

Entre Amigos: Preparations underway for Sister City travelers

BY [KERNAN TURNER ASHLAND AMIGO CLUB](#) March 19, 2019



Pictured are some of the Guanajuato delegation that visited Crater Lake National Park in April 2009 while celebrating the 40th anniversary of Sister City relations with Ashland. (Graham Lewis photo)

“To promote peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation – one individual, one community at a time.” – Mission Statement, Sister Cities International

Ashland and Guanajuato are about to celebrate 50 years of Sister City relations with the arrival of some 50 Guanajuatenses in April, followed by a like number of Ashlanders traveling to Guanajuato in May.

“Ashland is on everyone’s lips in Guanajuato,” Señora Chela Tapp-Kocks said in an interview upon her return from a week in Guanajuato helping public and private schools prepare for their city celebrations and greet Ashlanders in May.

The official Guanajuato delegation will be welcomed in Ashland April 5-10, and Guanajuato will greet Ashland representatives in Mexico May 27-31.

Tapp-Kocks, the visionary who more than 50 years ago proposed the Sister City link, said she was impressed with the enthusiasm of people in Guanajuato, but felt sadness that some people who wanted to visit Ashland have been unable to obtain visas in time to make the trip.

A steering committee led by Chamber of Commerce President Mary Gardiner and Chamber Executive Director Sandra Slattery has been working for months on an agenda for the celebrations in Ashland in April. Committee members are from Southern Oregon University, the City of Ashland, the public school system, police and fire departments, and the Rotary and Amigo clubs.

Activities planned for the Guanajuato visitors range from a Rotary Clubs' kick-off gathering at the Grizzly Peak winery and an official City of Ashland proclamation at the Community Center to a Chamber-sponsored gathering at the Brickroom Restaurant and an Amigo Club farewell party at the Ashland Springs Hotel, with many other events in between.

The Amigo Club is helping finance transportation for the visitors and arranging host-family lodging. Housing coordinator Suzanne Haveman is seeking more Ashland volunteers to open their doors. For more details, contact Haveman at suzhaveman@charter.net or (541) 840-5830.

“Bringing our Mexican friends into your homes is a great way to make people-to-people contact and to establish lifelong relationships,” Amigo Club President Betzabé “Mina” Turner said.

When the Ashland delegation goes to Guanajuato in May, they will be greeted by the city's private and public institutions, starting with a breakfast in one of the public schools where the students will sing each country's national anthem and perform Mexican folk dances and songs.

A student parade will follow the breakfast, winding through the narrow streets of the ancient city to the Plaza de la Paz (Peace Plaza) for a ceremony and placing of a plaque that commemorates 50 years of Sister City ties. The children will carry “People to People” and Mexican and American national flags.

The students are creating Sister City posters, compositions, and art works related to the theme, “Guanajuato: What It Means to Me” that will be displayed along the Paseo Ashland (Ashland Boulevard) that leads to a small plaza and obelisk dedicated to Tapp-Kocks and Ashland. A colorful, 75-foot-wide Ashland mural already adorns a wall bordering the boulevard.

“The excitement and enthusiasm of the students is contagious and shared by their teachers, who are thrilled that the children will have an opportunity to participate actively in a cultural exchange between two cities and two countries,” Señora Chela said.

“They will carry these early culture-sharing experiences with them for the rest of their lives,” she said, “just as the Amistad student exchange program between the University of Guanajuato and Southern Oregon University has affected the lives of hundreds of alumni.”

Amigo Club's Entre Amigos (Between Friends) column about Ashland ties to its sister city Guanajuato, Mexico, appears every month. Longtime AP reporter and bureau chief Kernan Turner is an Ashland resident and Amigo Club member.