



The Dispatch

August 2021



Welcome to the Dispatch! Enjoy this update from our Sister Cities. In this Dispatch, we share news of a major gift supporting Tsuchiura, a project to capture rainwater in Oaxaca as we support children's health, planning future projects with art, and ask for your thoughts about a Sister City in the United States.

Asia Sister City Updates

A Major Gift for the Tsuchiura Student Exchange

Keiko Nakajima, a retired Palo Alto Unified School District Japanese teacher and her husband, Yasuo Kishimoto, donated \$100,000 to Neighbors Abroad to fund the Palo Alto-Tsuchiura student exchange program that was founded over 20 years ago to promote international and intercultural understanding amongst our youth.



In 2019, the City of Tsuchiura invited representatives from Palo Alto to Japan to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Sister City relationship. From top left: Roger Ashley (Neighbors Abroad member), Eric Filseth (Palo Alto Mayor at the time of the photo), Jennifer Buenrostro (Neighbors Abroad VP of Tsuchiura), Nancy Mott (Neighbors Abroad member), Len Mott (Neighbors Abroad member); from

Keiko Nakajima taught Japanese at PAUSD from 2001-2014. Prior to coming to PAUSD, she earned her teaching credential from San Francisco State in 1995 and taught Japanese at Crocker Middle School in Hillsborough for six (6) years. They now reside in Tokyo, Japan.

For over 20 years, Palo Alto families have hosted Japanese students in their homes and then sent their children to live with their exchange students in Japan. The students also shadow their exchange students in their respective middle schools to experience the different educational systems.

In 1993, employees of Palo Alto's Syntex Corporation started hosting students from Niihari Village. When Niihari Village became part of Tsuchiura City, the Mayor of Tsuchiura City reached out to Neighbors Abroad expressing interest in becoming a Palo Alto Sister City. With the support of the Palo Alto City Council and Neighbors Abroad, Palo Alto and Tsuchiura became sister cities in 2009. Tsuchiura is located 90 minutes north of Tokyo and is famous for its annual fireworks competition.

*"Many thanks on behalf of the Palo Alto community. As someone who grew up in Palo Alto with my family hosting students and sending me and my siblings on exchanges - this gift is truly appreciated and will go a long way to building and bettering relationships across the world."
Former Mayor Adrian Fine.*

Keiko would like to express her thanks to the many Palo Alto families for hosting Japanese students, to the members of the Palo Alto City Council, PAUSD for welcoming Japanese students into Middle Schools, and Neighbors Abroad for its enduring support.

Neighbors Abroad would like to sincerely thank Keiko and Yasuo for their generous donation that will serve to enhance the Palo Alto-Tsuchiura Sister City exchange program for years to come.

Introducing the Asian Sister City Committee. We have consolidated our engagement between Tsuchiura, Japan, Palo, Philippines, and Yangpu District, Shanghai China into a committee that focuses on this quadrant of the world. A recent focus has been toward assuring respect for our local Asian and Pacific Islander community where the vision of Sister Cities is to reinforce the diversity that enriches our community.

[European Sister City Updates](#)

Meet the Heidelberg-Palo Alto Club

A group of Heidelberg entrepreneurs who came to Palo Alto in 2019, upon their return to Heidelberg, initiated the

Heidelberg-Palo Alto Club. HDPA is working with Neighbors Abroad especially with our European Sister City Committee. The European Sister City Committee is now the work of Jeannet Kiessling, our VP for Europe. *(In the photo is left to right Stephan Lochner, Nikolaus Starzacher, Matthias Blatz, then Vice Mayor Liz Kniss, Carsten Kaisig, Matthias Lautenschläger and Stefan Nitz.)*



Our engagement in Europe is a mix of education, business and sustainability. We have two education programs. Board Member Christina Florea and her colleague Masha Maslova introduced “Re-Imagine Education”. Financial Intelligence for Teens (FIT), developed by Board Member Ling Feng and a group of enthusiastic Palo Alto High School students, teaches financial literacy between these sister cities.

Palo Alto Mayor Tom Dubois and Bob Wenzlau visit Heidelberg during September. Visits with the HDPA, and the Mayor of Heidelberg Dr. Eckart Würzner are anticipated.

The European Sister City Committee needs to grow and find representatives for Albi, Enschede and Linköping. Working with our European sister cities is a chance to new friends in Europe. As the pandemic ends, new friends and colleagues will await you in Europe. Drop us a note if you are interested.



A Global Bike Summit

What can our Sister Cities teach Palo Alto? Neighbors Abroad helped assemble a panel from Enschede, Netherlands and Heidelberg, Germany to discuss successes and challenges on shifting from cars to bikes.

Meet Johannes Sommerfeld of

Heidelberg who shared that 33% of all trips are by bike! And meet Kees Lems from Enschede, Netherlands who shared that per capita Enschede has 1.5 bikes per person! The conference was sponsored in August by [Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition](#) with slides from the session that can be downloaded [here](#).

Oaxaca, Mexico Updates

Impactful Project on Rainwater Capture in Yaxe

San Nicolás Yaxe is an Indigenous community located in the Oaxacan Central Valleys region, with a population of 2,954 people.

