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By Kernan Turner, Amigo Club member.

Wearing her traveling scars proudly

BY **KERNAN TURNER ASHLAND AMIGO CLUB** January 14, 2019



Pictured are Amigo Club scholarship recipient Chantelle Seehawer (second from right, second row) and other foreign exchange students attending the University of Guanajuato in Guanajuato, Mexico. (Courtesy photo)

Halfway through a full year's study at the University of Guanajuato, Amigo Club scholarship recipient Chantelle Seehawer reports, "I am loving my time here in beautiful Guanajuato!"

In an email message exchange with "Entre Amigos," Seehawer said she had been "adopted" by a Guanajuato family and had visited several other cities in her free time, including San Miguel de

Allende, Guadalajara, Ajijic and Mexico City, and was preparing to visit Puerto Vallarta before second-semester classes resume in February. She said an online job helps pay for her extracurricular travel.

Seehawer, who will celebrate her 24th birthday this month, is the fifth student from Southern Oregon University to receive a grant financed by the Amigo Club endowed scholarship fund administered by the SOU Foundation. Created in 2015, the fund encourages participation in the Amistad student exchange program between SOU and the University of Guanajuato.

During her first semester, from August to December, Seehawer spent most of her time in the language department's Español Para Extranjeros, taking classes that included Advanced Lecture, Advanced History, Spanish Grammar and Conversation and a two-hour seminar on Fridays on Mexico-U.S. relations.

"I feel after my first two months here that my Spanish has grown amazingly," she said. "I have full dreams in Spanish and can carry on full-length conversations." She said her goal is to be an English teacher in a Spanish-speaking country.

She described the schooling atmosphere at UG as "very kind and positive," although she missed motivational homework.

She had one harrowing experience while staying with three fellow foreign exchange students at a home while visiting Ajijic, a lake town favored by U.S. expatriates near Guadalajara. The family was away on vacation, leaving their two young German shepherds behind.

She had been "loving those dogs for a whole day," but when she dived into the house's pool the next day for a swim, the two dogs jumped in and grabbed her left arm. A companion came to her rescue and detached the dogs from her arm, but not before their teeth ripped a wound that required 16 stitches.

"My stitches are out and I am already healed," she said. "I enjoy my scars really. Part of my life I'm happy and continuing my adventures."

Her comment was reminiscent of a statement in her scholarship application, when she referred to another kind of bite while traveling abroad for the first time at age 18.

“I spent three weeks backpacking with a friend in Australia,” she said. “This is where the travel bug bit me and left a scar that I will forever show proudly.”

By the time she received her Amigo Club scholarship, she already had traveled to Canada twice and backpacked in South America for two months, visiting Quito, Ecuador, Lima and Cusco, Peru, and hiking Peru’s Inca Trail to Machu Picchu.

Seehawer, a Spanish major with a minor in gender studies at SOU, will enroll in regular second-semester classes at UG that continue through the first week of June, travel some more in Mexico if her money holds out, and return to SOU in the fall.

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.

Amigo Club seeks host families

An Ashland steering committee has been meeting regularly since November to prepare for an official Guanajuato delegation expected April 5-10 in Ashland to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Sister City relations. An Ashland delegation will visit Guanajuato May 27-31.

The Ashland Amigo Club has volunteered to recruit host families for as many as 70 visitors from Guanajuato. Anyone interested in hosting may contact subcommittee chairman Suzanne Haveman for more details. She can be reached by phone at 541-488-1840, or by email at havemansuzanne@gmail.com.