



We're Neighbors Abroad, and this is your passport to what's happening with Palo Alto's Sister, Sibling, and Friendship Cities.

Scroll down for stories that span the globe — or click [here](#) for the best view.

Friendship, Fire Trucks, and a Fiesta: Oaxaca Visits Palo Alto



California Avenue came alive with music, dance, and vibrant costumes at the Sept. 27 *calenda*, the grand finale of the Oaxaca delegation's visit. Photo by Roland Wilhelm.

Neighbors Abroad had a blast in late September hosting a delegation from our Sister City of Oaxaca. And our three distinguished visitors didn't waste a minute.

Representing Oaxaca state and local government, **Juana Hernández López**, **Ave María Leyva López**, and **Frida Yolanda Lyle García** dove straight into Palo Alto's world of waste-busting and eco-innovation. From

storm drains and hazardous waste stations to **GreenWaste's** high-tech sorting facility, they got the full behind-the-scenes tour. And they brought home plenty of ideas as Oaxaca ramps up its own environmental infrastructure (which, fun fact, already includes a Palo Alto-donated refuse truck).

Of course, no Sister City visit from Oaxaca would be complete without a celebration of our decades-long fire-and-rescue friendship. Palo Alto firefighter **Yovan Sierra** — whose parents are from Mexico — called it a dream come true to have taken on the role of the official liaison for equipment donations. Yovan and two fellow firefighters even rolled up to the delegation's welcome reception in a fire truck and in full uniform. Talk about adding spark to the party! ☀️.



Left to right, Neighbors Abroad board member Ken Sanchez, firefighter Matthew Foster, Neighbors Abroad board member Flor Sanchez, firefighter Yovan Sierra (our new official liaison with the *bomberos* in Oaxaca), Neighbors Abroad board member Sarah Burgess, Palo Alto Mayor Ed Lauing, and Captain Adam Palsgrove.

The delegation stopped by **Avenidas**, where they toured programs for older adults and accepted donations of walkers, wheelchairs, and other mobility gear that will be shipped to Oaxaca along with fire equipment. They also had sit-downs with **Mayor Ed Lauing**, a personal tour of the **Palo Alto Art Center**, and, for the grand finale, our always-colorful *calenda* on California Avenue — music,

dance, food, and friendship filling the street with Oaxacan joy.

A huge gracias to everyone who made this whirlwind visit possible, especially **Sarah Burgess** and **Flor** and **Ken Sanchez**. After more than 60 years as Sister Cities, Palo Alto and Oaxaca are still turning up the energy — and we're just getting started!

For more on the *calenda*, visit our [Calenda page](#).



Passing the Torch: Welcome President Ed, Thank You Sarah!

Neighbors Abroad has a new president!

As of September 1, **Ed Fike** has stepped into the most coveted leadership role in Palo Alto. (No campaign ads, recounts, or X posts required.)

Ed connected with Neighbors Abroad six years ago when he was selected to run the Kasumigaura Marathon near our sister city, Tsuchiura, Japan. That race set the pace for his commitment to Palo Alto's international friendships. You can read more about Ed [here](#).

A heartfelt thank you to outgoing president **Sarah Burgess**, whose two years of transformative leadership made a lasting mark on our organization. Leading with equal parts clarity and compassion, Sarah helped launch a host of new initiatives—including our first Friendship City—championed youth exchanges, established our annual *calenda*, and strengthened our connections with all of our Sister Cities. She also deepened our ties with our friends in City Hall, elevating Neighbors Abroad's stature in the community and boosting our membership. She will continue her work as co-VP for Oaxaca, Mexico, alongside **Flor Sanchez**. Learn more about Sarah [here](#).

On October 3, board members and city officials attended a celebratory dinner in Sarah's honor, hosted by Ed and his husband **Bill Jeffrey** at the Fremont Hills Country Club.



'We welcomed him as strangers and said farewell as friends'

Photographers from Enschede Enjoy a Week of 'Camera Collaborations' with their Palo Alto Counterparts



It started more than a year ago with a slightly wacky idea: what if photographers in Palo Alto and our Sister City of Enschede swapped photos of the “beautiful and ugly” sides of their hometowns—then talked about them over Zoom? That’s how the **Fotoclub de Zoeker** in Enschede and the **Palo Alto Camera Club** first connected. The virtual exchange between the two amateur camera clubs (which organizer **Monica Schreiber** dubbed "Camera Collaborations") sparked real connections.

