

## Entre Amigos: AHS ambassadors prepare for Guanajuato visit

BY **KERNAN TURNER** May 14, 2018



Ashland High School juniors Leila Kenner (left) and Uma McGuire have been selected to represent Ashland as ambassadors to sister city Guanajuato, Mexico, during summer festivals in July. (Ashland Amigo Club photo)



Ashland High School juniors Uma McGuire (left) helps Leila Kenner adjust her costume during an after-school rehearsal of dance routines they will perform in July as ambassadors to sister city Guanajuato, Mexico. (Ashland Amigo Club photo)

Two Ashland High School students are preparing to serve as ambassadors next month to Ashland sister city Guanajuato, Mexico. Continuing a 49-year tradition, Guanajuato's summer festival queen will reciprocate by riding in Ashland's Fourth of July parade.

In Guanajuato, the Ashland ambassadors will join the festival queen's court and represent Ashland at civic gatherings during the summer festivals of San Juan and Presa de La Olla. A highlight is the symbolic cleaning of the La Olla reservoir that dates to the 18th century when the dam was drained and refilled.

This year's ambassadors are high school juniors Leila Kenner, daughter of Selima Siddiqui and Erik Kenner; and Uma McGuire, daughter of Poonam Thakur and Brian McGuire. A committee chose them from 24 aspiring applicants.

The girls are receiving coaching from Señora Chela Tapp-Kochs, one of the founders 49 years ago of sister city relations and the Ashland Amigo Club. She helped recruit the girls by visiting classes to share her deep knowledge of Guanajuato history and culture, and to show videos and pictures of the city, a UNESCO-designated world heritage site.

In her application to become an ambassador, Kenner said, "I believe that maintaining and building strong international connections helps us all learn to embrace our differences, appreciate our similarities and expand our definition of community."

Under Sra. Chela's volunteer tutelage, the girls are memorizing Spanish-language speeches and songs and learning an assortment of colorful folk dances they will present in Guanajuato. Kenner will recite in Spanish from Cervantes' Don Quixote and McGuire will quote some Shakespeare in English.

During their orientation sessions, Señora Chela, a retired Southern Oregon University language and literature professor, is working on their Spanish pronunciation and teaching them a concise history of Guanajuato and Mexico, touching on the Mayans and Aztecs, the arrival of the Spanish conquistadores, Mexican independence and revolution, and the Mexican-American War.

"Even though we have a small city, we have the resources and amenities that create our own special culture," McGuire says in a speech she has prepared to give in Guanajuato. "I also understand that Guanajuato is a unique city filled with traditions and history."

It will be Kenner's first trip outside the United States. McGuire has been to several countries and her parents once lived in Oaxaca.

### **Delegation to visit Ashland**

Guanajuato will send its annual delegation to Ashland at the end of June to participate in Fourth of July celebrations, including riding in the annual parade.

The Ashland Amigo Club has learned that delegation will be reduced this year to the summer festival queen, her mother and a city official due to activities surrounding national and local elections being held in Mexico on July 1. The festival queen has yet to be chosen.

Voters will choose a new president for a five-year-and-10-month term and a completely new slate of 128 senators and 500 members of the Chamber of Deputies. All but two of Mexico's 32 states are also holding local elections.

### **Guanajuato team headed here**

The Guanajuato Little League baseball team is ticketed and ready to travel to Ashland in July for the fourth annual Sister City Classic.

The Guanajuato Tigers will arrive on July 17 and play ball through July 23 against multiple Ashland Little League teams at Hunter Park. It will be the Tigers' second visit to Ashland in the alternating series than began in March 2015.

The Sister City Baseball Classic was co-founded by Armando Preciado, president of Guanajuato's Little League, and Rich Rosenthal, Ashland's team coordinator.

Rosenthal is seeking host families and financial sponsors. He can be contacted by email at [rosenthal@opendoor.com](mailto:rosenthal@opendoor.com) or by phone at (541) 774-2483.

— *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.*