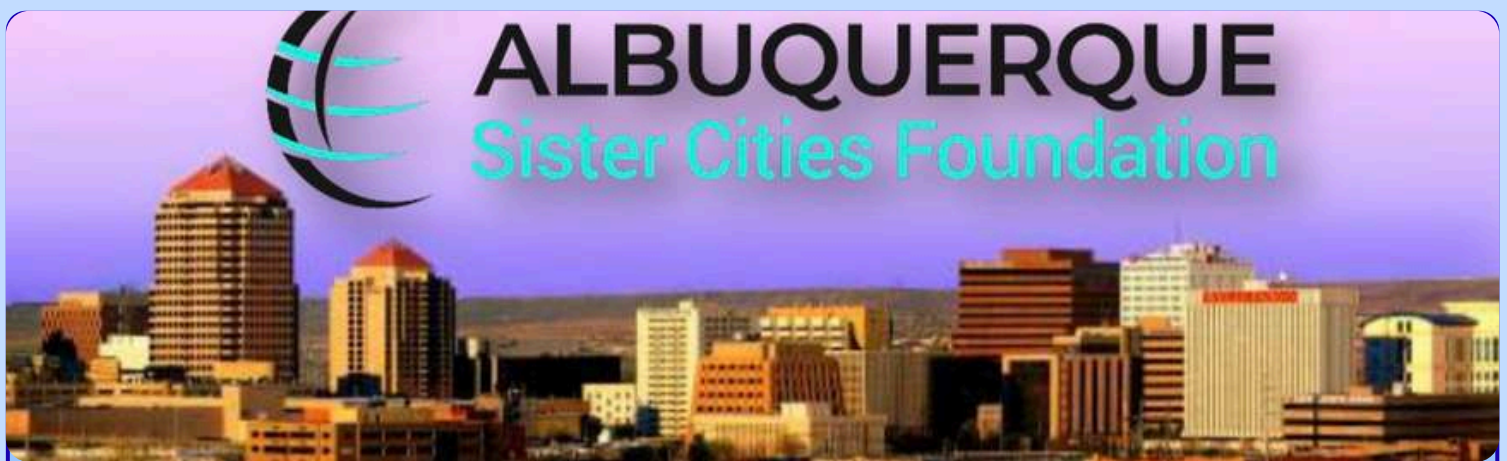




Summer

September 8th Chihuahua Delegation visiting Albuquerque City Officials, ASCF, and Mexico Consul

September 14th to 26th Lanzhou Delegation trip to Lanzhou, China

September 22nd to 25th ABQ official Delegation trip to Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua

September 25th-27th Spain reception with Special Guest TBD information with details will be emailed.

October 3rd to 11th ABQ International Balloon Fiesta
- TBD for possible ASCF visitors

November 11th-23rd Spain Delegation
If you are interested in being part of the Spain Delegation, see flyer on next page

January TBD ASCF International Tea. This is a public event.



New Banner with the country flags at the Sunport - Level 1

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*Single vs. double occupancy;
price includes round-trip airfare &
in-country travel.



ALBUQUERQUE
Sister Cities Foundation



ALBUQUERQUE
Sister Cities Foundation

Children's Day (Kodomo no Hi)

By Kazumi Kawakubo

Children's Day (Kodomo no Hi) is celebrated annually on May 5 in Japan. In recognition of this special holiday, the Albuquerque BioPark Botanic Garden hosts a variety of children-focused activities on Japanese Cultural demonstration on the first Saturday of May. This year's celebration was held on May 2.

For the first time, Ondine Montoya, Co-Chair of the Sasebo Sister City Committee, presented a Kimono Show with the assistance of Ikuko Begay, a longtime member of the ASCF and former Chair of the Sasebo Sister City Committee. It was a wonderful opportunity to introduce children and families to the beauty and cultural significance of traditional Japanese kimono. The presentation was a special addition to this year's Children's Day celebration and helped showcase an important aspect of Japanese culture.



**Kimono Presentation Featuring
the Assistance of Ikuko Begay**



Traditional Japanese Kimonos

Critical Mineral Exploration and Extraction

Turkmenistan Delegation

By Pam Feather

On May 3rd Global Ties ABQ and Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation held a reception at Alana McGrattan's home for the Turkmenistan Delegation. They were able to experience New Mexico cuisine and culture which included a tour of an organic farm. May 4th the Turkmenistan delegation met with Alan Armijo, International Liaison for Mayor Keller and Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation. Discussions were held regarding topics such as policies, technologies, innovations and developments on critical mineral exploration and extraction. The delegation was also interested in learning about the Albuquerque Sister Cities relationship with Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.



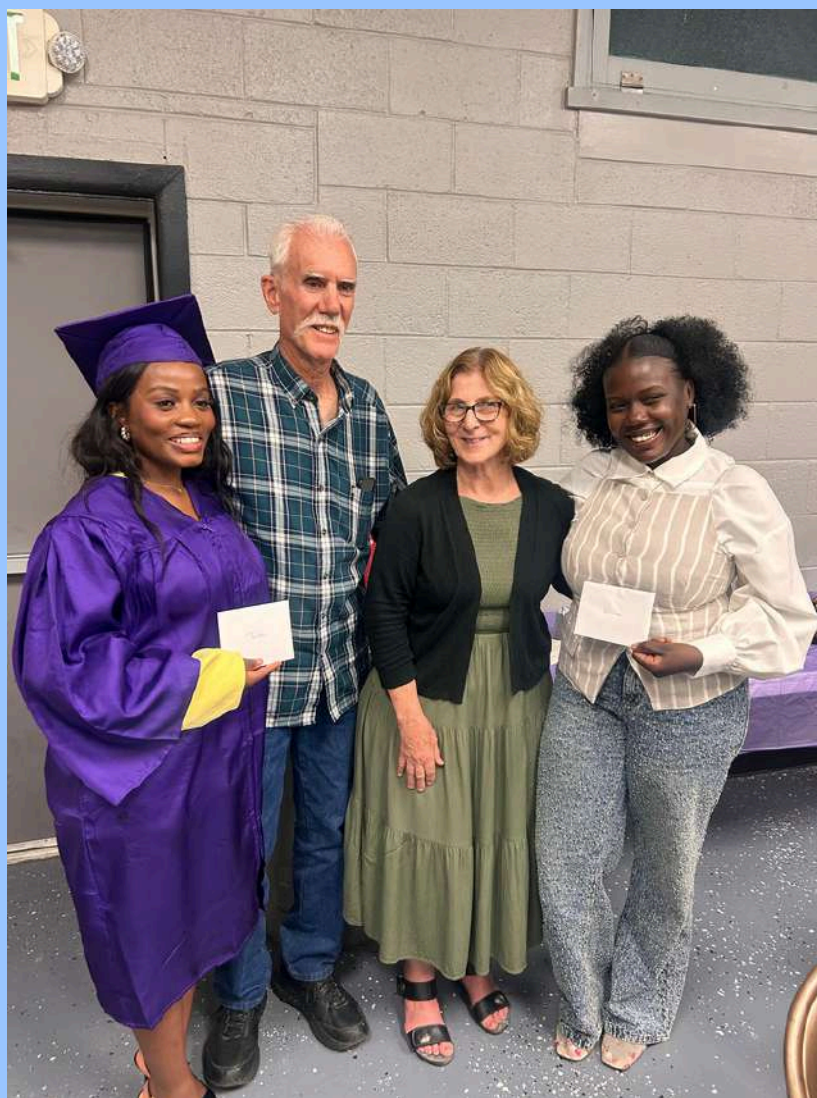
**Albuquerque Sister Cities Leadership, Alan Armijo International Liaison
for Mayor Keller and Turkmenistan Delegation**

Western New Mexico and New Mexico State University Graduations, Zambia By Pam Feather

On May 8 th in Silver City, New Mexico, Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation held a reception to celebrate Western New Mexico and New Mexico State University Graduations

For two Zambian students.

