

ASHLAND NEWS

January 13, 2024

Entre Amigos: Sister City club fills the house again with fundraiser dinner



Amigo Club President-elect Jay Tapp auctions several vacation choices during the live gift-basket chance auction at the club's December fundraiser. Tapp assumed the club presidency Jan. 1, 2023. Jay Ach photo

A sold-out Guanajuato Nights event at SOU raises \$15,000 for university student exchanges

By Kernan Turner

The COVID virus took a big bite out of Amigo Club activities for three years, but the club's recent sold-out Guanajuato Nights gathering at Southern Oregon University confirmed Ashland's continued support of Sister City and people-to-people relations with Guanajuato, Mexico.

The annual dinner/fundraiser on Dec. 2, the sixth overall and first after a three-year forced suspension, grossed some \$15,000 in donations.



Amigo Club outgoing President Betzabé "Mina" Turner places chance-auction tickets in a gift basket container at the Guanajuato Nights fundraiser. Jay Ach photo

“It was an incredible evening that spotlighted why the sister-city relationship is so wonderful, and more importantly, we were able to honor the people who have dedicated so much of their time and resources to ensuring the success of our people-to-people program,” said Jay Tapp, chairman of the organizing committee. “The funds that we raised help ensure our continued support of the student exchanges between Southern Oregon University and the Universidad de Guanajuato.”

This year’s Guanajuato Nights introduced a “chance auction” of prize baskets of goods and services.

Bidders for each basket bought tickets and placed them in jars placed next to the prize basket descriptions. The more tickets an individual bought and put in a jar the greater the chance of being drawn as the winner.

Two high school exchange students from Guanajuato, Nicolas and Sebastian Rojas Romero, drew the winning tickets.

Amigo Club members had spent months preparing the prize baskets and seeking support from local businesses. Prizes included goods from quality chocolate makers, free hotel stays and restaurant gift cards.

A live auction sold vacation accommodation in a Monterey Bay cottage donated by Amigo Club members Josie Wilson and her husband, Michael Belsky, and multiple-night accommodations in Guanajuato, including a bed and breakfast owned by Guanajuato Amigo Club President Ruben Rodriguez and nights at the luxury Paseo de la Presa Hotel, each including gift-certificate dining donated by Karen Burstein’s popular Casa Valadez restaurant.



Guanajuato Nights attendees include, former Mayor John Stromberg, from left, former SOU President Roy Saigo and SOU associate professor Dennis Slattery. Jay Ach photo



René Leo E. Ordoñez hugs

Amigo Club exchange-student scholarship recipients from Guanajuato, Karen Lopez Villanueva and Joaquin Torres. Ordoñez coordinates the MBA program at SOU. Jay Ach photo

This year's presentation of Amigo Club Appreciation Awards to significant Sister City supporters highlighted the evening. Recipients were former Mayor John Stromberg; Sandra Slattery, Ashland Chamber of Commerce executive director for 38 years; Dennis Slattery, a veteran SOU professor and former councilman, who substituted for Mayor Stromberg during 50th anniversary Sister City celebrations in Guanajuato in 2019; Dr. Roy Hirofumi Saigo, former president of Southern Oregon University; and Berta Montalvo, a sister city supporter in Guanajuato.

The Amigo Club also presented recognition awards to outgoing Amigo Club President Betzabé "Mina" Turner and her husband, Kernan Turner, for 15 years of dedicated service to the club and its mission. Mina's extended presidency ended on Dec. 31. Tapp assumed the presidency on Jan. 1 for a two-year term of office.

The dinner/auction's theme this year was the "Marvelous Mines of Guanajuato (Las Maravillosas Minas de Guanajuato)." Mining dominates the history of Guanajuato and still contributes to the region's wealth, employment and culture.

Guanajuato's Valenciana Mine began exploiting silver 500 years ago and by the 18th century it was yielding 60% of world silver production. The mine is still operating today.

The dinner consisted of miner enchiladas (enchiladas mineras) filled with a mixture of spicy potatoes and carrots, which remain popular in Guanajuato today. Miners' wives were faced with providing nourishing meals on their husbands' meager earnings.

Dining table centerpieces at the fundraiser consisted of model mining lanterns and poinsettias, the red-leafed flowering plant indigenous to Mexico and Central America. Three guitarists played Mexican music in the background.

Guest speaker Larry Buchanan, an Ashland resident and world-renowned mining geologist who lived in Guanajuato for years, talked about the development and significance of Guanajuato's mines.

Buchanan and his wife, Karen Gans, coauthored a book titled "El Gift of El Tio," which tells the story of Buchanan's San Cristobal silver discovery in Bolivia and how the mine development affected the region's rural population.

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.