

Sister cities celebrate milestones in 2019

by Kernan Turner Amigo Club

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Amigo Club photo Mayors John Stromberg of Ashland (left) and Mario Alejandro Navarro Saldaña formally proclaim "Guanajuato Day" during the formal unveiling on April 8 in the Ashland Council chambers of a donated Guanajuato City Coat of Arms (behind Navarro Saldaña).

Sister Cities Ashland and Guanajuato, Mexico, reached a major milestone in 2019, celebrating the 50th anniversary of a relationship that has not only drawn the two cities and their universities together, but also developed close people-to-people ties.

“We hope this amazing international civic connection will continue to gender mutual respect and personal friendships for another 50 years,” Amigo Club President Betzabé “Mina” Turner said. “Everyone can feel proud of having embraced peace and strong bonds of friendship between people from two distinct cultures.”

Fifty-six celebrants from Guanajuato came to Ashland in early April, and 85 Ashlanders traveled to Guanajuato in late May to join that city’s celebrations.

Mayors John Stromberg of Ashland and Mario Alejandro Navarro Saldaña proclaimed “Guanajuato Day” during the April 8 formal unveiling in the Ashland Council chambers of a donated Guanajuato City Coat of Arms.

Graciela “Señora Chela” Tapp-Kocks flew to Guanajuato to receive a “Distinguished Citizen of Guanajuato” award — the first foreigner so honored — for her visionary leadership leading to the sister-city link.

Other special events included a “solemn bilateral agreement” signing at the University of Guanajuato.

Citizen of the Year award

The Ashland Chamber of Commerce named the Amigo Club as the “2019 Citizen of the Year” for helping sustain 50 years of sister-city relations with Guanajuato. The chamber presented the award at its 113th annual dinner Oct. 3 that had the theme of “Celebrating 50 Years of Sister City Friendship.”

The Citizen of the Year Award honors more than 200 past and present Amigo Club members who over the years have helped support the connections between Ashland and Guanajuato.

World Peace Flame

World Peace ceremonies were held during the 50th anniversary celebrations in Ashland and Guanajuato, which will become the first Latin American city to light a World Peace Flame.

2019 Ashland High School ambassadors and Ashland delegation to Guanajuato

Ashland High School representatives Aubrey Reynolds and Taiga Sherman, coached by Tapp-Kocks, traveled to Guanajuato in June to participate in Guanajuato's major summer festivals.

Fourth of July

For the 50th year, the Amigo Club coordinated a packed calendar of activities for Guanajuato visitors who participated in the Ashland Fourth of July celebrations. The chamber named Tapp-Kocks and Mexican Congressman Juan Carlos Romero Hicks as parade grand marshals, although engagements in Mexico kept Romero Hicks from participating.

Guanajuato "Queen" Andrea I (Andrea Marina Maldonado) and her sister, Claudia, rode in the parade.

Guanajuato student nurses participate in exchange program

Also in 2019, six nursing students from the University of Guanajuato completed a three-week research visit to the Rogue Valley in early November.

The University of Guanajuato and the Ashland extension of the OHSU Nursing School have participated in student exchanges for five years. Ashland nursing students will go to Guanajuato in April this year.

Guanajuato Nights

The Amigo Club celebrated its fifth annual “Guanajuato Nights” fundraiser for the Club’s endowed scholarship fund Nov. 9 at the Rogue River Room at Southern Oregon University. More than 130 guests attended. The evening netted more than \$10,000 for the exchange student scholarship administered by the SOU Foundation.

Faffie Siekman, wife of Mexican Rep. Romero Hicks, donated \$25,000 in “matching funds” from the Siekman Foundation. Since the fundraiser’s inception five years ago, the scholarship fund has grown to more than \$200,000, and granted scholarships to seven SOU students attending the University of Guanajuato and two UG students attending SOU.

Appreciation Awards

During the Guanajuato Nights dinner, the Amigo Club recognized outstanding supporters of sister-city links, including Dr. Susan Walsh, SOU provost; Denise Baxter, Ashland mural artist; Barry and Kathryn Thalden, mural sponsors; Daniel Barrera Vazquez, commander of the Heroic Volunteer Firefighter Corps of Guanajuato; Karen Burstein, Guanajuato City Council member; Jesus Antonio Borja Perez, Guanajuato director general of culture and education; and Loreta Rangel, Guanajuato mural artist.