



The Amigo Club of Ashland, Oregon, Inc.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

What is the Amigo Club?

We hope the enclosed information will acquaint you with the Amigo Club of Ashland, Oregon, Inc.

The club's Constitution states, "The objective of this nonprofit corporation shall be to actively promote the Sister City relationship between the City of Ashland ... and the City of Guanajuato ... by supporting, without limitation, personal, educational, cultural, civic, social, medical, dental, and other exchanges between the two cities."

Founded 53 years ago, the club has always played an important role in boosting Ashland's relationship with Guanajuato. Today we have close to 100 active members, including several who came to Ashland as Guanajuato exchange students and became permanent residents and others who attended the University of Guanajuato under the Amistad student exchange program. We invite all community members to join us.

There have been some 80 marriages between Ashlanders and Guanajuatenses, and many have settled in the Rogue Valley.

We thought you might be interested in the brief historical narrative about the club and the exchange program that follows:

The Amigo Club of Ashland, Inc. is the key support group that for 53 years has helped keep alive Ashland's enthusiasm for the Sister City relationship with Guanajuato.

It all started in the imagination of Graciela Magdalena Tapp, better known in Ashland and Guanajuato as "Señora Chela." She first visited Guanajuato in the 1950s and was charmed by the people and the beauty of the old silver mining town that has become one of Mexico's major cultural centers. UNESCO declared it a World Heritage Site in 1988.

Sra. Chela came to Ashland in 1966 as an associate professor of foreign languages and literature at Southern Oregon College (now Southern Oregon University). In 1968,

inspired by her original impression of Guanajuato, Sra. Chela took her first group of 40 students on a bus tour of Mexico during Christmas break. Sra. Chela continued leading annual student and general-public tours of Mexico for 30 years.

The similarities between the two cities, including universities, impressive mountain settings, rich mining and cultural legacies and top-notch theatrical performances, inspired her idea of seeking a Sister City alliance. Sister Cities International's charter states that "The mission of the Corporation is to promote peace through mutual respect, understanding and cooperation – one individual, one community at a time."

As Sra. Chela planted the seeds with the Guanajuato and Ashland municipalities that eventually joined the two cities in a formal relationship, she also convinced the University of Guanajuato and Southern Oregon College to consider a student exchange agreement that would become the Amistad, or friendship, Program. In 1969, the university sent its first exchange student to Ashland, David Guerra Carrillo, who studied at SOC for two years, returned to Guanajuato, and became the head of the school of chemistry at the University of Guanajuato. He also served as the first coordinator in Mexico of the Amistad exchange program.

Working mostly behind the scenes, Sra. Chela inspired hundreds of people, both in Ashland and in Guanajuato, to support Sister City and Amistad activities.

"Sra. Chela is the heart, the mind and the soul of the program," former Guanajuato State Gov. Juan Carlos Romero Hicks said in an interview. "She is truly multi-cultural ... I have never met a college professor who has changed so many people's lives."

In 2004, Sra. Chela, received the El Pípila [PEE-pee-lah] de Plata award, the city's highest honor, named after the Guanajuato hero of Father Miguel Hidalgo's independence insurgency of 1810. The award usually honors a Guanajuato citizen, but an exception was made for Sra. Chela. In 2011, Guanajuato dedicated an obelisk with a plaque honoring Sra. Chela for her constant contribution to Sister City ties.

Juan Carlos and his brother, Jose Luis, are among the hundreds of distinguished Guanajuato citizens who have received graduate degrees from SOC. Jose Luis, a former president and chief executive officer of the Mexican Bank for Foreign Trade – BANCOMEXT, has a master's degree in social sciences/economics from Southern Oregon.

Juan Carlos received two master's degrees from SOU, often attributing his successful career to the education he received there. He served as rector of the University of Guanajuato (1991-1999) and as governor of the State of Guanajuato (2000-2006), as a federal senator (2011-2017) and has been a member of the lower house of Congress since 2018.

Since its beginning 41 years ago, more than 750 students, American and Mexican, have participated in the Amistad exchange program. And hundreds of American and Mexican citizens of all ages have traveled between Ashland and Guanajuato, many on special trips led by the Amigo Club.

University of Guanajuato Rector Arturo Lara Lopez reported in 2006 that 253 individuals from Guanajuato, nearly all alumni of the University of Guanajuato, had pursued master studies at SOU, mostly in business and psychology, and to a lesser extent, chemistry and other disciplines. More than twice as many SOU students have studied in Guanajuato.

The two universities have ratified the Amistad Agreement several times and initiated a program that allows Mexican students at the University of Guanajuato to take classes in Guanajuato from SOU visiting professors and receive a master's degree in management from SOU.

