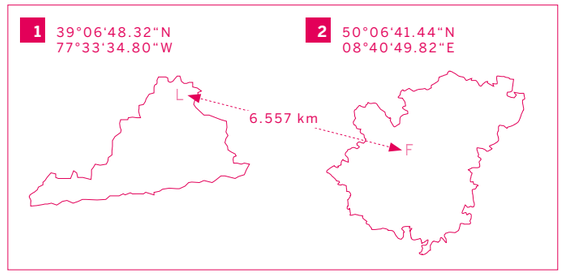
ON THE ROAD
IN LOUDOUN COUNTY

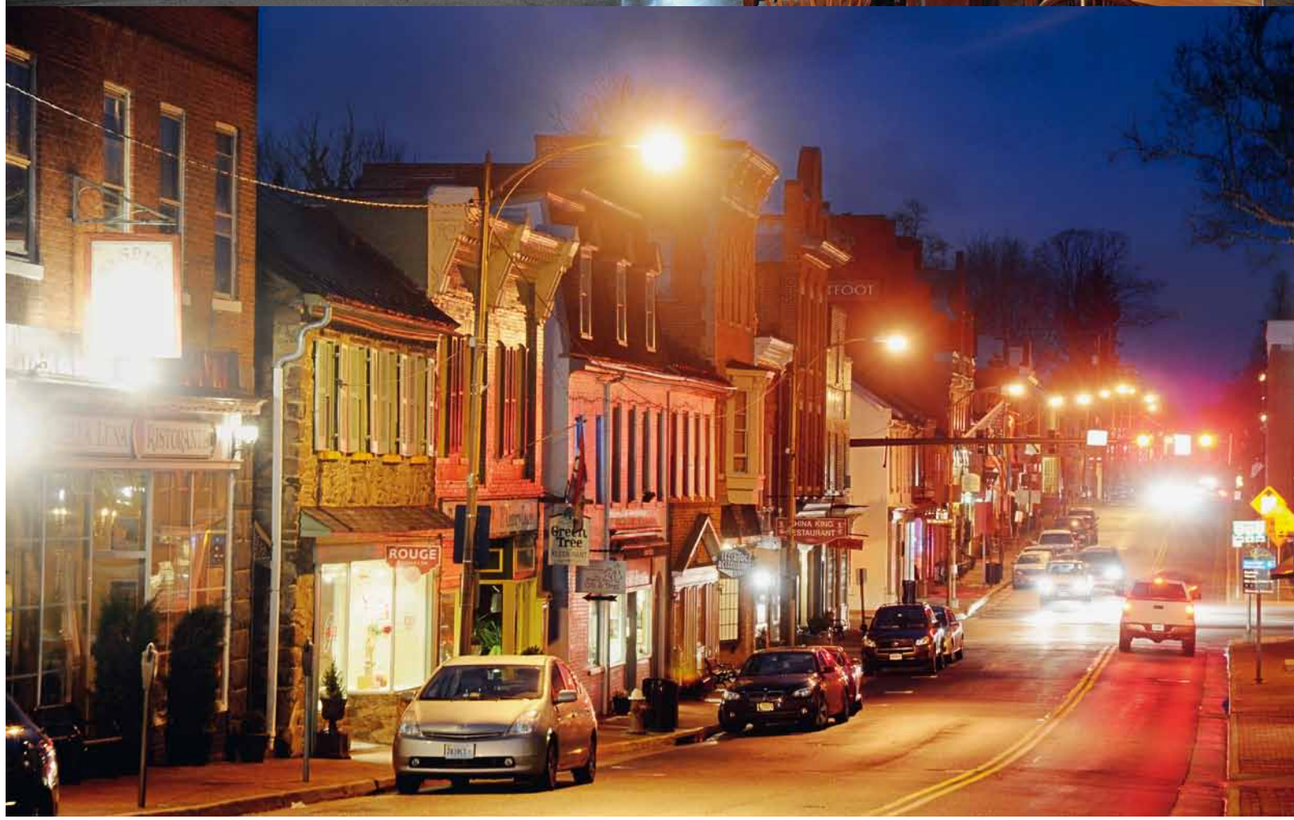
Transatlantic neighbors. A sweeping sky. An airport as the main driving business. Flourishing high-tech firms. Soft slopes with vineyards. Great quality of life. The Main-Taunus region has much in common with its twin region Loudoun County. A special instance of American-German friendship. A journey through Loudoun County

RONALD D. GERSTE AND TOBIAS EVERKE (PHOTOS)