Natasha Chapuma graduated with a Chemistry Masters from New Mexico State University and Natasha Phiri graduated with a Liberal Arts and Science Associates from Western New Mexico University. Congratulations!



**Natasha Phiri and Natasha
Chapuma with John and Pam Feather**

From Jericho to Albuquerque Celebration of Life, Culture, and Resilience

By Dr. Lynne Newton

On May 28, Albuquerque celebrated the launch of its new Sister City relationship with Jericho, Palestine, marking the beginning of a meaningful partnership grounded in cultural exchange, education, good will, and international friendship.

The evening opened with welcoming remarks from Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller and First Lady Elizabeth Keller, who recognized the importance of fostering international relationships through citizen diplomacy and cultural understanding. Their remarks set the tone for an event that celebrated the power of people-to-people connections in building bridges across cultures. The program also featured greetings from the Mayor of Jericho, Palestine, Abdel Karim Ghrouf, which emphasized a shared commitment to strengthening ties between the two communities. As one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities, Jericho offers an extraordinary cultural and historical legacy spanning more than 10,000 years.

This new Friendship City relationship creates opportunities for collaboration through the arts, cultural exchange, education, heritage preservation, impacts of climate change and aridification, tourism, and community engagement.

The initiative is led by Chair Samia Assed. Assed, a respected Palestinian Muslim American community leader in Albuquerque, has dedicated decades to advancing intercultural dialogue, human rights, and civic engagement in New Mexico, the United States, Palestine, and beyond.

A grassroots feminist and mother of nine, she has advocated for oppressed, poor, and marginalized people locally, nationally, and internationally. She has also served as Chair and board member of the city of Albuquerque's Human Rights Board.

Assed's leadership has been instrumental in establishing this new partnership and building bridges between Albuquerque and Jericho.



**First Lady Elizabeth Keller, Mayor Keller,
Pam Feather Samia Assed and
Dr. Lynne Newton ASCF**

Continued..

From Jericho to Albuquerque Celebration of Life, Culture, and Resilience By Dr. Lynne Newton

Dr. Lynne Newton, co-Chair, is an anthropologist, archaeologist, and museum curator whose career has focused on the vast cultural heritage of the Middle East. Through her research, publications, and museum work, she has explored the ways in which trade and cultural heritage connect communities across borders through time. Her experience in international cultural collaboration in Arabia brings an important perspective to the Friendship City initiative.

Together, Assed and Newton are helping to establish a foundation for lasting relationships between Albuquerque and Jericho, relationships that celebrate cultural heritage, encourage educational and artistic exchange, and demonstrate the enduring value of citizen diplomacy.

This new relationship reflects the belief that lasting international partnerships are built through personal connections, mutual respect, and a shared appreciation for history, culture, and community.



Samia Assed showing Mayor Keller Kenafah
contest



Samia Assed and Dr. Lynne Newton ASCF
Chairs

Celebrating 30 Years of Friendship: Albuquerque–Lanzhou Sister City Delegation Visit by WenFang Zhang

From June 2–4, Albuquerque welcomed a delegation from Lanzhou City, China, for a productive visit celebrating 30 years of friendship and partnership between our two sister cities.

During their visit, the delegation met with representatives from the City of Albuquerque Mayor’s Office, Economic Development Department, and Arts & Culture Department to share Lanzhou’s economic development initiatives and highlight opportunities in culture and tourism.

The delegation also visited the UNM Health Sciences Center, where they explored opportunities for future collaboration in global healthcare and toured the new UNM Hospital. At the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, the Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation hosted a special reception commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Albuquerque–Lanzhou Sister City relationship. The celebration featured performances by a student choir and local cultural dancers, bringing together community members and guests in a spirit of friendship and cultural exchange.

On the final day, the delegation visited Central New Mexico Community College (CNM) to discuss potential educational exchanges and cooperation between CNM and Lanzhou Vocational College.

The visit was a meaningful and productive milestone in our 30-year partnership, strengthening connections between Albuquerque and Lanzhou while opening new opportunities for collaboration in economic development, healthcare, education, culture, and tourism.



ASCF with Lanzhou City’s Delegation

Continued..



A Special Cake Cutting Ceremony



**Monica Mitchell
EDDept Deputy
Director, Alan Armijo
International Liaison
for Mayor Keller
and Lanzhou's
Delegation**



**Delegation tour at the
UNM Health Science Center**



**Delegation tour at the UNM
Health Science Center**



**Reception Commemorating the 30th Anniversary
of the Albuquerque-Lanzhou Sister City Relationship**



**Alana McGrattan
Presenting To Delegation**

Continued..



Alan Armijo International Liaison for Mayor Keller gives a gift to Deputy Mayor Jin Fang of the Lanzhou's Delegation



Alan Armijo International Liaison for Mayor Keller is presented gift by Deputy Mayor Jin Fang of the Lanzhou's Delegation



Delegation Learning New Opportunities



Lanzhou City Delegation with City of Albuquerque Officials and ASCF Representatives

Continued..



**Lanzhou City Delegation Meeting
Albuquerque City Officials**



**Pam Feather Receiving
A Gift from Lanzhou Delegation**



Richard Buckler With A Lanzhou Delegate



**ASCF President Pam Feather Speaking to Lanzhou
Delegation**

Continued..



**UNM Health Science Center
Presentation**



**Delegation Tour at
Central New Mexico Community College
(CNM)**



Lanzhou City's Delegation with CNM Faculty

8th US-China Sister Cities Summit

By Wenfang Zhang

On June 5, Wenfang Zhang, Co-Chair of the Lanzhou Sister City Committee, represented the Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation at the 8th US-China Sister Cities Summit in San Francisco.

The conference brought together sister city leaders and representatives from across the United States and China to share successful partnerships, exchange ideas, and explore opportunities for future collaboration. The gathering provided a valuable opportunity to strengthen connections and promote continued friendship and cooperation between sister cities.

The opening session featured remarks by Daniel Lurie, Mayor of San Francisco; Yang Wanming, President of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC); Xie Feng, Chinese Ambassador to the United States; and Carol Robertson Lopez, Chair Emerita of Sister Cities International.

The conference focused on three key themes: Green Development and Urban Governance, Culture and Tourism, and Education and Youth.

During the Culture and Tourism session, Jing Fang, Vice Mayor of Lanzhou, delivered a presentation highlighting Lanzhou's rich cultural heritage, tourism resources, and commitment to expanding international exchanges.

The conference provided a valuable opportunity to strengthen sister city partnerships and explore future cooperation between communities in the United States and China.



Wenfang Zhang, Lanzhou, CoChair
With Other Summit Attendees



Wenfang Zhang, Lanzhou, CoChair, Carol Robertson Lopez,
Chair Emerita of Sister Cities International Presenting and
Summit Attendee

Continued...

8th US-China Sister Cities Summit By Wenfang Zhang



**Carol Robertson Lopez, Chair Emerita of
Sister Cities International Presenting**



**Wenfang Zhang, Lanzhou
CoChair, During the
Conference**

Presenter Addressing Attendees During the Summit

Continued..

