

Entre Amigos: Ashland mural dedicated in Guanajuato

BY **KERNAN TURNER** June 18, 2018



• Ashland student ambassadors to Guanajuato Leila Kenner (left) and Uma McGuire practice a Mexican dance.



- **Ashland Mayor John Stromberg joins Ashland student ambassadors Leila Kenner (left) and Uma McGuire during rehearsal in Ashland.**



- **Uma McGuire (right) pose in Mexico with Guanajuato festival queen Jessica Leycegui Melesio after her Coronation this month.**



Ashland ambassadors

Uma McGuire (left) and Leila Kenner rehearse their version of a cowboy dance to the tune of “Don’t Fence me In.”

Ashland and Guanajuato are continuing a 49-year-old tradition of back-to-back Sister City visits during June and July.

Ashland sent a delegation a week ago to Guanajuato to participate in its festivals of San Juan (St. John the Baptist) and the annual cleaning of the Presa de la Olla reservoir that dates from the 18th century.

No sooner had the group reached Guanajuato than a heavy downpour caused flash flooding of three major streets and into the central business district. Some vehicles, residences and stores received minor flooding, but there were no reports of serious injuries.

The Ashland delegation is led by Public Works Director Paula Brown, representing Mayor John Stromberg and the city administration. She is accompanied by her husband, Patrick Flannery. The delegation includes two Ashland High School juniors, Leila Kenner and Uma McGuire, accompanied by their Spanish teacher and chaperone, Gladys Contreras, and Senora Chela Tapp-Kocks of the Ashland Amigo Club.

Before leaving for Guanajuato, the girls spent more than 100 after-school hours rehearsing their Spanish-language speeches and bilingual song and dance routines under the direction of Tapp-Kocks.

In Guanajuato, Kenner and McGuire have already participated as “ambassadors” to the coronation of festival queen Jessica I (Jessica Leycegui Melesio) and are performing and speaking at various Guanajuato venues.

Guanajuato’s reciprocal visit to Ashland begins June 27 when the delegates will be met by their host families at the Medford International Airport. They leave on July 5.

This year’s official visitors from the Municipality of Guanajuato includes Regidor (councilor) Adrian Camacho Trejo Luna and the festival queen, accompanied by a sister and their mother, Hila Melesio.

The Ashland Amigo Club has been busy for weeks recruiting host families and coordinating the delegation’s activities during the Independence Day celebrations, including breakfasts, lunches, dinners, city tours, winery, a trip to Crater Lake, rafting on the Rogue River, sailing on Emigrant Lake and other activities.

The visitors will also ride as Guanajuato representatives in the annual Fourth of July parade, join Chamber of Commerce and Amigo Club barbecues, and attend a performance of Romeo and Juliet, courtesy of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

Poetry recital

The seventh annual Spanish-language poetry recital sponsored by the Ashland Amigo Club will be held this year at 1 p.m. July 1 at the El Tapatio Restaurant at 1633 Hwy 99 on the north entrance to town. Light refreshments will be served.

Participants include Guanajuato dignitaries in town for the Fourth of July celebrations, Hispanics living in the Rogue Valley and Spanish students.

Amigo Club scholarship

The Amigo Club Endowed Scholarship Committee has approved granting a \$4,000 scholarship to Chantelle Seehawer for full year of study at the University of Guanajuato beginning this fall.

Seehawer is a Spanish major with a minor in gender studies at Southern Oregon University.

The scholarship, administered by the SOU Foundation, was created by the Amigo Club to encourage participation in the Amistad student exchange program between SOU and the University of Guanajuato.

Mural dedicated

Barry and Kathryn Thalden of Ashland arrived in Guanajuato Sunday ahead of Monday's inauguration of the Ashland mural designed and painted by Ashland artist Denise Baxter.

Baxter worked the month of April on the mural, assisted by Guanajuato art students and the logistical support of Laura "Loreta" Rangel Villasenor, who painted the Guanajuato mural in Ashland two years ago.

The Thaldens sponsored both murals.

"This project shows that we do not create peace and security by building walls and fences," Thalden said in remarks prepared for delivery at the inauguration ceremony. He added, "It is through caring about and respecting our friends of different countries with an appreciation of their cultures that we create peace and beauty in the world."

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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