GEODATA



Magical Loudoun
Traditional specialties in the Red Fox Inn in Middleburg (top), a view of the city of Leesburg at night



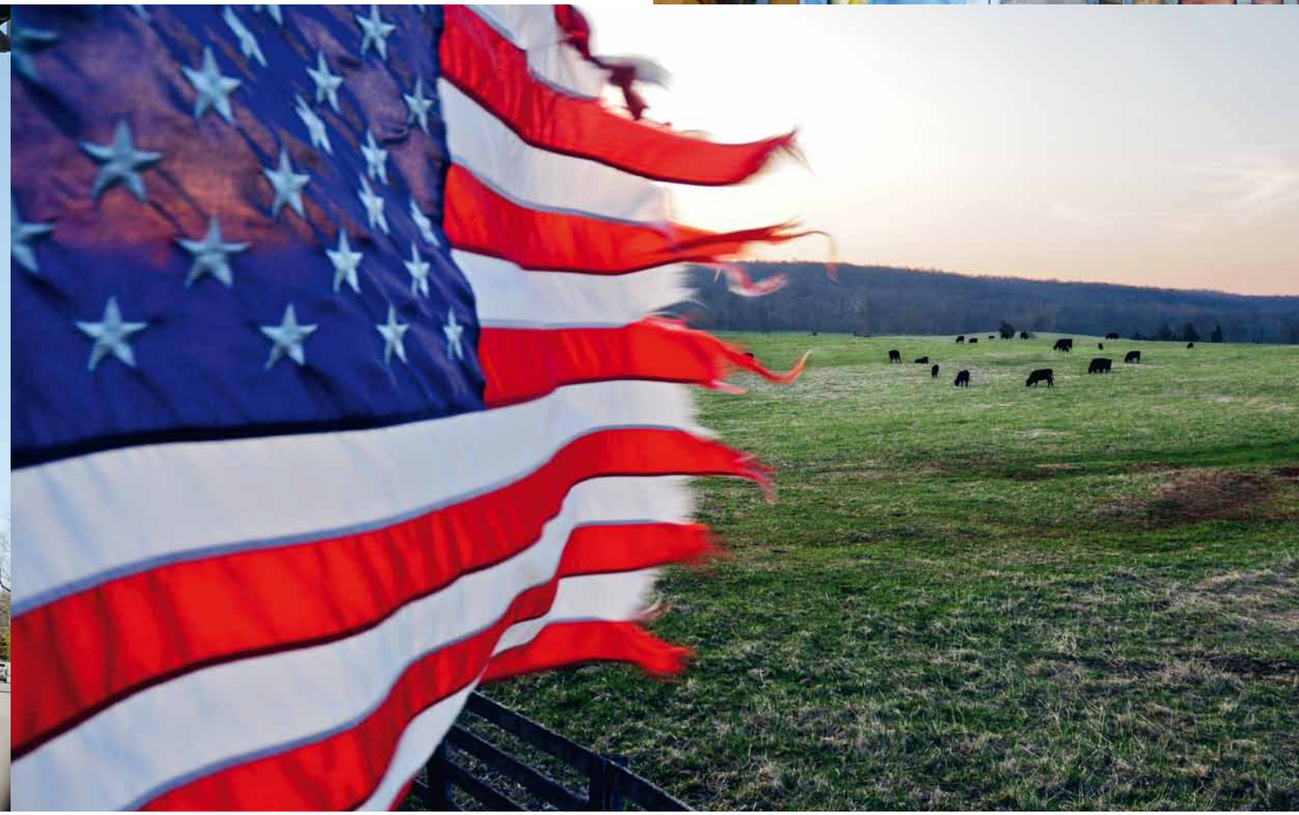
When George C. Marshall was not busy freeing the world from a dictator or preserving large areas of Europe from falling prey to the next tyrant he felt magically attracted to Dodona Manor. Marshall and his wife Katherine bought the country house in Leesburg in the American state of Virginia in the spring of 1941. Though the place seemed truly rural and secluded, it was close enough to Washington D.C., where Marshall was to be appointed chief of staff. Possibly he suspected that summer evenings on the veranda with Katherine would not be plentiful. On December 7, 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, four days later Hitler declared war on the United States and George C. Marshall had to create the largest armed forces the world had ever seen. The end of World War II might have brought freedom from Nazi tyranny, but Eastern Europe swiftly disappeared behind what Churchill called the "Iron Curtain." In his new role as America's secretary of state, military-minded Marshall became the catalyst of economic reconstruction. The Marshall Plan named after him not only secured the material survival of many people in the difficult post-war period, the massive aid program was also highly instrumental in ensuring that people were receptive to the idea of a democratic state and government in war-ravaged Europe. This was definitely the case in West Germany, which developed into a reliable member of the democratic community and in the new Europe that emerged, leaving the rivalries of the past behind.

