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Entre Amigos: Sister city club to hold annual Guanajuato Nights dinner and auction at SOU



Sean and Catherine Van Ausdall, center, meet Stefani “Fanny” Marlene Martinez Armendariz, left, and her daughter, Emma Navarro Martinez, in front of Guanajuato’s Teatro Juarez. Photo courtesy of Sean Van Ausdall

The sixth edition of the fundraiser event is back after a hiatus forced by the COVID pandemic

By Kernan Turner

The Ashland Amigo Club will offer the community its sixth annual Guanajuato Nights dinner and auction to raise funds for University of Guanajuato and Southern Oregon University exchange student scholarships.

“We’re back!” Amigo Club President Betzabé “Mina” Turner said, referring to four years of forced standby caused by the COVID pandemic. “We’re filled with enthusiasm and energy, hoping to host more than 100 guests and to receive generous donations.”

The fundraiser will be held from 6 to 9 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 2, in the Rogue River Room of the Stevenson Union building on the Southern Oregon University campus.

This year’s fundraiser has a special theme, “The Marvelous Mines of Guanajuato,” in recognition of the role mining has played in Guanajuato since the 18th century, when it became the world’s leading silver extraction center. Its mines continue producing gold and silver today.

“This year will feature the food — including famed Guanajuato “enchiladas mineras” (miners) — and music influenced by the mining traditions of our beautiful sister city,” said Jay Tapp, Amigo Club president-elect and chairman of the organizing committee. “We will also introduce our new ‘Chance Auction,’ featuring incredible prize packages. The Chance Auction format allows everyone to help raise funds in a relaxed and fun environment. Additionally, we will hold a traditional live auction for big-ticket items.”

The “enchilada minera” originated in colonial times. Its name came about because Guanajuato’s principal economic activity was mining, and the miners’ wives could prepare them from a delicious mix of nutritious, low-cost ingredients.

Tapp said Guanajuato Nights is open to the community and Amigo Club members. Dinner and Chance Auction tickets are available online at myevent.com/gtonights2023/tickets.

They also may be purchased at the door. For more Guanajuato Nights information, visit myevent.com/gtonights2023 or call 541-261-7116 after 5 p.m.

UNESCO declared the “Historic Town of Guanajuato and Adjacent Mines” a World Heritage Site in 1988, citing mining influences, including subterranean streets, deep mineshafts, and Baroque and neoclassical buildings built by wealthy miners. Among them are the churches of La Compañía and La Valenciana. UNESCO said they are “considered to be among the most beautiful examples of Baroque architecture in Central and South America.”

Proceeds benefit scholarship fund

Guanajuato Nights ticket and auction proceeds will go to the Amigo Club Endowed Scholarship Fund administered by the SOU Foundation.

Founded in 1969, the Amigo Club has supported Sister City relations between Ashland and Guanajuato for 54 years. In 2013, the IRS granted the club tax-exempt status, allowing it to accept tax-deductible donations.

Once it became tax exempt, the club held Guanajuato Nights fundraisers every year from 2015 through 2019. This year’s event will be the first since COVID restrictions ended. The annual gatherings have generated more than \$200,000 for the club’s endowed scholarship

fund. Part of that comes from generous matching contributions from Francis “Faffie” Siekman Romero, wife of Mexican federal representative Juan Carlos Romero Hicks, a former Guanajuato state governor and federal senator.

[SOU President Rick Bailey led a group to sister institution Guanajuato University last year to present SOU’s highest service award to Siekman and Romero Hicks](#), who, along with his brother, Jose Luis, are SOU Distinguished Alumni Award recipients, Juan Carlos in 1992 and Jose Luis in 2001. They earned master’s degrees through their studies at the university in Ashland.



At left, Sean Van Ausdall takes a break during Guanajuato festival, sitting on the steps of the Teatro Juarez. At right, military band members face a Cervantino Festival audience in Guanajuato. Photos courtesy of Sean Van Ausdall

Guanajuato visit

Sean and Catherine Van Ausdall of Ashland went to Guanajuato this month to attend the International Cervantino Festival, 16 days of performances by more than 2,000 artists from dozens of countries.

“Incredibly amazing,” Van Ausdall said upon their return to Ashland. The festival is named for 17th century writer Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, best known for his classic novel, “Don Quixote.”

They watched many events, including short Cervantes plays performed at night in the city's Plaza San Roque, a performance by Mexican soprano Olivia Gorra and the Guanajuato State Band, and Spanish classical guitarist Rafael Aguirre Minarro, who performed at a colorful former hacienda.

The Van Ausdalls were guests of Guanajuato Amigo Club President Ruben Rodriguez Nieto and his wife, Wendy. The Rodriguez family has visited Ashland frequently.

The Van Ausdalls brought back with them several donated live auction items for the Ashland Amigo Club's Dec. 2 Guanajuato Nights fundraiser at SOU. One offering is free lodging at a two-bedroom apartment overlooking the city, owned by Rodriguez Nieto. Another is a luxury apartment and meals at the Valadez Restaurant, courtesy of restaurateur and civic activist Karen Burstein Campos, a frequent traveler to Ashland.

Additionally, the auction will offer paintings by Loreta Rangel Villasenor, including acrylics, pastels, and prints. Ashlanders may be familiar with her mural "Las Calles de Guanajuato," on Calle Guanajuato behind the Ashland Plaza.

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