



Ashland helps Guanajuato attain World Peace Flame

by Caitlin Fowlkes of the Ashland Tidings - Friday, June 7th 2019



Students at the Guanajuato Independence Day celebration, celebrating the city's culture of peace. Photo by David Wick.

Ashland representatives are helping their sister city attain a World Peace Flame of their own.

Guanajuato, Mexico, will be the first Latin American city with a World Peace Flame and the first sister city flame holder. Guanajuato is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and this

will further its mission of peace, said Irene Kai, Ashland Culture of Peace Commission director of development.

"Its cultural and historical standing in the world is great," Kai said. "Guanajuato is the center of Mexico. That is where the revolution started, in the city itself, so it is very significant."

Kai brought the World Peace Flame to Ashland last September, making it the second one in the nation.

While Guanajuato dignitaries and residents were visiting Ashland in April to celebrate the 50th anniversary of their relationship, they attended a short World Peace Flame ceremony presented by Kai and ACPC Executive Director David Wick.

"It was raining actually, but they all still came in the rain," Kai said.

The mayor presented the city of Ashland with a plaque celebrating peace between the two cities. A much larger plaque now resides in the Guanajuato Plaza of Peace, right beside the UNESCO heritage plaque.

Kai said the mayor of Guanajuato asked to meet with them to discuss how to install their own World Peace Flame monument. He invited Kai and Wick to join Ashland dignitaries while they celebrated the anniversary in Guanajuato last week.

Acting on behalf of the World Peace Flame Foundation in the Netherlands, Kai and Wick met with city officials, administration, the mayor and university administrators to plan.

"They are all very serious and want to know how they can move forward," Kai said. "They have joined international cities of peace."

Now Kai is working with World Peace Flame Foundation officials to approve the site. She said the city has already been approved for the flame. If everything goes according to plan, Guanajuato should have a flame-lighting ceremony in September.

"Ashland and Guanajuato already have this very strong relationship, and that was really a part of our experience, to see how strong it is," Wick said. "It's very important to have sister city relationships, and taking the next step with the World Peace Flame is really setting the model for collaboration and friendship between the two cities as cities of peace."

The 15 peace flames around the world burn 24/7 and symbolize eternal peace, freedom and unity. The flame burns to remind those who see it and “keep it” that each moment, action and thought should be conducted with positivity toward others.

In a time of political dissension involving the possible physical separation between two bordering countries, the loving relationship between the two cities and their movement toward international peace is more important than ever, Wick said.

“It’s all the more reason to have positive relationships,” Wick said. “Despite the political upheavals of the time, these are long-lasting relationships (between the sister cities). It’s important to see that cities can establish relationships even if countries do not. Countries have a whole other agenda, but cities do not. Cities can form relationships without worrying about that agenda.”

Kai said members of the community where a World Peace Flame is installed have agreed that peace needs to reign over all else.

“Look at our world now,” Kai said. “How did we get to this place? Because enough people are thinking of all these negative things. We decided not to join them.”

She said when communities choose to celebrate peace — and especially when leaders choose to practice peace — it changes the whole dynamic of the community, and it influences children to become leaders who celebrate peace.

“It is changing the culture, and it is really important for the young people and the children to really learn a different way of living,” Kai said. “Our children caring for the peace flame from Ashland Middle School, that has changed their whole world view. Whatever position they hold when they grow up, they will come from that place of the heart.”

She said Guanajuato students who have participated in the student exchange program with Southern Oregon University have learned the Ashland culture of peace and gone on to hold high positions within the Guanajuato community, such as the minister of economics and even the mayor.

“(Both sister cities) have the same intentions to pass it on to the next generation, and when they grow up with the awareness and practice of peace, it’s important, because when the next generation become leaders, they will set a whole different tone for their cities and the world,” Kai said.

Once everything is approved and the monument is built, officials from the World Peace Flame Foundation will light the flame in Guanajuato.

Kai said the monument is planned to be built near the Ashland mural.

The lighting of the flame ceremony is planned to happen after Ashland's Global Peace Conference, which will feature an ambassador of the United Nations and founder of the global movement of the Culture of Peace, Anwarul Chowdhury, as its keynote speaker. Chowdhury is the former Senior Special Advisor to the UN General Assembly president and has served as the undersecretary general and high representative of the UN.

Kia Scherr is another confirmed speaker for the event. She is the co-founder of One Life Alliance, a nonprofit she started after the death of her husband and 13-year-old daughter, who were killed in a 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack.

Many local residents will attend the conference Sept. 20-21, including members of the chamber of commerce, the police chief, school district superintendent, faith community leaders, students, nonprofit agencies, Sen. Jeff Golden and Rep. Pam Marsh.

The theme of this year's conference is "You are the flame."

"When the police chief and the city council and the state representative and senator, all people in power, all come from that positive place, they influence our environment, our city and our state to be better," Kai said.

She said spreading the celebration of peace can become quite contagious.

"When you really proclaim and celebrate, that in itself is infectious, it is inspiration," Kai said. "It's important to reach out and share and touch others. We all have that in ourselves, but by expressing that it turns it into action. We are creating a movement."

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