

# ASHLAND DAILY TIDINGS

July 2018

## Entre Amigos: Ashland, Guanajuato to celebrate 50 years of sisterhood



Guanajuato children carry banners and Mexican and American flags parade through Guanajuato, Mexico, in 2009, greeting a visiting Ashland delegation participating in 40th anniversary celebrations of Sister City relations between Guanajuato and Ashland.

BY **JOHN ENDERS / ASHLAND AMIGO CLUB** July 16, 2018

*Editor's Note: Former Ashland Daily Tidings Editor John Enders has actively supported Ashland's Sister City relations with Guanajuato, Mexico, for years and participated in the 30th and 40th anniversaries in 1999 and 2009. In the column below, Enders, author of the book titled "Lithia Park: The Heart and Soul of Ashland," invites everyone to help make next year's Sister City golden jubilee a great success.*

When President Dwight Eisenhower introduced his People-to-People program in 1956, he said, "If we are going to take advantage of the assumption that all people want peace, then the problem is for

people to get together and to leap governments — if necessary to evade governments — to work out not one method but thousands of methods by which people can gradually learn a little bit more of each other.”

He may not have envisioned the impact his plan to promote global citizen diplomacy would have on little towns throughout the United States, including Ashland. The program eventually became Sister Cities International.

Without a doubt, the ties between Ashland and Guanajuato, Mexico, represent one of the world’s most comprehensive, long-lasting and successful sister-city relationships.

Citizens of Ashland and Guanajuato are now gearing up to celebrate next year the 50th anniversary of this exceptional international connection, which has led to hundreds of student exchanges and some 80 bicultural marriages. A committee will soon oversee preparation of jubilee activities.

This column is intended as a call for volunteers, as well as a kick-in-the-pants plea to those hesitating to support this mutually beneficial program. (For more information, contact Amigo Club President Betzabé “Mina” Turner by email at [amigo@97520.net](mailto:amigo@97520.net).)

A little history: Graciela Tapp-Kocks, known simply as Señora Chela in Ashland and Guanajuato, came to Southern Oregon College (now Southern Oregon University) as an associate professor of foreign languages and literature in 1966. Within a few years, her dogged determination had achieved municipal links and convinced university officials in both cities to support a student exchange that is now known as the Amistad Program. Over the years, formal connections have been formed between the two city administrations, fire and police departments, chambers of commerce, service clubs, the high schools and the two cities’ great cultural institutions: the Oregon Shakespeare Theater and the Festival Internacional Cervantino.

More than 750 students have participated in the Amistad exchange program. And hundreds of American and Mexican citizens of all ages have traveled back and forth between Ashland and Guanajuato, many on special trips led by the Ashland Amigo Club, also established 50 years ago to support the program.

Since the 9/11 attack, visas to enter the United States have become more difficult to secure. And current conditions along the border and the Trump Administration immigration policies make

programs such as the Ashland-Guanajuato sister-city relationship — and unity — more important than ever.

Several years ago, Ashland High School suspended its participation in the student exchanges. It's time for them to resume. In addition, enthusiasm for the Ashland-Guanajuato connection often depends on individuals in positions of leadership: some are simply more interested than others. I urge those who are lukewarm in their support to act in the interests of the entire community by wholeheartedly supporting this program.

Viva Ashland! Viva 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.*