

# Entre Amigos: Sister city celebrates Independence Day

BY [KERNAN TURNER / ASHLAND AMIGO CLUB](#) September 17, 2018





Mexicans are celebrating the 208th anniversary of Independence from Spain this week, a national patriotic holiday that has special significance in Ashland’s sister-city, Guanajuato, and nearby Dolores de Hidalgo. The two cities played important roles in the independence movement.

Simultaneously with the federal government and other cities around the country, Guanajuato initiated celebrations Saturday night with a reenactment of what is known as the “Grito de Dolores (Cry of Dolores)” of 1910, when parish priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costillas sparked the war of independence by ringing the church bells in the small town of Dolores and calling for an end to Spanish rule.

Traditional Mexican music, dancing and street food followed the “El Grito” reenactment in Guanajuato, and hundreds of spectators watched Sunday morning as nearly 3,000 celebrants paraded through the historic center’s narrow streets. Other communities across the country held a variety of parades, concerts, patriotic programs, and special programs on TV, radio and in the newspapers.

Thirteen days after Hidalgo's call for insurrection, at least 20,000 of his peasant fighters assaulted Guanajuato. Some 300 loyalists and Spanish troops sought refuge with their families inside the city's rock-solid, corn granary, the Alhóndiga de Granaditas, turning it into an improvised fortress.

The insurgents sent a 28-year-old local miner, Juan José de los Reyes Martínez Amaro, nicknamed "El Pípila," to burn down an entrance door. Tying a large, flat stone to his back for protection against a deluge of bullets and rocks from the Alhóndiga, he bravely reached the door and set it afire with tar and a torch. The revolutionaries stormed inside, killing everyone and then ravaging and burning the city.

It was the rebellion's first major victory, although an estimated 3,000 insurgents lost their lives in the siege of Guanajuato.

Hidalgo started a revolution but never got to finish it. Spanish firing squads executed him and three other main participants of the original insurgency, Ignacio Allende, Juan Aldama, and José Mariano Jiménez. Their decapitated heads hung from the four corners of the Alhondiga until Spain recognized Mexican independence on Aug. 24, 1821.

Today, an El Pípila statue stands on a hill overlooking the city's historic center and the heads are buried in a major Mexico City monument. Sept. 16 has been the official Independence Day holiday since 1925.

By 11 p.m. every Sept. 15, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans crowd shoulder-to-shoulder in Mexico City's main plaza, the Zócalo, to watch the president honor Hidalgo's "Grito" as federal, state and municipal officials enact similar ceremonies across the country.

In what has become an annual ritual, the president rings Hidalgo's original bell, since moved from Dolores to Mexico City, that he used to assemble his parishioners in 1910. The president then shouts "Viva!" (long live!) for Independence and its heroes and for Mexico. Each "Viva!" is echoed with a roar from the crowd below. The president then rings the bell again, waves a large national flag and leads everyone in singing the national anthem. Fireworks burst overhead.

Some years, the president has performed the "El Grito" reenactment at Hidalgo's church in Dolores de Hidalgo.

## **Guanajuato Nights date set**

The Ashland Amigo Club will hold this year's fourth annual Guanajuato Nights dinner/auction on Nov. 10 in the Rogue River Room of the Stevenson Union at Southern Oregon University.

The dinner is a major fundraiser for the club's endowed scholarship fund for students participating in the Amistad exchange program between SOU and the University of Guanajuato. This year's recipient, Chantelle Seehawer, is already in Guanajuato for a year's study at the university.

*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.*