



Sister-city relationship celebrated at 'Guanajuato Nights'

BY Kernan Turner November 16, 2015

Guanajuato signature chef Bricio Dominguez took Ashland by surprise Saturday, serving a five-course gastronomic delight for 126 guests at the Ashland Amigo Club's Guanajuato Nights dinner and silent auction fund-raiser.

Civic leaders and other Ashlanders lauded the gathering for bringing people together to mix with friends in an atmosphere supportive of a common cause: keeping alive the university-student exchange between Ashland and Guanajuato, Mexico.

Ashland Mayor John Stromberg told diners at the Ashland Elks Lodge banquet room that, at a time when many civic clubs seem to be losing members, the Amigo Club is "moving forward." The city became a dues-paying, non-voting club member this year, appointing Rich Rosenthal as its City Council liaison.

"We wanted Guanajuato Nights to share our Sister City's warmth and friendship with the people of Ashland and introduce them to Mexican haute cuisine," Amigo Club President Betzabé "Mina" Turner said. The Amigo Club has supported Sister City relations for nearly 47 years.

Guests gave a prolonged standing ovation to chef Bricio; his wife, Ruth; and son Luis Pablo; 26 volunteer Ashland High School student waiters; and 15 local Hispanics and others who assisted in the kitchen and plate preparation.

The sold-out event raised funds for the club's endowed scholarship for the Amistad (friendship) student exchange program between Southern Oregon University and the University of Guanajuato. Some 1,000 students, faculty and administrators have participated in the program since the early 1970s.

Chef Bricio and his wife, Ruth, flew to Ashland a few days before Saturday's dinner and went shopping with hosts Suzanne and Richard Haveman for locally available ingredients. The five-course meal featured a colorful fish ceviche sprinkled with bright-red pomegranate seeds, followed by a tomato-based tortilla soup, mole-dribbled salmon and a beef dish, tartar de buey. Dessert was a creamy butternut-squash mousse.

Also traveling to Ashland from Guanajuato for the fundraiser were Mexican Sen. Juan Carlos Romero Hicks and his wife, Faffie Siekman, and former Ashland Amigo Club President Susana Montalvo. Other out-of-towners included Dr. Joe Cox and his wife, Regina from Eugene, Klamath County Community College President Dr. Roberto Gutierrez and his wife, Tessa, and, from Portland, Keith Morrison and his wife, CPA Monica Santoyo-Morrison, a former SOU exchange student.

Sen. Romero Hicks and Dr. Cox are longtime supporters of Sister City ties. The senator, a former University of Guanajuato president and Guanajuato State governor, earned two Master's at SOU as an early participant in the Amistad exchange program, and Cox was state chancellor of higher education after serving from 1987 to 1994 as president of Southern Oregon University.

The club awarded Romero's wife, Faffie, an appreciation plaque for her many years of Sister City support. Siekman provided \$12,000 in matching funds earlier this year for an initial Amigo Club drive that collected some \$30,000 in scholarship donations. She has offered to repeat her generosity next year.

The club presented other awards to early Sister City advocates Rick Mattos, Ken Jones and his deceased wife, Laura, and former Mayor John Morrison, who led delegations to Guanajuato four times while in office. Jones was co-president of the original City Friendship Committee that sought Sister City affiliation.

Amigo Club founder Señora Chela Tapp-Kocks praised the generosity of bidders who participated in the silent auction organized by Anne and Michael Meiring, and in the oral bidding elicited by impromptu auctioneers Jay Tapp and Stephen Krause for vacation rentals in Guanajuato and the Mexican and Oregon coasts.

While in Ashland, Sen. Romero Hicks spent time with students, faculty, administrators and division heads at SOU discussing the Amistad program and "new proposals for a new generation of exchange students." He gave a public talk at SOU on Friday on the subject "Mexico 101: Economy, Politics and Culture."

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