8th US-China Sister Cities Summit

By Wenfang Zhang



**Wenfang Zhang, Co-Chair
Lanzhou, China
with Summit Attendees**



**Wenfang Zhang, Co-Chair
Lanzhou, China**



**Daniel Lurie Mayor of San
Francisco Presenting**



**Zhang Jianmin Consul General of the
People's Republic of China in San Francisco Presenting**

Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation Annual Meeting:

By Pam Feather

June 7, 2026, Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation's annual meeting was held at the Albuquerque Art Museum. Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation appreciates the ongoing partnership and support with Albuquerque Art and Culture Department.

Voting was held for Fiscal Year 2027 ASCF Executive Board positions. The results were:

Two Years term

President – Pam Feather

Interim 1VP – Robert Donnelly

One Year term

2nd VP – Alana McGrattan

3rd VP – Dave Bagley

Treasurer – Richard Buckler

Secretary – Mark Nelson

The Sister City Chairs provided an update on their current trips, projects, and exchanges. For everyone in attendance.

An overview of the Helmstedt International Youth Soccer Camp held July 24-31, 2026 was given and the introduction of the Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA Youth Soccer team who participated.

Thank you everyone who attended and the continued support for Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation.



Albuquerque Youth Selected for the Helmstedt International Youth Soccer Camp

Gansu International Fellowship Program

By Henry Hoffman

I am very grateful to the Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation for facilitating my participation in the 18th International Fellowship Program of Gansu Province. I am proud to have contributed to the Sister City relationship between Albuquerque and Gansu's capital, Lanzhou, as it celebrates its 30th year.

The program hosted by the very professional and friendly staff of the Gansu Foreign Affairs Office provided a 2.5-week introduction to the province's economy, history, and culture. Along with 17 other fellows representing 14 countries, I learned about this unique part of China through lectures, tours, field trips, panels, independent exploration, and casual conversations. While so much of what I discovered during the program was distinct and unfamiliar, the similarities between Albuquerque and Lanzhou are equally abundant and would be obvious to anyone who knows both cities.

Both of our cities lie along the banks of iconic rivers in the western, arid and mountainous regions of our respective countries. At "only" 4 million people, Lanzhou has a small population compared to the rest of China but like Albuquerque, punches well above its weight in terms of culture. Like Albuquerque, Lanzhou sits at a historic crossroads. Located between the Tibetan and Mongolian Plateaus, Gansu's geography contains a narrow, traversable passage known as the Hexi Corridor that ancient Silk Road merchants began to use more than 2,000 years ago. This trade enriched the province and inspired artistic achievements such as the bronze Flying Horse of Gansu, which is now the national symbol of tourism in China. We were fortunate to visit both the tomb near the city of Wuwei where the sculpture was discovered and its new home in the Gansu Provincial Museum.



**Group Photo of Participants in the
18th International Fellowship Program of Gansu Province**

Continued..

Gansu International Fellowship Program

By Henry Hoffman

This long history of commercial exchange and migration also gave rise to more than 40 vibrant and varied ethnic communities that call Gansu home. During our fellowship, we were introduced to some of these cultures through their rich traditions, including Tibetan circle dancing, high-pitched Hua'er folk songs, and delicious Dongxiang mutton. Lanzhou's most famous dish, spicy beef noodle soup, combines Hui Muslim flavors with broader Chinese noodle-making practices. The respect for tradition and celebration of diversity are deeply familiar to any New Mexican.

Gansu's arid climate also makes it an ideal place for renewable energy, particularly wind and solar, much like New Mexico. The province has invested heavily in new infrastructure in recent years, including airports, hospitals, and train stations. These investments reflect Gansu's efforts to prepare for the future. For visitors, Gansu is clean, safe, and easy to navigate.

Most importantly, I was delighted to learn that people in Lanzhou share Albuquerque's reputation for warmth and hospitality. Maybe it's the sunny weather or the slower pace compared to China's bigger cities, but for whatever reason, I found nearly everyone I encountered to be friendly and helpful, even when language barriers intervened. People were excited to meet Americans and proud to tell us that an American had designed Lanzhou's first permanent bridge or that Vice President Henry Wallace had donated melon seeds to Lanzhou in the 1940s. These were widely known and often repeated anecdotes, and they inspired me to learn more about the history of Albuquerque's Chinese community so that I can reciprocate their enthusiasm. I believe that greater cultural understanding between Americans and Chinese people is invaluable, and I hope more visits continue in both directions in the years to come.



Cultural Exchange Through Traditional foods

Continued..

Gansu International Fellowship Program

By Henry Hoffman



Lanzhou, China City



Fellowship Participants Share Their Creativity Through Art



Yellow River at Lanzhou, China

Continued..

Gansu International Fellowship Program

By Henry Hoffman



Mark Nelson and Henry Hoffman at Wuquan (five Springs) Mountain



"Flying Horse of Gansu" at the Gansu Provincial Museum in Lanzhou



Henry Hoffman at Labrang Monastery in Gannan Tibetan autonomous prefecture.

Gansu International Fellowship Program

By Mark Nelson

Thanks to the Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation (ASCF), I had the honor of traveling to Lanzhou, China to attend the 18th International Fellowship Program of Gansu Province. Lanzhou has been a sister city with Albuquerque for 30 years. Since 2018, a delegate from Albuquerque has attended this program to learn more about the culture, history, and economic development of Lanzhou's province. This year we were able to send two representatives for Albuquerque and New Mexico respectively to join 16 fellows from 13 nations. The program included classroom education on topics such as the history of the province and its place on the Silk Road, renewable energy in Gansu, the Belt and Road Initiative's impact on the province, traditional Chinese medicine, and broader themes in Chinese culture. It also included a myriad of in person visits and hands on cultural experiences.

The majority of the program took place in Lanzhou, the capital of the province. Our time in Lanzhou included visits to universities, museums, factories, markets, the provincial legislature, a major medical center, a special economic trade zone to learn about Gansu's approach to economic development and public planning, and cultural touchstones of the province. Lanzhou is a city of over 4 million people, and the only major Chinese city to be bisected by the Yellow River. It was also strategically located on the ancient Silk Road. Lanzhou is known in the Mandarin speaking world as the home of The Readers (Duzhe) magazine, as well as the birthplace of Lanzhou beef noodles, a globally famous dish. A highlight of the program was spending an evening over local cuisine and wines with Lanzhou city officials who work in regular coordination with ASCF. New friends were made with people who were already good friends to Albuquerque, thousands of miles away.



Group Photo of Participants in the
18th International Fellowship Program of Gansu Province

Continued..

Gansu International Fellowship Program

By Mark Nelson

The fellowship also afforded us travel of more than 700 miles within the province. Our visit took us to agricultural development projects, archaeological locations, and historic sites. We traveled to regions in the province with diverse cultural influences that are seen in the daily life of Lanzhou City and the larger province. These included the green hills of Linxia, home o the Hui. The Hui are a major Muslim ethnic group well known for unique cuisine and a distinct type of traditional singing called Hua'er. In Linxia City, I spoke to a distinguished man in his eighties who said I was the first American he had encountered. We also entered the mountains of Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture to visit Labrang Monastery, the largest Tibeta Buddhist monastery outside of Tibet. The monastery dates back to 1709. Later in Hezuo, the capital of Gannan, we danced to Tibetan folk songs in the rain with elder women from the community. I still wonder how I was lucky enough to experience these moments of connection across the globe.



Lanzhou fellowship recognition

Continued..

