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Ashland Honors early advocate of sister-city relations

by Kernan Turner for the Tidings

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Photo by Graham Lewis, Ashland Chamber of Commerce Graciela “Señora Chela” Tapp-Kocks holds a hand-made bowl presented by the City of Ashland in honor of her support of sister-city relations with Guanajuato, Mexico, presented Tuesday at a Southern Oregon University “Gala” celebration.

Ashland officially declared “Guanajuato Day” on Monday, but by Tuesday attention had shifted to Graciela “Señora Chela” Tapp-Kocks, the visionary professor who campaigned 50 years ago for sister-city relations with the Mexican metropolis.

Some 50 citizens from Guanajuato are in Ashland this week celebrating the 50th anniversary of the tie between the two cities.

Ashland Chamber of Commerce Sandra Slattery announced at a buffet reception and musical concert held at Southern Oregon University on Tuesday that Tapp-Kocks would be the grand marshal at this year's Fourth of July Parade.

Mayor Alejandro Navarro Saldaña announced that Guanajuato had honored Tapp-Kocks with its Citizen of the Year Award, the first time ever to be bestowed on a non-Mexican citizen.

Others who acknowledged Tapp-Kocks' contributions to both cities included Ashland Mayor John Stromberg, SOU President Linda Schott, and University of Guanajuato Rector (President) Dr. Luis Felipe Guerrero Agripino.

At the concert dedicated to Tapp-Kocks, Schott read a letter from Gov. Kate Brown recognizing that "everyday citizens who have found brothers and sisters across the border make us a better city and state through their growing understanding of global citizenship."

She praised Tapp-Kocks for "pouring so much energy and affection" into the sister-city relationship.

In his remarks, UG President Guerrero Agripino said, "If I had to summarize 50 years of sister-city relations, I could do it in two words. And those two words would be Señora Tapp-Kocks."

In the late 1960s, Tapp-Kocks, SOU Spanish and French professor, shuttled between the two cities, urging city and university officials to formally become sister cities, finally accomplished in 1969. At the same time, the two universities

signed a student-exchange program that ultimately resulted in the participation of more than 750 Mexican and American students.

The Amigo Club of Ashland, Ore., Inc. scheduled the final event of the weeklong anniversary celebration with a dinner party Wednesday night at the Ashland Springs Hotel ballroom.

Most Guanajuato guests will return home Thursday. An Ashland delegation will travel to Guanajuato in May to join its anniversary celebrations.

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