As Rachel Thompson, curator of Dodona Manor relates, "Germany generously supported the restoration work on George C. Marshall's estate." A good 10 years ago the house was bought by a foundation and converted into a museum. It has been restored, and thanks to the presence of many original items there is a sense of that modest comfort typical of the early 1950s when Marshall, meanwhile over 70 years old, lived here. If one takes a look at the plain bedroom used by the secretary of state or stands in the library, which is almost opulently outfitted by comparison, one can sense the presence and impact of a man to whom personal vanity and the quest for worldly goods were largely anathema. That is if one excludes his sole luxury: Dodona Manor. From their garden Marshall and Katherine looked out onto farmland and a country road that went past Dodona Manor and led to the town center of Leesburg.

Today, Marshall would recognize his house immediately, but the surroundings have more or less changed beyond recognition. The town of Leesburg has expanded to the boundaries of his property and beyond it; there is roughly the same amount of traffic as you might see in any other flourishing American town. Notwithstanding the economic crisis, Leesburg, once a refuge deep in rural America, is now a flourishing town not far from Washington, D.C. Outside of rush hour you can reach the capital in less than an hour, and it takes just 15 minutes to reach Dulles International Airport, named after Marshall's successor in the State Department. For many people Leesburg is an attractive destination for a weekend trip: Its outlet mall is an unparalleled shopping paradise. But Leesburg has another major advantage: Unlike other boom towns, the city fathers have largely avoided permitting

Loudoun is expanding
Scott K. York (left) has been chairman of the board of supervisors for a full 11 years – since then the population of Loudoun has almost doubled. Chamber of Commerce President Tony Howard is delighted about the new shopping center. Elaine Walker, lady mayor of Lovettsville, is delighted with the county's dynamism

Rural Loudoun
Jenni McCloud was a manager in the dot.com community before making her wine-growing estate Chrysalis into an American success story



Historical Loudoun
Dodona Manor was a refuge for George C. Marshall (1880-1959) – and the only luxury of this modest man. Today, the house is a museum and reflects the coziness of the 1950s

GEORGE MARSHALL SOCIETY

The "Association to promote German–American relations and the twinning of Main-Taunus-Kreis and Loudoun," was established in 2009 and commemorates George C. Marshall's historical achievement in reconstructing Germany after World War II (the Marshall Plan). The society also works for a lively exchange between the two regions in the worlds of business, culture and education. The society's chairman is Landrat Berthold Gall.
www.george-marshall-gesellschaft.org

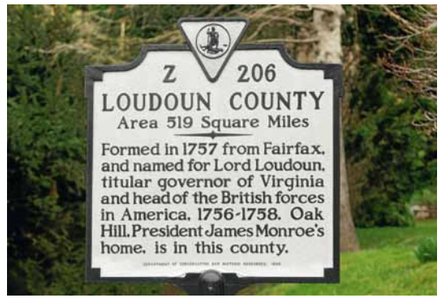
General and statesman
A monument in front of Dodona Manor memorializes George C. Marshall, the "architect" of the Marshall Plan

architectural blights on the landscape and have meticulously preserved the historical core of the town. In doing so they have transformed it into an El Dorado for small galleries, antique stores and pretty restaurants – a way of recalling history from the English colonial epoch via houses dating back to the days of the republic's founding fathers and the Civil War. This path has not only been successfully taken in Leesburg, but in Loudoun County as a whole: the county which starts behind the Dulles Airport and nestles gently on the Potomac River in North Virginia.

Loudoun County has been the official twin of the Main-Taunus region since 2006 in a transatlantic partnership whose creation was considerably promoted by the George Marshall Society in Hofheim (see box). Truly in the spirit of the general and statesman from Leesburg, the society supports American-German friendship and the economic and cultural connections between the FrankfurtRhineMain region and greater Washington in particular. There is a particular emphasis on student exchanges. Every year, 10 young people from the Main-Taunus region spend two weeks in Loudoun County, and at the beginning of advent they are visited for a fortnight by 10 American teenagers. Living in host families means they can experience normal, everyday life in another country. Moreover, individual schools maintain contact with schools in the Main-Taunus region, although these are always maintained through formal partnerships: Briar Woods High School (Ashburn), Loudoun County High School (Leesburg), Dominion High School (Sterling) and CS Monroe Technology Center. Incidentally, the latter is the first vocational school in the United States with an exchange abroad; only recently American students visited the Konrad-Adenauer-Schule in Kriftel.