During a visit to Guanajuato in May 2016, SOU President Dr. Roy Hirofumi Saigo and UG President Dr. Luis Felipe Guerrero Agripino sign a formal "memorandum of understanding" that renewed 47 years of "academic friendship," including exchanges of students and research and teaching staff, joint academic and scientific activities, and collaborative research projects.

The Amigo Club started out as a group of interested citizens who took students into their homes, making it possible for them to spend a year studying in Ashland. That has expanded to coordinating host families in Ashland for other Guanajuatenses on official visits.

Today, the Club's members promote people-to-people travel between the two cities, support the Amistad Program, house students, greet and host other visiting Guanajuato citizens, hold student receptions and an annual "Guanajuato Nights" dinner/auction fundraiser, and provide other support for the Sister City and Amistad programs. The club also serves as a communications hub for all sectors of Ashland society involved in the Sister City relationship through regular contacts and email exchanges, and as a clearing house for special events and contacts between Ashland and Guanajuato.

The Amigo Club has created a permanent endowed exchange student scholarship fund administered by the SOU Foundation. It has granted five scholarships since 2016.

The City of Ashland actively supports the program and has donated fire trucks, an ambulance and medical equipment to Guanajuato. The mayors of Ashland and Guanajuato have traveled to one another's cities on official and informal visits, especially during the Fourth of July celebration in Ashland and the Fiestas de San Juan and Presa de la Olla in June in Guanajuato. Each year, Ashland High School girls travel to Guanajuato to join the fiesta queen's court, and the queen, accompanied by Guanajuato city and university officials, comes to Ashland to ride in Ashland's Fourth of July Parade.

The Ashland Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club have been especially active in recent years. The Rotary Club raised has funded housing for Guanajuato's poor and the chamber held a symposium in 2009 on doing business in Mexico.

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AMIGO CLUB HISTORY

Abbreviated Chronology

- 1967 - Sra. Chela Tapp, an assistant professor of Spanish and French at Southern Oregon College, makes first contacts in Mexico leading to the establishment of a Sister City program between Ashland and Guanajuato and a student-exchange program between SOC and the University of Guanajuato.
- Nov. 12, 1968 – Ashland City Council instructs Mayor Richard Neill to invite Guanajuato to explore the possibility of a Sister City link to Ashland. A friendship committee was formed with Dr. Marvin Kocks as committee chairman.
- December/January 1968/69 -- Sra. Chela takes SOC students on a bus tour of Mexico during the Christmas holidays. These tours continue for nearly three decades. *Sra. Chela reports that Guanajuato Mayor Ignacio Reyes Rebana confirmed he would like to have Ashland as a Sister City.*
- April 1969 – Some 35 Mexicans, including Guanajuato city and university officials, attend a “Day in Guanajuato” fiesta and Fine Arts Festival on the SOC campus. *Ashland and Guanajuato officially declare themselves “Friendship Cities,”* which later leads to formal Sister City ties.
- July 1969 -- For the first time, the queen of Guanajuato’s Fiestas de San Juan y Presa de la Olla participates in Ashland’s Fourth of July Parade. Later that summer two Ashland High School girls take part in the “Guanajuato Days” festival in Mexico. *The annual visits continue to the present day.*
- December/January 1969/70 -- Sra. Chela takes students and members of the *newly formed Ashland-Guanajuato Amigo Club*, organized to carry on a “people-to-people” exchange between Ashland and Guanajuato, on a chartered bus trip to Mexico and Guanajuato.