Gansu International Fellowship Program

By Mark Nelson

I left the fellowship having grown in my understanding of Chinese culture and the distinctives of life in Gansu province. I gained better insight into official Chinese government perspectives on domestic and global politics and economics. I saw more clearly what daily life in China is like for the average citizen of a major city. I also attempted to represent the best of New Mexican culture, including warmth, hospitality, and openness to others, to our friends in Lanzhou. We face a challenging era in the relationship between the United States and China. Security, trade, international law, and human rights concerns mean that there will continue to be serious friction in parts of the relationship. As a result, citizen diplomacy to build understanding and curiosity between our societies is more important now than ever before. I am forever thankful to ASCF for the opportunity to grow in my personal understanding of China, and for the opportunity to contribute to deeper understanding and connection between the peoples of Albuquerque and Lanzhou.



**Mark Nelson and Henry Hoffman Share a Dinner
with International Fellowship Participants**

Continued..

Gansu International Fellowship Program

By Mark Nelson



Group Visit to a Cultural and Historic Landmark



Mark Nelson in the City



Group tour Exploring the Area

Continued..

Gansu International Fellowship Program

By Mark Nelson



Mark Nelson at the City of Lanzhou



Mark Nelson and Henry Hoffman in front of Grass Saint Pavilion at the Lanzhou Stele Fores



Practicing calligraphy
with students at
Lanzhou Jiaotong University.

Helmstedt International Youth Soccer Camp July 24th-31st , 2026

By Brooke Meisner

On July 24, girls and boys from France, Germany, Ukraine, and the United States gathered in our sister city, Helmstedt, Germany, for a youth soccer camp. We couldn't always communicate with language, but we all shared a love of music, dancing, and swimming. Most importantly, we shared the common language of soccer (fußball, футбол, football), and for many of us, this trip became about much more than the sport. The amazing team of volunteers in Helmstedt set up large, ten person tents, to house the teams from each country at the Sportanlage Am Bötschenberg. Each tent was furnished with cots, sleeping bags, and inflatable pillows. We ate our meals in a large community tent, and we used the facilities of the sports complex where we were staying. As the only American girl, I stayed in the German tent.

I have just started to learn German in school, so I was apprehensive about being immersed in the language with people I didn't know. It turned out that I didn't have anything to worry about. They were such an accepting and kind group of girls, and they helped me to start to understand the main ideas of their conversations. During our town outings they showed me the local spots, and we had many conversations about the similarities and differences of our two countries.



Youth Soccer Camp Participants and Organizers

Continued..

Helmstedt International Youth Soccer Camp July 24-31, 2026

By Brooke Meisner

When it came to playing soccer, communicating without language was always a challenge. We had to translate drills and positions between German, English, French and Ukrainian. However, by the end we had figured out how to represent what we were trying to say in other ways. Between the night time pick up games and the organized tournaments, I got to see so many different playing styles and compete with many talented, young athletes. While being the only girl from America was difficult at times, it also allowed me to play for both the Germans and Ukrainians. I got to have a matching uniform that the other girls from Germany had brought, and they even got me a little New Mexican flag to wave with the German one.

Besides soccer, we also got to visit the cities of Helmstedt and Wolfsburg, on both guided tours and open exploration. We went to the Autostadt in Wolfsburg to tour the Volkswagen facilities, and we were able to tour the Marienborn Memorial to Divided Germany in Helmstedt. On one occasion, the German girls and I did the geocaching activity while they showed me all their favorite places, including an ice cream stop! Of course, there were also many trips to the local outdoor pool where everyone was able to swim and play volleyball together.



**Youth Soccer Players from Helmstedt,
Albuquerque, Kharkiv, and Vitre**

Continued..

Helmstedt International Youth Soccer Camp July 24-31, 2026

By Brooke Meisner

The American team made sure to bring a bit of New Mexican culture to Europe. After I reached out to the New Mexico United soccer team they donated 100 scarves that were flown across the ocean and handed out to everyone who participated in the camp. For that generosity, we are all extremely thankful! We were also able to share some green chili and extremely spicy hot sauces with all the players and volunteers on our last night there, and we got a lot of extremely funny reactions.

The best part of the camp though, was all the memories and international friendships that we made. Through the late night dart tournaments, endless card games, and afternoon free-time, every one of us found a home away from home. It was only a week, but the friendships we made will last so much longer than that. Yes, tears were shed, and yes we all still text each other, despite the huge time difference. On behalf of everyone who was able to participate in the camp, thank you. Thank you to all those who made it happen and allowed every one of us to develop person to person connection despite language, distance, and politics.



Albuquerque Youth Soccer Team



Kharkiv, Ukraine Youth Soccer Team

Continued..

“Helmstedt has never seen an event like this”

Promoting International Understanding Takes Center Stage at the Helmstedt Twinning Association’s (HPV) youth soccer camp on the Bötschenberg by Katja Weber-Diedrich

Anticipation is practically palpable on the Bötschenberg. At the Helmstedt Sports Club’s barbecue hut, the Helmstedt Town Twinning Association (HPV) is outlining the event starting next week—one that will involve numerous volunteers.

From July 24 to 31, the HPV is hosting an international youth soccer camp titled “Game On” featuring 65 young people aged 15 to 17 from Helmstedt’s partner cities—Albuquerque (USA) and Vitré (France)—as well as from three Ukrainian cities: Kherson, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhzhia. The Ukrainian organization “Children in War” is playing a key role; its name highlights the camp’s primary focus in Helmstedt. “Rooted in the spirit of reconciliation following the devastating World Wars, we feel deeply committed today to fostering European and international ideals—peace, grassroots understanding between peoples, and democracy—by organizing diverse person-to-person encounters, particularly for young people,” says Dr. Joachim Scherrieble.

In doing so, the HPV chairman touches upon the fundamental purpose of partnership associations:

to promote international understanding and live out peace through town twinning. The idea of hosting the 2026 international youth gathering in Helmstedt actually originated in the USA. Pam Feather, chair of the Albuquerque Sister Cities committee, wanted to bring together soccer-loving youths from her city with peers from Kharkiv, Albuquerque’s sister city since 2023. However, due to the geopolitical situation, such a meeting between the USA and Ukraine was not feasible, prompting her to suggest holding the event in Helmstedt instead. The City of Albuquerque is providing financial assistance to the HPV, as are several sponsors and other supporters.

Continued..

“Helmstedt has never seen an event like this”

**Promoting International Understanding Takes Center Stage at
the Helmstedt Twinning Association’s (HPV) youth soccer
camp on the Bötschenberg
by Katja Weber-Diedrich**

In addition to Helmstedter SV (providing its sports facilities) and restaurateur Markus Suchandt (making the club's hospitality area available to the HPV), these supporters include the City and District of Helmstedt, Avacon, Sport-Thieme, the Lions Club Helmstedt, and the Bürgerstiftung Ostfalen (Civic Foundation of Eastphalia). The District Youth Fire Brigade—highly experienced in setting up large-scale tent camps—is contributing the necessary equipment, ranging from tents to tableware. The camp itself was organized by city representatives Carsten Flohr, Monika Bartels-Röker, Susanne Otto, Harald Spitzer, Youth Liaison Daniela Meyer, Secretary Ferhat-Atilgan Kara, and Chairman Dr. Joachim Scherrieble. A large number of volunteers.

Supports the HPV board team, helping with setup, picking up the young people from the airport, preparing meals, and organizing specific program activities. The young people arrive in Germany on Friday, July 24. At Bötchenberg, there will be a barbecue and ice-breaker games in the evening. The soccer players who will be joined by local youths from Helmstedt will not only train at Bötchenberg, the new campus at the Julianum and use other sports facilities. They will also get to know the city, visit the outdoor pool complex, the Marienborn Memorial, and more. The soccer tournaments themselves will take place on Sunday morning, July 26, starting at 10:30 a.m. on the HSV pitch. The opening kick-off will be performed by Member of the European Parliament Lena Dupont and Helmstedt District Administrator Gerhard Radeck.

