

Sister Cities Launch ‘Civil Courage’ Essay Contest

High School Writing Competition Honors WWII-Era Dutch Pastor Who Saved Jews

Palo Alto, Calif. and **Enschede, the Netherlands** – Sister cities since 1980, Palo Alto and Enschede have joined forces to launch the **Leendert Overduin Civil Courage Essay Contest**, open to high school students in Palo Alto and neighboring cities. The cross-border contest, organized by non-profit Neighbors Abroad, offers cash prizes and an opportunity for the winners to visit Enschede as Sister City ambassadors.

The story of Pastor Leendert Overduin’s life-risking humanitarian efforts during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands is starting to be unearthed in his native Enschede, a town of 160,000 near the German border. Overduin’s life is the subject of the 2020 Dutch documentary “The Conscience of a City,” produced by Enschede resident Willy Berends and [available on YouTube](#).

Outside Enschede, however, the Protestant pastor’s quiet legacy is barely a historical footnote. “This innovative contest aims to change that,” said Neighbors Abroad President Bob Wenzlau.

The contest also celebrates a profound and very personal connection between one local man and Pastor Overduin. Uri Elzur, a San Jose resident, is the son of one of the children Overduin saved. A board member at Palo Alto’s Congregation Kol Emeth, Elzur partnered with Neighbors Abroad, Palo Alto’s sister city organization, to establish the essay contest.

As a member of the Dutch resistance, Overduin saved hundreds of Jewish children, including Elzur’s mother, through an underground network of safehouses in the Dutch countryside. After the war, he provided aid to the orphaned children of Dutch collaborators. His dramatic story—multiple arrests by the Nazis, hundreds of lives saved—invites comparisons to Germany’s Oskar Schindler, the subject of Steven Spielberg’s 1993 film.

“It astounds me that Pastor Overduin, to whom I owe my very existence, is virtually unknown,” Elzur said. “Pastor Overduin’s heroism, his values and actions toward all people, serve as a moral compass for our generation. This essay contest addresses what it means to demonstrate courage and humanitarianism without the expectation of recognition, certainly a compelling topic in the social media age.”

Palo Alto Mayor Patrick Burt said: “The City of Palo Alto is honored to partner with Enschede in this essay contest as a means for current generations to recognize how the courage of an individual can have a lasting impact on countless lives while inspiring us to love and care for each other. It offers our young citizens an opportunity to reflect on Pastor Overduin’s legacy and to reflect on how his actions relate directly to today’s important need to live up to our equity and social justice values.”

About the Leendert Overduin Civil Courage Essay Contest

Who can participate? All current high school students who live or attend school in Palo Alto, East Palo Alto, Mountain View, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Atherton and Menlo Park and Redwood City.

Essay prompt: Pastor Overduin demonstrated great civil courage and humanitarianism without any expectation of recognition. How is selfless devotion to others evidenced in the modern era? In the age

of social media, is it harder to do good for the sake of good? Does that matter, as long as good works are manifested? Students are invited to address any or all of these questions or to pursue their own take on Pastor Overduin's legacy of civil courage and how his example resonates today. Contest entrants are encouraged to watch ["The Conscience of a City"](#) for background on Pastor Overduin.

Length of essay: 500-800 words

Deadline and submission information: Entries must be received by midnight on May 1, 2022. Essays should be sent to: overduin_prize@neighborsabroad.org. Students are asked to include their home address, email address, phone number, the name of their high school, their grade, age and contact information for their parents or guardians.

Prizes and selection of winner: A jury will select three winners from each of the Palo Alto and Bloomington areas. First place: \$500; Second place: \$300; Third place: \$100. The top two contest winners from each participating city will be invited to visit Enschede as Sister and Sibling City ambassadors and will meet contest winners from participating international cities. All trip details, including the dates of travel, will be determined at the sole discretion of Enschede officials. Winners will be announced in the last week of May 2022.

About Neighbors Abroad: Since 1963, Neighbors Abroad has been charged by the City of Palo Alto with promoting engagement between Palo Alto and its Sister Cities. Focusing on cultural exchanges, enrichment, sustainability and commerce, Neighbors Abroad today partners with eight international sister cities: Albi, France; Enschede, Netherlands; Heidelberg, Germany; Linköping, Sweden; Oaxaca, Mexico; Palo, Philippines; Tsuchiura, Japan; and Yangpu District, Shanghai China. In November 2021, Palo Alto and Neighbors Abroad launched a first-of-its-kind Sibling Sister relationship with Bloomington, Indiana.

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