

# Sister city firefighters come to Ashland to pick up ambulances

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Juan Eduardo Luna Lira, at left, and Juan Armando Alvarez-Villegas, right, pose for a photo at Fire Station 2 in Ashland with the crew on shift. Ashland Fire & Rescue is donating the two vehicles to the city of Guanajuato because of the sister sister partnership they share. Ashland.news photo by Holly Dillemoth

## Pair of Fire & Rescue vehicles had reached service life limit here, will have second life in Guanajuato

By Holly Dillemoth, Ashland.news

After serving their purpose to Ashland Fire & Rescue personnel and the surrounding community, two ambulances formerly owned by the city of Ashland are headed to Guanajuato, Mexico, thanks to a gesture of sister-city friendship and a brotherly labor of love.

Representatives of Ashland's sister city of Guanajuato made a visit to Southern Oregon Thursday to accept the contribution that speaks to the heart of the sister-city partnership.

Two volunteer firefighters from Guanajuato — Juan Eduardo Luna Lira and Juan Armando Alvarez-Villegas — attended a luncheon on Thursday in Ashland, visiting with Wildfire Division Chief Chris Chambers and other fire personnel, Mina and Kernan Turner of the Amigo Club,

and Chela Tapp-Kocks, known to many in the city of Guanajuato as “Señora Chela,” the founder of the sister-city relationship. They gathered at Station No. 2 on Ashland Street where Chambers formally transferred two Ashland ambulances into the care of Guanajuato’s volunteer fire department, known there as bomberos.

“Having been to Guanajuato, these go to good use there,” Chamber said, during brief remarks to fire personnel and Ashland’s Amigo Club members outside the station. “They keep these things running far longer than we will in the U.S.”



From left, Guanajuato volunteer firefighters Juan Eduardo Luna Lira and Juan Armando Alvarez-Villegas with Ashland Fire & Rescue Wildfire Division Chief Chris Chambers and Ashland Amigo Club members Chela Tapp-Kocks and Mina Turner. Ashland.news photo by Holly Dillemoth

The 2006 and 2008 ambulances have reached their mileage limit for Ashland’s use, but have enough life in them for use in Guanajuato, according to Chambers. One vehicle will go to the volunteer fire department, with the other will go to the city of Guanajuato for its use.

The vehicles will be replaced with two new models at the station, according to Chambers, who said more details will be released soon.

Betzabe “Mina” Turner, president of the Amigo Club of Ashland, translated remarks by Alvarez-Villegas, a veterinarian by trade but firefighter volunteer in Guanajuato. He has volunteered since his youth, as many do in Guanajuato.

“Today is a very important day for the Guanajuatenses and for the fire department,” Alvarez-Villegas said, as translated by Turner.

Alvarez-Villegas expressed happiness and gratitude for the contribution, and thanks to “Señora Chela” for her part in fostering the sister city relationship between Ashland and Guanajuato, which also shares a university exchange between Southern Oregon University and University of Guanajuato.

Via Señora Chela’s translation, Luna Lira told Ashland.news that the visit is his fifth to Ashland.

“It’s always a pleasure to visit the city of Ashland,” Luna Lira said, noting the “beautiful friendship between the sister cities.”

Luna Lira said youth, both girls and boys in Guanajuato, are able to serve as volunteer firefighters as young as 6 years old all the way up to adulthood. They can go on to attend a fire academy at 18 years of age.

Luna Lira and Alvarez-Villegas started volunteering as firefighters at 11 and 12 years old, before pursuing careers as an attorney and a veterinarian, respectively.

“In Guanajuato, we call them angels, because they’ve saved so many lives,” he said, via Senora Chela’s translation.

With narrow cobblestone streets in Guanajuato, it can be difficult for firefighters to navigate, according to Luna Lira, and a small ambulance can help be able to save lives.

Senora Chela, who is well known to those in Guanajuato’s higher education and civic community, added: “Their heart and soul is in it, they are angels and they are heroes.”

In Guanajuato, Alvarez-Villegas said, via translator, “There is a space for the city of Ashland and especially its people.”

Alvarez-Villegas also lauded the support of Chambers, who last visited Guanajuato for the 50th anniversary of the partnership.

“Our two bomberos, our two captains from Guanajuato are going to drive these two babies all the way down to the border these next few days, leaving early (Friday) morning,” Chambers said Thursday.

The journey will take several days, including a period of time that the ambulances may have to stay at the Mexico border.

“That just shows their dedication to come all the way here,” Chambers said on Thursday.

“We hope these serve you well,” he told them.

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