



Entre Amigos: Sister cities' summer connections

BY Kernan Turner July 20, 2015 – Daily Tidings column

Editor's note: The Daily Tidings has invited Ashland's Amigo Club to report on Ashland's Sister City ties to the UNESCO World Heritage City of Guanajuato, Mexico. The Entre Amigos (Between Friends) column will appear on the third Tuesday of each month.

Each June for 46 years, Ashlanders have traveled to Guanajuato, followed by a visit to Ashland by a Guanajuato delegation. It's a tradition begun when Guanajuato and Ashland became Sister Cities in 1969.

This year Ashland City Counselor Stefani Seffinger, acting as Mayor John Stromberg's official representative, led an Ashland delegation in June to observe Guanajuato's annual San Juan Saint's Day Festival and the opening of the floodgates to clean the city's La Olla Dam, a tradition since the 18th century.

Two third-year Ashland High School students, Mikaela Louise Perry and Angelique Ostmo, joined the festival queen's court and toured Guanajuato as Ashland ambassadors, performing song and dance routines choreographed by Graciela "Chela" Tapp-Kocks, a member of Ashland's Amigo Club. Others on the trip were Amigo Club members Marsha King-Rosine and Ann DiSalvo, Ashland Spanish teacher Gladys Contreras and folkloric dancer Héctor Zaragoza Valentín.

They returned to Ashland in time for the high school ambassadors and Guanajuato Festival Queen Wendy Rodriguez to ride in the Fourth of July Parade down Siskiyou Boulevard and Main Street, along with an official delegation from Guanajuato chosen by Mayor Luis Fernando Gutiérrez Márquez, including six city counselors (regidores) and city legal adviser (síndico) Jorge Luis Hernández.

Other counselors included Maria Rosa Amelia García, Guadalupe Barrera, Avelina Aguilar, José Luis Camacho Trejo Luna and Luis Felipe Luna Domínguez, and Clarissa Beatriz Arrache de Abascal, who represented the mayor and the Guanajuato Amigo Club that supports the Sister City relationship. Also visiting Ashland were the festival queen's father, Rubén Rodríguez, their

family friend Sergio Ramos Fainsod, artist Loreta Rangel, and Hernández's daughter Amy Hernández Peña.

Amigo Club members provided housing for the Guanajuato visitors during their stay here.

The visitors had a tight four-day schedule. Besides riding in the Fourth of July parade, they sang the Mexican national anthem at the Lithia Park band shell, watched the fireworks display, attended the Chamber of Commerce's annual barbecue, went to breakfast with the mayor and city counselors and with SOU President Roy Saigo and faculty members at the university's Guanajuato Room, watched "Guys and Dolls" at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, toured the city, visited a local winery, rafted down the Rogue River, listened to Spanish poetry recitations at SOU's Schneider Art Museum and partied at the Amigo Club's annual Four of July gathering.

Ashland and Guanajuato have been sister cities for 46 years. Sister Cities International grew out of President Dwight Eisenhower's White House summit on citizen diplomacy in 1956. The organization sees itself as "a champion for peace and prosperity" that fosters bonds between people from different communities and cultures around the world so they can "understand, appreciate, and celebrate their differences while building partnerships that ... lessen the chance of new conflicts."

Specific steps taken include:

- **Police training:** While here for the Fourth of July, the Guanajuato city counselors met with Mayor Stromberg, Police Chief Tighe O'Meara and city counselors Seffinger and Rich Rosenthal to discuss preparation of an Ashland training program for the Guanajuato police force. The emphasis will be on detention and evidence procedures.
- **Guanajuato student enrolls:** At least one Guanajuato student will be attending Ashland High School this fall. He is Luis Pablo Domínguez Vazquez. He is the grandson of Pedro Vázquez Nieto, whose permanent photo exhibit of Guanajuato hangs in the Gresham Room of the Ashland Public Library. More Guanajuato students may enroll.

Longtime AP reporter and bureau chief Kernan Turner is an Amigo Club member.