

August 15, 2017

Festival queen waits 33 years for first visit

By Kernan Turner Amigo Club

Posted Aug 15, 2017 at 2:00 AM



Guanajuato festival queen Gabriela Cardenas receives flowers from Ashland Mayor John Stromberg at a city reception during her Fourth of July visit to her sister city. [Amigo Club photo]

An official photograph of festival queen Gabriela Cardenas as a 19-year-old in 1980. She waited another 33 years to make her first visit to Ashland, Guanajuato's sister city. [Photo courtesy of Gabriela Cardenas]

Guanajuato's 1980 summer festival queen, Gabriela Cardenas, remembers how as a 19-year-old grade school teacher she looked forward to not only her Guanajuato activities, but also to the traditional trip to sister-city Ashland. She had a long wait.

Festival queens had been coming to Ashland nearly every year since Sister City relations began in 1969. They joined Guanajuato's official delegation to Ashland's Fourth of July celebrations, where several thousand spectators along the parade route cheered and applauded as they passed by in an open convertible.

Somehow, Guanajuato city officials in 1980 failed to coordinate arrangements with Ashland and a disappointed Cardenas never got to Ashland that year. Another 33 years would slip by before she made her first visit to her sister city as the director general of the Guanajuato Municipal System of Integral Family Development.

Cardenas made her second visit to Ashland this year, this time as a city councilor heading Guanajuato's delegation to the Fourth of July festivities in representation of Mayor Edgar Castro Cerrillo. And, for the first time, rode in the parade, accompanied by this year's queen, Maritere Dominguez Silva, and the other delegates.

She brought pictures to Ashland taken when she was Guanajuato's summer festival queen those many years ago.

"Ashland is the only sister city that maintains such strong bonds of friendship, fraternity, and — most of all — solidarity with Guanajuato's most needy citizens," Cardenas said in a recent email message to the Amigo Club. She added that Ashland's "many contributions to Guanajuato over the last 48 years" made her fully committed to her sister city.

Amigo Club Flies Guanajuato Queen Home

One of the first Guanajuato festival queens to participate in Ashland's Fourth of July festivities got an unusual ride home to Mexico.

The young woman, Magdalena Munoz, and her sister, Lilia, missed their scheduled flight from Ashland to Guanajuato. Amigo Club boosters Ken Jones and his wife, Laura, volunteered to fly them home in the Jones' Cessna. Ken was the pilot and Laura the "navigator."

“The long day began at dawn after about four hours of sleep,” Ken wrote later. “Laura, my competent navigator, had her Mexico chart spread out on her lap.” As they flew over Nevada and Arizona headed for Hermosillo, Mexico, thunderstorms sporadically obscured the roads on the barren desert below.

“Having found what I thought was the road, I began following it,” Ken said. “About 10 minutes had passed when I noticed my compass showed ... we were going northwest, when we should be going due south! Finding her (the navigator) nodding, which she is prone to do, I gently nudged her. ‘Laura, where are we,’ I asked? After viewing the chart, and peering out the window, she said, ‘In our airplane, somewhere in Mexico!’”

Ken turned the plane to follow the road in the opposite direction, and landed an hour later in Hermosillo for the night.

Thunderstorms in the mountains the next day forced them to spend that night in Guadalajara.

On the third day they reached Guanajuato, buzzed the city as instructed to signal their arrival, and landed at the small municipal airport, which was closed and without an outside telephone. The Spanish-speaking sisters got the idea across that they needed to hitchhike the 10 miles to town.

“Somehow, we managed to stuff all of our luggage, as well as ourselves, into a little Volkswagen bug, along with the accommodating driver, his wife, and child!” Ken wrote. They located the girls’ father at the bus station.

Ken ended his trip description by writing, “I could go on and on with this story, but I won’t.”

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.