There is no shortage of institutions for learning and making new contacts in Loudoun County – something Scott K. York has first-hand knowledge of. In his 11 years as chairman of the Board of Supervisors of Loudoun County he has had to build and open 46 new schools, relates York, chairman of the county's governing body. Evidently he has mixed feelings about this development. In 11 years, the population of the county has almost doubled to some 283,000. "Above all, jobs in high-tech firms have attracted specialists to Loudoun," explains York, who can easily look over to Dodona Manor from his office on the fifth floor of the administrative building of Loudoun County, the highest secular building in Leesburg. "Many new housing estates have been created, but the building work and increase in traffic have made things stressful." The crisis may not have stopped the county's expansion but it has slowed it down – something Scott York does not appear to be unhappy about.

Tony Howard, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, strides across an almost-completed shopping center – one of two such projects less than one mile apart, not exactly a sign of crisis. Howard points to the upper floors above the Starbucks, the mobile phone stores, and the dentist: "There are the apartments. We are not making the same mistake again of having centers for shopping and communication so far apart from the residential areas that they can only be reached by car. Living, shopping, talking to each other and often working. In other



words: Life is to take place in a close-knit community, an urban concept for suburbia." If you ask York and Howard why growth has hardly made a dent the president of the Chamber of Commerce names two important institutions: "The Government in nearby Washington with its many jobs and the airport. An incredible number of firms start up in the vicinity of Dulles and create jobs because they know that there are non-stop flights from this airport to all over the world."

That said, the airport and the high-tech firms that drive Loudoun's economy only partly reflect what the region is about. Down many of the blue roads in the county the impression is of a traditional piece of America with a strong agricultural basis and farming culture based on two things: horses and wine. Loudoun is a horse-breeding county. Horseracing and the deep green meadows of peacefully grazing hoofed animals are typical for the region. The vineyards, which are undulating rather than placed at high altitudes, are also typical. Jenni McCloud was a successful manager in the dot.com world before she fulfilled her life's dream. She bought a large piece of pastureland not far from the historical town of Middleburg and established her own wine-growing estate, "Chrysalis." The energetic woman, mother of six children and pack leader of 18 dogs made the Norton vine type, which originally comes from Virginia and which provides a red wine of great intensity, native to the Commonwealth again. After seven or eight years in the red, "Chrysalis" has established itself firmly on the map of American wine-growing regions. Numerous wines have won prizes, and on sunny weekends the numbers of visitors who come for wine tastings reach the hundreds.

The wine-growing estates in Loudoun County and the great range of restaurants, often in listed buildings, give the impression of the quality of Virginian wines. Nowhere do there seem to be as many buildings worthy of conservation as in Middleburg, whose center is just a three-minute drive away from Jenni McCloud's wine-growing estate. The small town, where in architectural terms time seems to have stood still around 1810, is home to the oldest inn still in operation in North America: the Red Fox Inn. The main house, whose guest room boasts a crackling open hearth, stems from the year 1728. The guest rooms exude the charm of a long-past epoch of sunrises over this continent, and in the restaurant specialties are served that would have also been familiar to the people that built the house: a traditional peanut soup, for example, with Virginia ham and duck that tastes of maple syrup. Any visitor who cannot help but be reminded of an English country club is not so far off, at least in culinary terms: The menu includes fish fried in Guinness and chips.

Elaine Walker may not be as old as the Red Fox Inn, but the lady mayor of the small community Lovettsville is nonetheless something of a Loudoun institution. Having been re-elected for the 11th time, Mrs. Walker presides over a community of 1,400 at the northern end of Loudoun County. Here, too, buildings are going up quickly because of the huge demand for the one-family houses in several developments. At 300,000 to 400,000 dollars a piece, these houses cost around half of what one would pay for houses 20 or 25 kilometers closer to Washington. Elaine is delighted with the development of the community, and sees herself as a champion of the environment: "My motto is: Look after the land, it is the only one we have." In 1730, the first settlers put down roots in Lovettsville; they were German immigrants. For a long time the place was seen as a "German settlement." It was the beginning of a friendship between Loudoun County and the geographic center of the first world that has withstood the course of time. \\

Idyllic Loudoun
Expansive, deep green fields near Lovettsville – even though the high-tech sector in Loudoun County is booming, the region is strongly influenced by farming