Water is becoming increasingly scarce. The people of Yaxe used to grow large amounts of vegetables for sale to the central Oaxacan markets, and used to produce baskets made from river reed (carrizo), but both of these activities have become less and less viable because of the impoverished water access.

Because the grid is managed through batch deliveries, where water only flows through the system once per week, each house must find a way of storing what

they can in order to administer it until the next batch arrives.

From a long term relationship between Vidas y Sueños and Neighbors Abroad, both organizations reached out to multiple sources to facilitate this project. The [Stanford Global Well for Life Project](#) has a history of working within Oaxaca to assess and promote general wellness, and they joined to monitor and facilitate the effect water recapture would have. Neighbors Abroad committed to the funding to the project, the baseline for 20 homes at the most minimal product, with the intent to fundraise as well for additional funds to add filters and pumps. [Isla Urbana](#) reached out to Fundacion Moises Itzkowich in Mexico, who matched the program for 30 additional homes. [Kiwanis of Palo Alto](#) and the Rotary Club of North Hunterdon, N.J. donated additional funds through Neighbors Abroad to raise the total amount for this project.



At the left, the community of Yaxe gathered to learn how to operate their new rainwater capture systems. In the upper right, last rainwater capture system installed showing local Vidas y Sueños representative Doña Catalina Lopez (an original participant in Vidas y Sueños), Vidas y Sueños Director Andrea Ortiz and homeowner. At the lower right, young participants in the Vidas y Sueños program, joined on the right standing by Bob Wenzlau, Julie Jomo, Doña Catalina, and Helena Iturribarría Rojas the Director of the Environment for Oaxaca State.

Construction began June 4. The benefiting families engaged in the project, donating time and manpower as well as food for the workers and housing. Over a period of 10 days, all 50 systems were installed, just in time for the beginning of the rainy season. The effects are widespread, as indicated on [this map](#).

The final leg - is the installation of murals on the water tanks, with their duplication in Palo Alto and across our Sister Cities. This [Art and Sustainability Project](#) can be viewed on Neighbors Abroad website

Closing the Digital Divide at the Calpulli Center

During the pandemic, students attending the Calpulli Center could no



longer join classes in person. And Mexico shifted all their student classes online. What about children where there is no Internet? Neighbors Abroad and Kiwanis International supported the students by buying and maintaining subscriptions to Internet WIFI services.

Twenty Years of Support to the Bomberos

Neighbors Abroad, and Bob Wenzlau, were honored with a commemorative plaque recognizing 20 years of support to the fire fighters of Oaxaca. Bob is receiving a plaque signed by all the fire fighters in Oaxaca, with Heliodoro Carlos Díaz Escarraga, Secretary of Public Security for the State of Oaxaca, and Chief Manuel Maza. Across Bob's service, approximately 15 ambulances and fire vehicles have found their way to serve Oaxaca in a second life. The event was celebrated in June 2021 in Oaxaca with the Patronados, the local community committee supporting the firefighters. Neighbors Abroad is evaluating supporting the transport of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other essential equipment for the firefighters.



What are Your Thoughts on a US "Sister City"?

Neighbors Abroad is assisting Tom DuBois, our Mayor, in evaluating a "sister city" in the United States. We are in conversations with Bloomington, Indiana. This initiative strives to seek understanding, empathy and shared experiences within the United States. What are your thoughts?

Here is my input!

Welcoming New Board Members, Tuesday Coffees and an Updated Sister City Sign

Our Board is growing! We welcome Flor Molina and Ken Sanchez to our Board. Both Flor and Ken lead Vidas y Sueños, the successor organization to Niño a Niño, providing children's health support in Oaxaca, Mexico. Ken has jumped in to lead our communications.

We have a Tuesday morning coffee. Our coffee time is still on Zoom, and has been a venue to calibrate on our program activities as well as maintain our friendships. Please join, and know that the access information is on the calendar of our [home page](#).



In remembrance, we also lost Joe Mandell, husband of Marion Mandell. Joe was an anchor to the incredible service Marion gave Oaxaca and Palo Alto across the years. His music, played at our holiday parties, will endure in our hearts. We also lost Jayne Uyenoyama, the sister of Liz Kniss (left in photo in Albi). Jayne accompanied the delegation to Albi and Heidelberg in 2019. She was spirited, and brought joy to meetings with Albi as well as presenting to the Queen of Sweden in attendance in Heidelberg. Both would bring you to smile, and held dedication to Neighbors Abroad's mission.

We are working to update our Sister City sign in front of City Hall to reflect all of our Sister Cities. We are grateful to pledges of support from the Palo Alto Rotary and Chesley Douglas (who originally lead the construction of the sign.)

We look forward to gathering soon in person, activating summer exchanges (still on hold with the pandemic), and celebrating the friendships that are the heart of Neighbors Abroad.

We Appreciate Your Support

Across this issue of The Dispatch, we hope you have found the impact of our work. We are honored to be a conduit of good impact as well as cultural engagement, and welcome your ongoing support!

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