

# TASHLAND DAILY TIDINGS

By Kernan Turner Amigo Club

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## University exchange student program participants thrive



Guanajuato nursing students gathered for a brunch with their professors, Oregon Health and Science University instructors, host families and Ashland Amigo Club members at the Tapatío Restaurant. The mural in the background depicts the downtown colonial district of Guanajuato. Pictured (l-r) front row: Joanne Noone, Marian Telerski, Señora Chela Tapp-Kocks, Susana Montalvo, Betzabé "Mina" Turner and Kernan Turner; second row, Tony Kyle, Rory Pattison, Bree Koepke and Laura Dary; third row, Ricardo García Hernández, Gabriela Marmolejo Cervantes, Liliana Abigail Montes Rangel, Marta Elena Tovar Becerra, Elesandra Cardoso Morales, María Beatriz Sánchez Cruz, Trish Kohan, Kristina Núñez, Kimmie Prowell; and back row, John Morrison, Consuelo Monserrat Padilla Sosa, Kortney Pree, Hilda Guerra Lezo and Miguel Ángel Vázquez Ramírez. Amigo Club photo

The Amistad student exchange agreement between Southern Oregon University and the University of Guanajuato has expanded horizons over the years for more than 700 participants.

Sen. Juan Carlos Romero Hicks, an early Amistad exchange student, has always acknowledged his academic training at Southern Oregon University led to his becoming president (rector) of the University of Guanajuato, governor of the State of Guanajuato, and a federal senator who today champions national education reform. He and his brother, José Luis, earned master's degrees in

Ashland. José Luis went on to become president and chief executive officer of the Mexican Bank for Foreign Trade, BANCOMEXT.

The Romero Hicks have maintained their ties to Sister City Ashland, sending seven of their children to its public schools. Juan Carlos' wife, Frances "Faffie" Siekman, donated \$25,500 last year in matching funds to an endowed Ashland Amigo Club exchange-student scholarship fund.

There are many other outstanding Amistad exchange alumni in Mexico and Oregon, including Brenda Johnson, chief executive officer of non-profit La Clinica, founded in 1988 to serve the Rogue Valley's migrant and seasonal-worker community.

Southern Oregon University has formally recognized Johnson and the Romero Hicks brothers as Distinguished Alumni (Juan Carlos in 1992, Jose Luis in 2001 and Johnson in 2007).

Johnson told Oregon Business magazine in 2015 that she discovered her mission in life when, as an undergraduate student in Mexico, she was treated by doctors "I didn't know and in a language I didn't understand. I made a vow at that time to ensure other people were cared for in a culturally respectful way."

La Clinica's 17 health centers, including nine school-based clinics, provided services in 2014 to some 25,000 patients, nearly three-quarters of them poverty-level non-Hispanics.

### **Ashland donates ambulance to Guanajuato volunteers**

Ashland will donate a 24-year-old fire department ambulance and 19 portable two-way radios to Guanajuato's volunteer firemen.

Ashland Fire & Rescue Chief John Karns said the ambulance cost \$108,000 in 1992 and had a front-line service of 15 years. The fire department has purchased a new ambulance from Horton Ambulance of Ohio for \$196,055. It also has a front-line service life of 15 years.

The ambulance will bring Ashland's total donations to Guanajuato to two fire engines and two ambulances. Guanajuato Mayor (Presidente Municipal) Luis Fernando Gutiérrez Márquez has said when the city's new fire department is completed, it will "carry the name 'Ashland' in gratitude for all its support."

### **Guanajuato nursing students return home**

Eight Guanajuato nursing students returned home Saturday after a three-week study tour of health-care facilities as part of an exchange program between the Oregon Health and Science University and the University of Guanajuato.

"They made a community assessment ... of how helpful the facilities are," said Trish Kohan, clinical instructor at OHSU's Ashland campus.

They focused on child and adult obesity and nutrition, Kohan said, with an interest in studying "how our medical system provides services" for low-income patients.

The U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization reported in 2015 that Mexico had overtaken the United States as the fattest country in the Western Hemisphere with a 32.8 percent adult obesity rate, compared with 31.8 percent in the United States.

The students visited La Clinica's Wellness and West Medford Health centers, Head Start, and Kids Unlimited.

They found "these facilities are trying to prevent obesity instead of reacting to it," Kohan said. "They were excited to take this information home ... and, as nurses, try to impact the health and wellness of the people there."

Kohan will accompany eight Ashland nursing students to Guanajuato for three weeks in April and May. Eight students also went there last year.

*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.*

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