Please see German Article on Next page.

Continued..

„So ein Event hat Helmstedt noch nicht erlebt“

Auf dem Bötschenberg wird beim Jugend-Fußball-Camp des Helmstedter Partnerschaftsvereins Völkerverständigung groß geschrieben

von Katja Weber-Diedrich

Auf dem Bötschenberg ist die Vorfreude förmlich greifbar. An der Grillhütte des Helmstedter Sportvereins schildert der Helmstedter Verein für Städtepartnerschaften (HPV), was hier in der nächsten Woche beginnt und zahlreiche Ehrenamtliche einbinden wird.

Vom 24. bis zum 31. Juli veranstaltet der HPV unter dem Titel „Game On“ ein internationales Jugend-Fußball-Camp, an dem 65 Jugendliche zwischen 15 und 17 Jahren aus Helmstedts Partnerstädten Albuquerque (USA) und Vitry (Frankreich) sowie aus drei Orten der Ukraine - Cherson, Charkiw und Saporischja - teilnehmen.

Wesentlich mit eingebunden ist die ukrainische Organisation „Children in War“, deren Namen verdeutlicht, was der Hauptaspekt des Camps in Helmstedt sein soll: „Aus dem Versöhnungsgedanken nach den verheerenden zwei Weltkriegen kommend, fühlen wir uns heute zutiefst der Pflege des europäischen, internationalen Gedankens von Frieden, Völkerverständigung von unten und De-

mokratie durch die Organisation unterschiedlichster Begegnungen von Mensch zu Mensch - insbesondere Jugendliche - verpflichtet“, sagt Dr. Joachim Scherrieble. Der HPV-Vorsitzende spricht damit zugleich an, was der sinngebende Zweck von Partnerschaftsvereinen ist: Durch Städtepartnerschaften soll Völkerverständigung gefördert und Frieden gelebt werden. Die Idee, das internationale Jugendtreffen 2026 in Helmstedt zu veranstalten, stammt eigentlich aus den USA. Die Vorsitzende des Twin-Sister-Committee Albuquerque, Pam Feather, wollte fußballbegeisterte Jugendliche aus ihrer Stadt mit solchen aus Charkiw, das seit 2023 Partnerstadt von Albuquerque ist, zusammenbringen. Aufgrund der geopolitischen Lage ist eine solche Begegnung zwischen den USA und der Ukraine aber nicht möglich, weshalb sie anregte, das Treffen in Helmstedt zu veranstalten.

Die Stadt Albuquerque greift dem HPV finanziell unter die Arme, ebenso wie einige Sponsoren und weitere Unterstützende. Neben dem Helmstedter SV, der seine Sportstätte zur Verfügung stellt, und dem EQ-Gastwirt

Markus Suchandt, der dem HPV die Vereinsgaststätte überlässt, sind das die Stadt und der Landkreis Helmstedt, die Avacon, Sport-Thieme, der Lions Club Helmstedt sowie die Bürgerstiftung Ostfalen. Die mit großen Zeltlagern bestens vertraute Kreisjugendfeuerwehr steuert das passende Equipment bei, vom Zelt bis zum Geschirr.

Das Camp selbst vorbereitet haben die Städtebeauftragten Carsten Flohr, Monika Bartels-Röker, Susanne Otto, Harald Spitzer, die Jugendbeauftragte Daniela Meyer, der Schriftführer Ferhat-Atilgan Kara sowie der Vorsitzende Dr. Joachim Scherrieble. Eine große Anzahl Ehrenamtlicher ergänzt das HPV-Vorstandsteam, hilft beim Aufbau, beim Abholen der Jugendlichen vom Flughafen, beim Essen zubereiten sowie bei der Ausgestaltung der einzelnen Programmpunkte.

Am Freitag, 24. Juli, kommen die Jugendlichen in Deutschland an. Auf dem Bötschenberg wird abends gemeinsam gegrillt und Kennenlernspiele veranstaltet. In den Folgetagen sollen die Fußballerinnen und Fußballer, zu denen sich Helmstedter Jugendliche gesellen werden, nicht nur auf dem Bötschenberg sowie



Die Organisatoren des Helmstedter Partnerschaftsvereins - Dr. Joachim Scherrieble, Susanne Otto, Carsten Flohr, Monika Bartels-Röker und Harald Spitzer (von links, es fehlen Daniela Meyer und Ferhat-Atilgan Kara) - freuen sich schon auf die vielen neuen Freundschaften, die ab der nächsten Woche beim HSV auf dem Bötschenberg in Helmstedt geknüpft werden.

Foto: Katja Weber-Diedrich

auf dem neuen Campus am Julianum trainieren und die weiteren Sporteinrichtungen nutzen, sondern auch die Stadt kennenlernen, das Freibad sowie die Gedenkstätte Marienborn besuchen und einiges mehr. Die Fuß-

ballturniere selbst werden am Sonntagvormittag, 26. Juli, ab 10.30 Uhr auf dem HSV-Platz ausgetragen. Den Anstoß übernehmen die Europa-Abgeordnete Lena Dupont und Helmstedts Landrat Gerhard Radeck.



ALBUQUERQUE
Sister Cities Foundation

“Game on” in Helmstedt: A week as colorful as life itself. Thanks to the joint efforts of the partner cities, young people from Ukraine were also able to participate in the summer camp.

Music and swimming at the Birkerteich forest pool, German-German history, the Autostadt in Wolfsburg, and—of course—football, football, football: all of this was on the agenda this week for the international “Game On”; summer camp in Helmstedt (as previously reported).

What the Helmstedt Partnership Association (HPV)—together with sister cities Albuquerque and Vitré and the Ukrainian organization “Children in War” —organized here at a former Cold War dividing line is something unique and special: An international gathering of young people from France, the USA, and the war-torn Ukrainian cities of Kharkiv, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia—a week of community transcending borders.

“Really nice,” said participants speaking to the *Helmstedter Sonntag* on Wednesday evening at the Birkerteich pool—“chouette”, “klasno, simply super.

Their week in “pretty old Helmstedt” offered a bit of everything—weather-wise, ranging from torrential downpours to scorching heat, and emotionally, reflecting the ups and downs of life itself:

It was lively and fun, intense, deeply sad and melancholic; moments of amazement, moments of celebration, and moments of tears.

Two girls from Vitré—with bystanders nodding in agreement—shared how deeply they were moved by the sense of community with peers whose daily lives are defined by a devastating war.

But very quickly, said a participant from Albuquerque, USA, the initial awkwardness vanished; they celebrated peace without ignoring the war, became friends, ate together, watched videos, flirted, and played football—“just normal, just together” The thought of his new friends heading back to where bombs are falling makes him swallow hard. Volodymyr, a soccer coach from Kharkiv—who also works with children in his hometown and quickly became the cheerful heart of the camp in Helmstedt—is among those who enjoyed a brief respite this week, “a few days of vacation” from the war.

Continued..

“Game on” in Helmstedt: A week as colorful as life itself. Thanks to the joint efforts of the partner cities, young people from Ukraine were also able to participate in the summer camp.

On Wednesday at the outdoor pool—two days before returning to a reality defined by wailing sirens and drone attacks—he spontaneously “saves” the group photo with a diving leap, quickly arranges the participants in rows, and beams with laughter as he talks about his happy time in Helmstedt with the help of Diana, a Ukrainian-American interpreter.

