



Sister City supporters gather to support program

By Kernan Turner for the Tidings

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Amigo Club

Three Sister City leaders from Guanajuato, Mexico, joined more than 120 residents of Ashland and nearby towns Saturday night at the third annual Guanajuato Nights fund-raising dinner/auction.

“When I got an invitation to attend and receive an award, I realized it was a great honor and I had no choice but to join you here tonight,” Martin Pantoja Aguilar told the diners. “Whenever I visit Ashland, I feel at home.”

His sentiments were shared by Faffie Siekman Romero and Hector Efrain Rodriguez de la Rosa, frequent visitors to Ashland and avid supporters of the Sister City program founded 48 years ago. Rodriguez is the provost at the University of Guanajuato.

Rodriguez said many factors had contributed to the exceptionally strong ties between Ashland and Guanajuato, but “the most important element has been love.”

All three of the visitors were early participants in the Amistad student exchange program between the Guanajuato university and Southern Oregon University. More than 1,000 students, academics and university administrators have participated in exchanges since the program’s inception in 1969.

Guanajuato Nights raises money through tickets and auction sales for the Ashland Amigo Club's endowed scholarship for SOU and University of Guanajuato students participating in the Amistad exchange.

Siekman, wife of Mexican Sen. Juan Carlos Romero Hicks, has been a major contributor to the scholarship fund by matching all other donations dollar-for-dollar. After receiving two master's degrees from SOU, Romero Hicks has been the president of the University of Guanajuato, governor of Guanajuato State and a federal senator. He currently is seeking nomination by the conservative National Action Party (PAN) as its candidate for the country's presidential elections in 2018. The PAN and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) are Mexico's leading political parties.

Siekman announced the Amigo Club scholarship fund had reached \$98,000, not counting Saturday's proceeds. Previous Guanajuato Nights gatherings have averaged \$10,000.

Amigo Club founder Graciela "Senora Chela" Tapp-Kocks presented awards for Sister City support over the years to four recipients: Pantoja Aguilar, Carmen Adams, Sean Van Ausdall and Victoria "Snow" Mountain.

The dinner, held in the Rogue River Room of the SOU student union, featured Mexico cuisine prepared by SOU Executive Chef Jerry Gander from traditional recipes.

Among current city government and university leaders at the dinner were Mayor John Stromberg, University President Dr. Linda Schott, Provost Susan Walsh, City Councilor Rich Rosenthal, Ashland Chamber of Commerce President Mary Gardiner, SOU trustee Daniel Santos and Janet Fratella, SOU vice president of development and executive director of the SOU Foundation.

Nursing exchange students return to Guanajuato

Eight nursing students from the University of Guanajuato returned home Saturday after spending three weeks in the Rogue Valley in a student exchange sponsored by the Oregon Health and Science University.

While here, they studied health care culture and practices in the United States by working on community health projects at La Clinica and Migrant Head Start of the Oregon Child Development Coalition.

Their projects focused at La Clinica on healthy meal-planning for youths and at Migrant Head Start on promoting healthy habits related to hand hygiene, exercise and tooth brushing. Students also interviewed teenage Hispanic girls and their parents about suicide.

The students presented the results of their studies at a reception on the Ashland campus of the Oregon Health and Science University at Southern Oregon University.

The nursing and community leaders supporting the exchange and promoting student learning included Alma Elder, Carolina Castaneda del Rio, Ana Maria Salaverry, Fernanda Krolak, Alex Gitzen and Lucy Hernandez.

The student nursing exchange will enter its fourth year next spring when U.S. students travel to Guanajuato.

— 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.



Photo by Graham Lewis



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