

## UPF-Austria Opens Branch in the Eastern State of Burgenland

Peter Haider  
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Parndorf, Austria -- UPF-Austria has inaugurated a local branch in the eastern state of Burgenland.

The leaders of the new branch, Johann and Yoon Ja Rechberger, moved back to their hometown, Parndorf, 18 years ago. They built a stable foundation with the local community by developing a Nordic Walking Club and involving themselves in local political work. The inauguration of the new UPF branch was supported by several local town councilors, as well as members of the Nordic Walking Club and other local clubs.

The place of the inauguration on June 5, 2019, was a former barn, which had been rebuilt as a marketplace where local people sell organic and natural products once a week.

The program opened with an energetic performance by the local children's and youth troupe Hot Rock Dancers. They were followed by sisters Anela and Dzejla Cindrak, who played beautiful melodies on the violin and the accordion.

Johann Rechberger, acting as moderator, welcomed everyone and gave an introduction to UPF and its founders. He also announced the UPF activities that will be held in Parndorf in the coming months. One of the planned projects is the Peace Road, which will take place in autumn.

Peter Haider, the president of UPF-Austria, gave a report on UPF activities in Vienna. His report mentioned interreligious conferences in the United Nations headquarters commemorating World Interfaith Harmony Week; cultural exchange events; and peacebuilding projects such as the Horn of Africa Peace Initiative.

The main speaker of the evening was Barbara Grabner, who gave a presentation on "1989-2019: The Green Belt along the Former Iron Curtain."

A journalist and former contributor to the Naturschutzbund (Club for the Protection of Nature), she explained that the existence of the Iron Curtain had an unexpected benefit for nature. During the years that people were not allowed to enter the Iron Curtain zone, many plant and animal species that had been almost extinct in Europe could recover there and accumulate again. It was very inspiring to see photographs of beautiful plants and animals that could flourish because humans were kept away. Nowadays, Mrs. Grabner organizes excursions to some of the most beautiful places near the Austrian-Slovak border, places that were inaccessible during the Cold War years.

Dr. Klaus Michalek, the president of the Naturschutzbund, added more facts to Mrs. Grabner's presentation.

In his closing remarks, Mr. Rechberger appealed to the participants to sign a petition against building more highways in the area around Parndorf, which would destroy more precious nature on the Green Belt.