Then, suddenly, his words take on a serious tone, and the meaning is clear even before Diana translates from Ukrainian into English: A few days without fear are a gift. And then there’s the matter of language. It’s actually beside the point when young people dance, listen to music, party, and hang out, says documentary filmmaker Felix, who had originally intended simply to complete his professional assignment and shoot a short film.

But he was so swept up by the atmosphere at the camp that he ended up being there almost every day. On the morning before their departure, the visitors from France and the USA have a lesson in East-West German history on the agenda at the Marienborn Memorial. “Surreal. Like a very old spy movie. But above all: oppressive” is how one French participant sums up her impressions. The guests from Ukraine spent that morning—their last before heading back—out in the woods.

What they wanted was a walk in nature. Free and at peace. Without fear. For the evening, they prepared a special farewell gift for their hosts from Helmstedt, the organizers from Kharkiv’s American sister city of Albuquerque, and all the new friends made during the “Game on” week:

As they perform a multilingual song, tears flow—tears of emotion and of the impending farewell. No one needs a translation; the message is universal. It was a great time for everyone. Please see next page for German article.

Continued..

„Game on“ in Helmstedt: Eine Woche, bunt wie das Leben

Durch das gemeinsame Engagement der Partnerstädte konnten auch Jugendliche aus der Ukraine am Sommercamp teilnehmen

von Kathrin Peter-Sohr

Musik und Schwimmen im Waldbad Birkerteich, deutsch-deutsche Geschichte, die Autostadt Wolfsburg und natürlich Fußball, Fußball, Fußball, das alles stand diese Woche auf dem Programm des internationalen Sommercamps „Game On“ in Helmstedt (wir berichteten). Es ist etwas Einzigartiges und Besonderes, was der Helmstedter Partnerschaftsverein (HPV) gemeinsam mit den Schwesternstädten Albuquerque und Vitré sowie der ukrainischen Organisation „Children in war“ hier, an der ehemaligen Schnittstelle des Kalten Krieges organisiert hat: Eine internationale Begegnung von jungen Menschen aus Frankreich, den USA und den vom Krieg schwer betroffenen ukrainischen Städten Charkiv, Cherson und Saporischja, eine Woche voller Gemeinschaft über Grenzen hinweg. „Really nice“, sei es gewesen, erzählten Teilnehmende im Gespräch mit dem HELMSTEDTER SONNTAG am Mittwochabend im Waldbad Birkerteich, „chouette“, „klasno“, einfach super. Ihre Woche in „pretty old Helm-

stedt“ hatte zwischen Platzregen und Gluthitze nicht nur wettermäßig alles zu bieten, was das Leben so mit sich bringt: Schwungvoll und lustig sei es gewesen, voller Intensität, tieftraurig und melancholisch, mal zum Staunen, mal zum Feiern und mal auch zum Weinen.

Besonders die Gemeinschaft mit Gleichaltrigen, deren Alltag von einem verheerenden Krieg geprägt ist, habe sie sehr berührt, erzählen zwei Mädchen aus Vitré, die Umstehenden nickten zustimmend.

Aber sehr schnell, sagt ein Teilnehmender aus dem amerikanischen Albuquerque, habe man die anfänglichen Berührungsängste vergessen, den Frieden gefeiert ohne den Krieg zu ignorieren, habe sich angefreundet, zusammen gegessen, Videos angeguckt, geflirtet, Fußball gespielt, „just normal, just together“, einfach ganz normal, einfach zusammen.

Die Vorstellung, dass seine neuen Freunde jetzt dahin zurückfahren, wo Bomben fallen, lässt ihn schlucken.

Fußballtrainer Volodymyr aus Charkiv, der auch in seiner Heimatstadt Kinder betreut und in Helmstedt schnell die fröhliche



Am Mittwochabend gab es für die Gäste aus der Ukraine, Vitré und Albuquerque und die Teilnehmenden aus Helmstedt Musik und Party im Waldbad Birkerteich. In der Nacht vor der Abreise am Freitag fiel das Schlafen im Camp am Bötschenberg dann komplett aus...
Foto: Kathrin Peter-Sohr

Seele des Camps geworden ist, gehört auch zu denen, die in dieser Woche eine kurze Auszeit, „ein paar Tage Ferien“ vom Krieg hatten.

Am Mittwoch im Freibad, zwei Tage bevor es dahin zurück geht, wo die Normalität in Sirenengeheul und Drohnenangriffen besteht, „rettet“ er spontan mit ei-

nem Hechtsprung das Gruppenfoto, „sortiert“ noch schnell die Reihen der Teilnehmenden, er lacht und strahlt, wenn er mithilfe der ukrainisch-amerikanischen Dolmetscherin Diana von seiner glücklichen Zeit in Helmstedt erzählt. Dann plötzlich klingen seine Worte ernst und der Sinn ist klar, noch bevor Diana aus dem Ukrainischen ins Englische übersetzt: Ein paar Tage ohne Angst sind ein Geschenk. Überhaupt, Sprache. Ist doch eigentlich nebensächlich, wenn junge Leute tanzen, Musik hören, feiern, und abhängen, sagt Dokumentarfilmer Felix, der eigentlich nur professionell seinen Auftrag erledigen und einen Kurzfilm drehen wollte. Dann hat ihn die Stimmung im Camp so mitgerissen, dass er schließlich fast jeden Tag dabei war. Am Morgen vor der Abreise steht für die Besuchenden aus Frankreich und den USA in der Gedenkstätte Marienborn noch

deutsch-deutsche Geschichte auf dem Programm. „Unwirklich. Wie ein sehr alter Agentenfilm. Aber vor allem: bedrückend“, fasst eine französische Teilnehmerin ihre Eindrücke zusammen. Die Gäste aus der Ukraine waren an diesem Vormittag, dem letzten, bevor es zurückgeht, im Wald unterwegs. Ihr Wunsch war ein Spaziergang in der Natur. Frei und in Frieden. Ohne Angst.

Am Abend haben sie noch ein besonderes Abschiedsgeschenk für die Gastgebenden aus Helmstedt, die Organisierenden aus Charkivs amerikanischer Partnerstadt Albuquerque und alle neu gewonnenen Freunde der „Game on“-Woche vorbereitet: Bei dem mehrsprachigen Singstück, das sie aufführen, fließen Tränen der Rührung und des bevorstehenden Abschieds. Eine Übersetzung braucht niemand, die Botschaft ist universell: „Es war eine tolle Zeit mit Euch“.



It's a Small World. And Now You Know Vova More than 6,000 miles apart, Albuquerque and Kharkiv are connected in more ways than meets the eye

by Genevieve Trainor

When the Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation (ASCF) began co-organizing a soccer camp to bring together youth players from Kharkiv, Albuquerque, Germany and France for the last week of July, it was on my mind that I should introduce my friend Vova Koliy to ASCF. It hit the back burner, and I didn't introduce them.

Vova is one of the first people I met in Kharkiv, when I first started volunteering in Ukraine in December 2022.

Vova was a volunteer with the Kharkiv-based nonprofit organization Unity and Strength. Unity and Strength was founded by a real estate agent, Nataliya Serhienko, who "adopted" Vova as a young adult from an orphanage in the Kharkiv region. After Russia's full-scale invasion started, Vova worked tirelessly and often seven days a week alongside Nataliya and other Unity and Strength volunteers to deliver aid to people in Kharkiv and front-line communities in the region, often risking his life to do so by crossing destroyed bridges under shelling, including on foot. He became something of a legend and was featured in multiple international stories and a book by my friend who introduced me to Ukraine and Unity and Strength.



