

## Keeping close sister-city relations

by Kernan Turner Ashland Amigo Club  
Monday, August 19th 2019



courtesy photo. Señora Chela Tapp-Kocks rides as grand marshal in Ashland's 2019 Fourth of July Parade.

Few other cities in the world have developed such profound and enduring sister-city relations as Ashland and Guanajuato, Mexico. They celebrated their 50th anniversary this summer, with 56 Guanajuato citizens visiting Ashland and 85 Ashlanders traveling to Guanajuato. Today's "Entre Amigos" column features an interview with Chela Tapp-Kocks, who was instrumental in bringing and keeping the two cities together. The edited interview transcript follows:

**Kernan Turner: What are some of your thoughts on the accomplishments and the future of Ashland's special affiliation with Guanajuato?**

**Chela Tapp-Kocks:** The word “affiliation” is exactly what President Dwight D. Eisenhower used in 1956 when he proposed the people-to-people program, promoting peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation — one individual and one community at a time. The Sister Cities International website affirms that a formal relationship between communities and its corresponding face-to-face meetings and exchanges not only enrich individual lives, but also help communities thrive.

**KT: Did Guanajuato and Ashland follow the original sister city mission statement in 1969?**

**Tapp-Kocks:** Yes, we did. The original sister-city commission and the newly formed Amigo Club founders wrote a vision statement and shared it with our Guanajuato Amigos. At the time, we envisioned citizens of each city would share cultures through personal contact and an exchange of viewpoints, customs and traditions I am amazed that our founders knew their cities so well in 1969 that 50 years later, in 2019, we are still following their guidelines. They were truly people of unique insight.

**KT: Could you expound on that?**

**Tapp-Kocks:** We envisioned four phases. The first was academic exchanges between the University of Guanajuato and Southern Oregon University (Southern Oregon College at the time). Elmo Stevenson of SOC and Euquerio Guerrero López of the UG started student exchanges that through the years have included more than 1,000 students and included department chairs, professors, and programs such as art, psychology, nursing, business, and others. Current SOU President Linda Schott and UG President (Rector) Luis Felipe Guerrero Agripino signed a new exchange agreement this summer.

Each city was part of the first phase through connections between mayors, city administrators and city councils. Their successors remain key to the program's success.

**KT: What were the other phases?**

**Tapp-Kocks:** Phase II included the exchange of student ambassadors. Two Ashland High School ambassadors participate in Guanajuato's summer festival each June and Guanajuato's festival queen rides in Ashland's Fourth of July parade. Phase 2 also initiated successful exchanges between individual friends, service clubs, churches, and civic organizations.

Phase 3 was artistic exchanges. Both cities and universities have participated, including bands, orchestras, art exhibits, choirs, dance and ballet, and many guest lecturers. Phase 3 also included medical and dental professional exchanges and conferences.

Phase 4 saw the exchanges of fire and police department personnel and techniques that also resulted in the transfer of used ambulances and fire trucks to Guanajuato.

**KT: What about the future?**

**Tapp-Kocks:** I am not a visionary, but I believe many activities will continue, tweaked to reflect new styles or methodologies. I believe that the citizens of Ashland and Guanajuato have been blessed by our exchanges and the sharing of two very different cultures. The "people" of the people-to-people program will decide any future changes, guided by their own traditions and history.

Looking forward, I am aware of how the contributions of so many people have rippled across and beyond the boundaries of the two cities and two countries.

The sister city program has produced two communities enlightened by the simple idea of people with distinct cultures sharing their uniqueness. Our successful past mirrors and projects an exciting future.