

ASHLAND DAILY TIDINGS

Ashland fire officer and family visit Guanajuato

By Kernan Turner Amigo Club

Ashland Fire & Rescue Forest Division Chief Chris Chambers vacationed in Mexico at year's end, visiting family in San Miguel de Allende and spending Dec. 27 in Ashland's Sister City, Guanajuato. He was accompanied by his wife, Leah Saturen, and daughters, Anya and Mira Saturen, and his father-in-law, Steve Saturen. It was a return trip to Guanajuato for Chambers, who has visited several times, once as the leader of the city's official delegation to the annual Festival of San Juan and Presa de la Olla, celebrated each June.

Chambers offered Entre Amigos this description of the family's day spent in Guanajuato:

"We were greeted by Mario Barrón, long-time leader of the Heroic Corps of Volunteer Firefighters and friend to Ashland, along with Capt. Juan Eduardo "Lalo" Lira Luna, the Corps training officer. Lalo has been to Ashland to receive a donated fire engine and attended our prescribed fire and trench rescue trainings last spring. We toured the fire station, which has been recently repainted, and jumped into a truck to the town center, passing through the tunnels that Guanajuato is known for. The tunnels originally diverted the Guanajuato River to prevent flooding of the early mining town. Converted into a rabbit's warren of underground roadways, they lessen today's traffic on city streets above.

"We joined a tour of Teatro Juarez, after scoring a big cup of fresh cut mango splashed with lime. The square and the whole downtown were packed with Mexicans on holiday break. We visited the Cervantes museum and then looped above the plaza to the childhood home of Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, now a museum as well. The colors of Guanajuato captivated Mira and Anya. We stopped for a photo on the University of Guanajuato steps and were joined by another firefighter, Miguel, who has been with the volunteers for more than 20 years and worked his younger years as a miner. Our gracious guests held a place in line for

us at the funicular (cable car) while we shopped for jewelry next to the Teatro Juarez. The funicular is an amazing machine, counterbalancing two cars that climb and descend a steep grade to the Pípila Statue above downtown. Pípila is the nickname of Juan José de los Reyes Martínez Amaro, Guanajuato's hero of the 1910 Mexican War of Independence.

"The Pípila Statue was amazing, although Anya was more captivated by what appeared to be a statue of a miner, but turned out to be a living street mime, immobile and covered in gold paint, frozen in position as he posed for pesos. Our guides then whisked us up to the mining area on the outskirts of town (via "Paseo Ashland!"), where we toured the Valenciana Mine thanks to Miguel, who with 364 other former miners, is a part owner of the tourist operation at the abandoned site. Many of Guanajuato's multiple mine shafts are connected underground. "After the mine, we drove farther up the mountains into the forests just above town for a relaxing dinner with our hosts (the mole sauce was amazing!). At the end of the day, we said goodbye and made our way back to San Miguel. "I'm grateful to our hosts, who took us anywhere we wanted for an entire day. I valued this visit because it was less about the two fire departments and more about the people and sharing experiences.

"The friendships and respect between our cities and fire departments continues to grow each year and I look forward to hosting our bombero friends in Ashland soon, in addition to any of our other Guanajuato brothers and sisters."

Amigo Club's Entre Amigos (Between Friends) column about Ashland ties to its sister city Guanajuato, Mexico, appears on the third Tuesday of each month. Longtime AP reporter and bureau chief Kernan Turner is an Ashland resident and Amigo Club member.