Vova and I meet at the Kofein coffee shop in Kharkiv, Ukraine in March 2024.

Continued..

It's a Small World. And Now You Know Vova More than 6,000 miles apart, Albuquerque and Kharkiv are connected in more ways than meets the eye

by Genevieve Trainor

I stayed at Nataliya's house with Vova and other volunteers and got to know him well. He would wake up early and make everyone coffee, even though he himself did not drink it (only Coke). He would walk with me to the store when GPS wasn't working to make sure I didn't get lost (the Ukrainian Army scrambles GPS when there are incoming drones), and he very patiently showed me how to prepare aid bags and helped me integrate into the aid deliveries.

Most importantly, he showed me kindness and welcomed me into his world with Unity and Strength.

His life hasn't been easy. He was born with cerebral palsy, and his mother was told he would not live. Growing up in an orphanage in Shevchenkove, he started playing soccer and never stopped.

Living in Kharkiv with Nataliya, along with his aid work, he coached youth soccer and organized trips abroad for the kids. When the fields in Kharkiv needed new nets or repairs, often due to shelling, Vova secured funding. When the kids needed cleats and gear, he made it happen.



Vova delivers humanitarian aid with Kharkiv-based nonprofit Unity and Strength in the Kharkiv region in 2022. Credit: Marcin Banasiak.

Continued..

It's a Small World. And Now You Know Vova More than 6,000 miles apart, Albuquerque and Kharkiv are connected in more ways than meets the eye

by Genevieve Trainor

Fast-forward to now: I work with the Albuquerque-Kharkiv Sister Cities International Partnership on partnership development and media initiatives, but I wasn't working on the soccer camp. As I was looking at pictures from the camp, there was Vova and his youth soccer players from Kharkiv, alongside ASCF leadership. I never introduced them. They met anyway, more than 6,000 miles apart.



Vova coaches youth soccer players from Kharkiv, Ukraine during the Kharkiv and International Youth Soccer Camp with participants from Kharkiv, Albuquerque, Germany and France in Helmstedt, Germany in July 2026. Courtesy of Vova Koliy.



Vova coaches youth soccer players from Kharkiv, Ukraine during the Kharkiv and International Youth Soccer Camp with participants from Kharkiv, Albuquerque, Germany and France in Helmstedt, Germany in July 2026. Courtesy of Vova Koliy.



Pam Feather, Vova, Diana Horak

Reflections on the 70th Anniversary of Sister Cities International (from 1956 and counting):

By Richard Buckler

From July 22 – 25 over 250 delegates—Ambassadors, Mayors, Political and Civic Leaders, State Department Officials, Citizen Diplomats, and 5 representatives from your Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation (ASCF)—attended Sister Cities International’s 70th Anniversary Homecoming Summit in Washington D.C. ASCF helped send 5 representatives—Richard Buckler, Treasurer and SCI’s State Rep; Samia Assed, Chair for our Jericho, Palestine Committee; Lynne Newton, Co-Chair for Jericho; Miguel Sabol, Co-Chair for Albuquerque, Spain; and Andrew Leverett, Chair for Rehovot, Israel. Hotel rooms were shared where appropriate, and a stipend given, which helped alleviate the overall cost for your Albuquerque delegates.

Now, think about it for a moment: 70 years ago, President Eisenhower declared that the most worthwhile purpose there is in the world today, is to pursue peace. He believed: “...all people want peace,” and encouraged generations to come that “...As you start this work...you will understand that this is something that lies very close to the hearts of every man, woman, and child in America—and indeed...the world.” This vision has been at the heart of ASCF since its founding now some 60 years ago, and the diversity we have in our growing number of sister cities (13 at last count) certainly shows a special community commitment.

But, back to the Conference:

Day 1 featured an Africa Region Forum held at George Washington University’s Elliott School of International Affairs. As the SCI Country Representative for Zambia, I was asked to open the afternoon by showcasing how Los Angeles formed the first ever sister city relationship between the continent of Africa and the United States. Lusaka, Zambia was their choice, and Albuquerque continues to be privileged to share this same sister city relationship, having officially joined with Lusaka in 2014.



Richard Buckler, Carrie Tirrell (Richard's Niece), Sheri Capehart (Chairperson of SCI Board)

Continued..

Reflections on the 70 th Anniversary of Sister Cities International (from 1956 and counting):

By Richard Buckler

After my brief opening, two planned panels were featured. The first focused on “Economic Bridges,” and the second on “Sports, Culture, and Educational Bridges.” Los Angeles fit right in as an example of such sports diplomacy, featuring the Olympics in 1984 and upcoming in 2028. Participants were able to attend a third impromptu session on “Port Cities,” which of course included representatives from both the east and west coast of the United States, as well as their partner port cities throughout the world.

On Day 2 conference participants were treated to special briefings by the U.S. State Department, focused on East Asia and the Pacific, South and Central Asia, and Europe and Eurasia. The traditional Parade of Nations kicked off the late morning keynote speaker, none other than the Vice President of Ghana, Her Excellency Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang. Two panels were featured in the afternoon. The first on Sports Diplomacy given by Rob Placek, Senior Advisor for Sports Diplomacy at the U.S. Department of State. With the recent FIFA World Cup hosted primarily by the United States, discussions centered on how to strengthen our sister city connections,

especially as the Los Angeles Olympics takes place in the Summer of 2028. One of the highlights of the Conference was Day 2’s evening event: the Embassy Welcome Reception at the Japanese Ambassador’s Residence. Having had a major role in staffing the U.S. Pavillion at the Osaka World Expo for six months in 2025, Sister Cities International (SCI) thanked the Japanese Government for the opportunity to experience a first-class World Trade Expo. Great speeches, Japanese cuisine, and opportunities to enjoy all the special ambience made for a great evening. Having a glass or two of Saki, while making new friends ended a great Day 2.



**Ricki Garrett welcoming delegates to
Africa Region Summit at George
Washington University**

Continued..

Reflections on the 70 th Anniversary of Sister Cities International (from 1956 and counting):

By Richard Buckler

Day 3 saw the Conference move over to the Organization of American States, a venue across from the White House. Assistant Secretary Cate Dillon of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs opened our day as the featured speaker, welcoming us to the Washington D.C. area. At lunch Her Excellency Ambassador Laura Gil, Assistant Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS) shared her perspective on transparency, engagement with civil society, the defense of human rights, gender equality, and institutional modernization. With a wealth of knowledge, Ambassador Gil also noted that she was the first woman to hold the "Ambassador" position at the OAS.

Later that afternoon the 2026 YAAS Winners from across the world joined us virtually on large screens throughout the venue.

YAAS stands for Young Artists and Authors Showcase, a competition each spring for our 13 – 18-year-old students, in particular. We were certainly inspired by all the creativity exhibited by the young people from our Member Cities in the U.S., as well as their Sister Cities throughout the world. [Special note: the theme for next year is already out--"A Tapestry of Cultures and the Threads that Connect Us." SCI is already accepting Submissions: September 1, 2026 to April 1, 2027]



Bob Herring of Cincinnati and Richard Buckler taking picture together of original award plate 2026

Continued..