- December 1970 – Ashland City Council officially designates a three-day “Guanajuato Amigo Days celebration. SOC President James K. Sours announces a student exchange with Guanajuato will get underway in 1971. *This was the beginning of the Amistad Program*, although the first exchange student from Guanajuato, David Guerra, enrolled at SOC for the 1969/70 and 1970/71 school years. The first formal exchange under the *Amistad* agreement between SOC and the University of Guanajuato included three Mexicans and five U.S. students who enrolled for the 1971/72 school year.
- February 1971 – Founders formally approve the first Amigo Club Constitution at the home of Ginny Cotton (much later, in 2009, a revised Constitution will be approved at a general membership meeting called by club president Betzabé “Mina” Turner).
- April 1999 – Ashland hosts Guanajuato visitors for a week-long 30th anniversary celebration of the ties between the two cities.
- June 2000 – Student exchange agreement signed in Ashland between Ashland High School and the University of Guanajuato Preparatory School.
- April 2009 – Ashland and Guanajuato celebrate 40th anniversary of their fraternal ties. Guanajuato representatives visit Ashland in April, and Ashlanders travel to Guanajuato in August. The Ashland Chamber of Commerce hosts a symposium on doing business in Mexico.
- September 16, 2009 (Mexican Independence Day) – Amigo Club members, meeting at the home of Leo and Marianne van Dijk, approve revised (updated) Constitution.
- March 2011 – City of Guanajuato dedicates an obelisk with a plaque honoring Sra. Chela for her constant contribution to Sister City ties.
- July 1, 2011 – Guanajuato photographer/poet Pedro Vázquez Nieto opens “Photos of Guanajuato, Mexico” exhibit at Ashland Public Library.
- April 2013 – The Amigo Club and combined Ashland Rotary clubs raise \$6,000 for purchasing surgical instruments for Dr. Miguel Covarrubias, founder of the Nuevo Amanecer organization in Guanajuato for the repair of children’s cleft palates.
- July 2013 - IRS recognizes the Amigo Club as a “public charity” and grants 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt status, retroactively to Dec. 5, 2011.
- November 2014 – Amigo Club seeks \$25,000 in donations for the creation of a permanent endowed exchange student scholarship fund administered by the SOU Foundation. Within

weeks, the fund had reached \$30,000, including matching funds from Faffie Siekman Romero of Guanajuato.

- March 2015 – An Ashland team visits Guanajuato for the first Sister City Little League Baseball Classic. The series continues today, with Ashland teams traveling to Guanajuato and Guanajuato teams to Ashland each year.
- July 2015 – The Ashland Daily Tidings publishes the first monthly “Entre Amigos” column featuring Sister City news. The column continues to the present-day.
- October 2015 – The Amigo Club grants Amistad student exchange scholarships to its first two recipients. By 2018, the club had granted five scholarships for students participating in the exchange program between the University of Guanajuato and Southern Oregon University.
- November 2015 – Amigo Club holds its first Guanajuato Nights dinner/auction to raise money for its endowed scholarship fund. Subsequent annual Guanajuato Nights dinners have helped increase the scholarship fund to more than \$150,000 by 2018.
- July 4, 2016 – Ashland inaugurates the giant “Las Calles de Guanajuato” mural on the wall of a building facing Ashland Creek on a Calle Guanajuato. Kathryn and Barry Thalden commissioned the mural painted by Guanajuato Artist Laura “Loreta” Rangel.
- May 2016 - Southern Oregon University President Dr. Roy Hirofumi Saigo and UG President Dr. Luis Felipe Guerrero Agripino sign a formal “memorandum of understanding” that renewed 47 years of “academic friendship,” including exchanges of students and research and teaching staff, joint academic and scientific activities, and collaborative research projects. The Amigo Club and the SOU Foundation sign agreement that creates the Amigo Club Endowed Scholarship. The first two scholarship recipients go to Guanajuato.
- May 2017 - Three Guanajuato “bomberos” joined some 40 other fire fighters in fire suppression training in the hills overlooking Ashland.
- May 2018 – Guanajuato inaugurates a 75-by-11-foot wall mural titled “Ashland – Where Culture Meets Nature,” near Paseo de Ashland at the main entrance to the city. The Thaldens Ashland artist Denise Baxter, who spent a month in Guanajuato.
- October 2017 – University of Guanajuato nursing students participate for the fourth year in the annual international student-exchange program between UG and the Oregon Health and Sciences University School of Nursing on the Southern Oregon University campus.
- April 2019 – A delegation of more than 50 Guanajuato citizens visits Ashland for six days to join the town’s celebration of the 50th anniversary of Sister City relations between the two cities.

- May 2019 – Some 90 Ashlanders travel to Guanajuato for six days of commemorations and festivities related to the 50th anniversary of Sister City connections.
- October 2019 – The Ashland Chamber of Commerce presents its prestigious “Citizen of the Year” award to the Amigo Club. The award is received by Amigo Club board members at the Chamber’s annual banquet by Amigo Club President Betzabe “Mina” Turner, Kernan Turner and Señora Chela Tapp-Kocks.
- 2020-2021 - COVID pandemic curtails joint activities in Ashland and Guanajuato.
- July 2022 – For the first time since 2019, A six-member delegation from Guanajuato participates in Ashland’s annual Fourth of July celebrations. The Amigo Club sponsors its ninth annual Spanish-language poetry recital, featuring club members, students, Guanajuato dignitaries in town for Fourth of July celebrations, and Hispanics from the Rogue Valley.
- July 2022 – The Amigo Club grants the 10th scholarship sponsored by its endowed scholarship Fund administered by the SOU Foundation.