

Entre Amigos: Guanajuato mural work in progress



Photo courtesy of Denise Baxter

A Guanajuato student assistant mirrors the smile she is painting on a wall mural near the entrance to Ashland's sister city Guanajuato

By Kernan Turner / Amigo Club

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Ashland Artist Denise Baxter is spending this month in Guanajuato working with University of Guanajuato assistants in painting a 75- by 11-foot wall mural titled “Ashland — Where Culture Meets Nature.” The painting will span a length of the wall with iconic images depicting Ashland from sunrise to sunset.

The mural wall borders the Paseo de Ashland (Ashland Promenade) near the main entrance to Guanajuato, a UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site, founded in the early 16th century by the Spanish. Ashland and Guanajuato have been sister cities for 49 years.

The mural complements one painted two years ago on the side of a building facing Calle Guanajuato in Ashland. Both murals have been sponsored by Ashland residents Kathryn and Barry Thalden.

Baxter writes from Guanajuato (edited for length):

“We’re about halfway through painting the Ashland mural on a prominent wall in Guanajuato. It takes a lot of patience and planning, and we’ve begun detail work after nearly finishing the first stage of blocking the paint to create a map of colors. At this stage, nothing is complete on the wall, although it might look like it. It still requires layers upon layers of paint to complete the design and to get past the first two stages of the four-stage process. We are on schedule to finish this month and very proud of what we’ve done so far.

“Five principal University of Guanajuato students are assisting me. When one of them needs to attend classes, an alternate student fills in, which means I’ve had the pleasure of training 10 students so far. I think each has learned something new and I hope that they have enjoyed the experience. The primary students are the most important because they have learned the system intimately and get a lot done quickly.

“My Spanish is improving daily. Most of the students speak only Spanish, although a couple know a few words in English, which helps. I’m loving the language experience and everyone has been so helpful with my efforts to communicate.

“The city of Guanajuato has provided around-the-clock security to guard against graffiti. An anti-graffiti glaze will be administered when we are finished. Each day, the transit department blocks off the lane nearest our work to ensure our safety and pedestrians passing by. The city has also provided two amazing men who help us with scaffolding and are at our beck-and-call throughout the day for

our needs, including water and helping clean up our mess. They are so wonderful and are there on the spot if we drop a rag from the scaffold or need something in the truck while working on the wall.

“Loreta is my angel for all her support. (Editor’s note: Laura “Loreta” Rangel Villasenor is the artist who painted the Guanajuato mural in Ashland and is providing Denise logistical support in Guanajuato, as Denise did for her in Ashland.)

“I would also like to point out that my daughter has fallen in love with this beautiful city and wants to return as soon as possible to begin her studies at the university. She feels that she has found her home away from home. I feel that, too. Guanajuato is more than I ever could have imagined, and I love it so very much.

“We have been living with two extraordinarily generous people, Ashland Amigo Club members Karen Gans and Larry Buchanan, in their beautiful home in Guanajuato. The house is an architectural gem and provides us with a relaxed and loving environment each evening.

“Thank you, Amigo Club, for making connections that matter so much to the success of this project.”

—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.