Reflections on the 70th Anniversary of Sister Cities International (from 1956 and counting):

By Richard Buckler

The premier event for Day 3 was the Evening Gala. Our speaker was His Excellency Ambassador Albert Ramdin, Secretary General of the OAS. All of us from Albuquerque got to sit together. We were joined at our table by long-time friends from Santa Fe: Peter Ives, SCI Board Member and SCI Treasurer; and Carol Robertson Lopez, SCI Board Chair Emerita, and SCI Country Rep for China, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. Then, it happened! Albuquerque received the 2026 prestigious award for large cities with a population over 300,000 for Innovation in Humanitarian Assistance. The award was given for the Team Effort during 2025 for all the activities sponsored by your Kharkiv Committee, the City of Albuquerque, the Ukrainian Americans of New Mexico, the Cincinnati-Kharkiv Sister City Partnership, and other “Friends of Kharkiv.” Congratulations Albuquerque! What a way to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of President Eisenhower, but also reminding us that the work is not yet done until there is peace in all parts of the world.



**Part of Albuquerque Group receiving Award
with Chairperson of the Board Sheri Capehart**

Continued..



Richard, Niece Carrie,
Carol Robinson
Lopez at Awards night



VP of Ghana, Her Excellency Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang

Washington DC Sister Cities International 70th Homecoming

By Miguel Sabol

I had a wonderful time learning more about the mission, history, and the vast network that comprises Sister Cities International in Washington, D.C. I experienced firsthand that Sister Cities is more than just the relationships our city has with like-minded cities. We are part of a larger movement and an important network of citizen diplomats striving to share and connect with the world.

Over and over, I listened to professional diplomats, ambassadors, and international leaders highlight that it was through our citizen to citizen outreach that real change and diplomacy occurs. They reminded us that while they are focusing on policies and macro-level relationships, the micro-level relationships are where cultural exchange and understanding occurs and blossoms into something beautiful between peoples from different countries.

My favorite part of the conference was without a doubt getting to meet and have conversations with members of Sister Cities organizations throughout the country. As a newer member of the community, I enjoyed hearing about how different organizations are run and what initiatives different cities have with their sister cities. I was able to learn a lot from these conversations, and they gave me a lot of energy and excitement to continue working on developing Albuquerque's relationships and initiatives.



**Albuquerque team receiving the 2026 prestigious
award for large cities with a population over 300,000 for
Innovation in Humanitarian Assistance**

Washington DC Sister Cities International 70th Homecoming

By Andrew Tafoya Leverett

A celebration to remember. This trip to Washington DC was quite an experience and a pleasure for me to participate. I was able to take part in many events and attend several panel discussions. I was honored to be recognized as a flag bearer during the event, representing Israel. Likewise, I was honored to host as a guest speaker for the Mayoral Panel Discussion: Mayor Haim Bibas of Modiin-Maccabim-Reut, Israel. The highlights for me, were the conversations and the connections that I made during this trip. I saw some familiar faces, and I met some new people, but all the same, my zest for farthing the Sister City connections has been rejuvenated. Seeing the International level on display is quite inspiring, and I must say that the event was well planned, and we were delighted to visit several memorable locations, including the Organization of American States, George Washington University, The Japanese Ambassador's Residence.

Going forward, I intend to involve myself more on behalf of Sister Cities, I wish to implement some new initiatives based upon my take aways from this conference such as a Spogomi fest in Albuquerque, and general best practices to support my community. I have already begun some follow up discussions with friends and acquaintances after this event, and likewise on a local level, I am striving to bring more New Mexican cities

into the fold. Taking a recommendation directly from the International team, advocating such initiatives as 500 in 5, 7 for 70, and striving to connect Japanese a African cities with American cities. I'm thankful that I was able to participate in this event, and I look forward to the pathahead.

-Andrew Tafoya Leverett



Dinner at the 70th Anniversary

Washington DC Sister Cities International 70th Homecoming

By Dr. Lynne Newton

In July, I had the wonderful opportunity to attend the 70th Annual Sister Cities International Conference in Washington, D.C. The conference was a great reminder of the power of citizen diplomacy and the importance of building relationships, sharing ideas, and creating connections that reach far beyond our own communities. I especially enjoyed networking with Sister Cities representatives from across the country and around the world, exchanging stories and learning about the many ways local partnerships can make a global impact. One of the highlights was helping celebrate Albuquerque's sister city relationship with Kharkiv, Ukraine, as ABQ-Kharkiv received a well-deserved award during the conference dinner. It was an inspiring evening and a wonderful celebration of the relationships that make Sister Cities so meaningful.



**Samia Assed and Dr. Lynne Newton
with Japanese Ambassador**



**Samia Assed Jericho Chair with
African Delegates**



Vice-President of Ghana



**Spanish Ambassador and
Samia Assed Jercho Chair**

Obon Japanese Summer Festival

By Kazumi Kawakubo

The 2026 Obon Japanese Summer Festival was held at the Albuquerque BioPark Botanic Garden on August 14 from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. This year's event was especially successful, with all 1,000 tickets sold in advance as the Albuquerque BioPark anticipated a larger turnout.

The Sasebo Sister City Committee hosted a booth staffed by more than 20 dedicated volunteers. The committee has initiated and supported this event in partnership with Albuquerque BioPark staff since the opening of the Japanese Sasebo Garden in 2011, which was established in honor of Sasebo City as Albuquerque's sister city.

This year's celebration was particularly meaningful as Albuquerque and Sasebo marked the 60th anniversary of their sister-city relationship. The Consulate-General of Japan in Denver, along with the Consul for Public Relations and Cultural Affairs, also joined us in commemorating this significant milestone.

Kazumi Kawakubo

Chair, Sasebo Sister City Committee



Photo with Consul-General Okajima,
Alan Armijo International Liaison for Mayor Keller,
Richard Buckler ASCF, Kazumi Kawakubo ASCF, Consul for Public Relations and Cultural
Affairs Kanno, David Begay ASCF

Continued..



Kazumi Kawakubo and Volunteers



Photo of Sasebo Sister City Booth



2026 Obon Matsuri

35th Anniversary Commemoration of Ukrainian Independence

By George Klapischak

Mayor Keller gave opening remarks for the 35th anniversary commemoration of Ukrainian Independence held at the Albuquerque Museum. He shared his ongoing appreciation for the Ukrainian community in New Mexico.

ASCF President Pam Feather presented Mayor Tim Keller with the Humanitarian Award granted to the Albuquerque Sister Cities Foundation by Sister Cities International at its 70th year conference celebration. Sharing the stage were ASCF special envoy Diana Horak with some of the young sportsmen who attended the ASCF sponsored Helmstedt Germany International Youth Soccer Camp in late July. A special commemorative sports jersey from the camp was also presented to Mayor Keller and a Kharkiv team signed Ukrainian flag. Daria Derebera, UANM representative and Jim Bowers, a generous donor were each honored with a Kharkiv team signed Ukrainian flag by ASCF President Pam Feather. Followed by short film clips of the soccer camp. ASCF year in review, a report by special envoy Genevieve Trainor about the upcoming NMPBS iColores series being filmed in Ukraine. The attendees enjoyed several musical and dance performances and a well laid out table of various tasty foods.

ASCF year in review, a report by special envoy Genevieve Trainor about the upcoming NMPBS iColores series being filmed in Ukraine. The attendees enjoyed several musical and dance performances and a well laid out table of various tasty foods.



Orion Gonzales giving Mayor Keller a
"Game On" Soccer Jersey



Mayor Keller Receiving Signed Flag



**Mayor Keller and Alan Armijo,
International Liaison for Mayor Keller
receiving SCI humanitarian award**



Ukrainian Performers



**Daria Derebera, UANM representative and Jim
Bowers receiving a signed Ukrainian Flag**



**Mayor Keller Shaking Hands
with Albuquerque Soccer Team**