

Hungarian sister city cast perfectly

BY TOM DAVIS

For three weeks this summer my wife and I, both employees of Toledo city schools, worked in Szeged, Hungary, teaching English. The younger students had had a year or two of English at school and have been exposed to American movies and television. Our job was to model the language as Americans speak and to build on their vocabularies. We didn't know a word of Hungarian. Teaching meant using pictures, a lot of pointing at objects, and a fair amount of acting.

Whoever suggested Szeged as Toledo's sister city must have had great insight because the two cities have much in common. Szeged is located near the border as is Toledo. The Maumee divides Toledo; the Tisa River divides Szeged. It is a center for learning and medical care for southeastern Hungary. The population of 200,000 is surrounded by rich farm lands. The topography of Szeged and Toledo is much the same. Local burgers believe that Budapest receives most of the money, and the other cities get very little. Sound familiar?

Citizens of both cities have a critical attitude toward their governments and status in life. On balance, the Hungarians have more about which to complain. They have just come away from a 50-year marriage with socialism and all its trials. Free elections were held for the first time only two years ago. Many say that nothing has really changed and that the "good old boys" are still running the show.

In both Toledo and Szeged there is a smoldering anger about their situations. The recent Blade poll showing that a sizable group of Toledoans would move if they could illustrates the point. The people of Szeged feel anger toward a system that guaranteed them security and that now is no more.

The anger and frustration does not seem to be directed toward the United States. Young people go out of their way to emulate everything

American and appear eager to learn English. Shirts with English words and sweatshirts with "Chicago Bulls" are fashionable. Almost every Hungarian has a relative somewhere in the United States, and the remaining individuals feel a sense of pride regarding their American cousins. They still feel that everyone in the United States is rich, and that ours is the land of opportunity.

Hungarians feel defensive about their country and its place in the world because they perceive that little attention is given them and

little is known about them. One student of 18 complained to me that most Americans only think of Hungary as a good place to get a bowl of goulash. Another person objected by my joke about the relative size of Toledo's mosquitoes and those in Szeged. She remarked, "There you go, we are always considered to be smaller." Hungarians are very willing to talk about their own experiences under the Communist rule, but are not very willing to talk about the broader historical implications of that period.

Small or not, Hungary has survived every invader — and there have been many — and continues as a land rich in tradition and opportunity.

Editor's Note: The group from Toledo included five teachers from Toledo Public Schools and one retired teacher from the city schools. Six University of Toledo students and faculty members also took part. The participants paid most of their own expenses to teach for one to two months in the program arranged by Toledo Sisters Cities International.