Fast forward to late October, and that online experiment jumped from screen to real life when photographers **Martin Klein Schaarsberg** and **Roald Kooijman** spent a week in Palo Alto on a photography and citizen diplomacy adventure.



Left to right: Sue Borg, Jeff Sultan, Roald Kooijman, Martin Klein Schaarsberg, Bob Fisher, Jan Fisher

With help from a dream team of Palo Alto Camera Club tour guides (**Wright Schickli, Judy Kramer, Mark Gerow, Bob Fisher, and Allan Colby**), the week included wanderings around downtown Palo Alto, Baylands and Stanford strolls, a day of redwoods and ocean, and a trip to Monterey/Carmel with Monica and her husband **Matt**.

Special appreciation to the Camera Club's enthusiastic co-presidents **Sue Borg** and **Bob Fisher**, who embraced the collaboration idea from the get-go and said, "Sure, I'll host someone in my home for a week who I only met for two hours over Zoom!" Sue and her husband **Jeff Sultan** opened their home to Roald, while **Bob** and **Jan Fisher** hosted Martin.

Martin and Roald gave a wonderful presentation about Fotoclub de Zoeker during a welcome reception at Sue and Jeff's home. One guest of honor was Public Arts Commissioner **Harriet Stern**, who collaborated with Fotoclub de Zoeker for her 2023 "We Are What We Eat" exhibit at the Palo Alto Arts Center.

In a full-circle moment, the visit rekindled Sister City ties dating back to a 1980s high school jazz band exchange, when Bob and Jan (who hosted Martin) first visited Enschede and were hosted by a local couple who became lifelong friends. That experience inspired them to open their own home—decades later—to Martin.

A "goodbye" message from Sue summed up the spirit of the exchange:

"I was sad to drop Roald off at the train station this morning. We welcomed him as strangers and said farewell as friends ... Thank you to Monica and Neighbors Abroad for initiating and organizing this wonderful visit. Truly our world needs more of this. And I can't wait to see how our collaboration evolves."

And evolve it will! Stay tuned for news of a photography trip to the Netherlands in 2027.

See just a small sampling of the photography produced during the whirlwind week [here](#).

Check out the original “Beautiful-Ugly” project that sparked the real-world visit [here](#).



Pictured above: Martin with his delightful hosts, Bob and Sue Fisher; Roald at the Google visitor center, and four photographers in the redwoods: Mark Gerow, Martin, Roald, and Bob Fisher.

Lydia Kou and Sophie Vong-Karlage Join Neighbors Abroad Leadership

In recent months, we welcomed two new board members: **Lydia Kou** and **Sophie Vong-Karlage**.

Lydia (pictured at top) is a familiar name and face in Palo Alto. A former member of the Palo Alto City Council and the city’s mayor in 2023, she is also a residential Realtor, small



business owner, and a proud member of the Barron Park neighborhood. Lydia brings a truly global background to Neighbors Abroad: born in Hong Kong to parents from Shanghai, she grew up in Sudan, where her father managed a factory and her mother opened the country's first Chinese restaurant. She is serving as co-VP for Tsuchiura, our Japanese Sister City, working with **Evelyn Shimazaki** to advance the long-running student exchange between the two cities, among other projects. Read more about Lydia [here](#).

Sophie's international experience and language abilities are equally remarkable. Originally from southern China, Sophie has lived abroad (including a year in Nagoya, Japan) and previously worked as a translator. She speaks English, Japanese, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Hakka. Sophie earned a Certificate in Fund Raising Management from Indiana University's Lilly Family School of Philanthropy and is completing her Master's in Philanthropic Studies there while also holding down a fulltime job in fundraising at Pets in Need. Somehow she has found time to dive enthusiastically into multiple Neighbors Abroad projects (have you noticed our amped up social media presence?), including serving as our board Secretary. Read more about Sophie [here](#).



Welcome, Lydia and Sophie!

Education is for Life



Traveling to any of our sister cities?

Get ready by taking a World Language class at the Palo Alto Adult School.

Winter registration opens December 5th.



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Palo + Palo Alto = A Journey of Connection



Left to right: Doug Smith, Ellen Valentine, Wayne Thompson, Nodelyn Smith, Marilee Moy, May Chevalier, Lydia Kou, Kayla Shepherd, John St. Claire III, Tyler Shepherd, Nancy Shepherd

In August, 2025, a delegation traveled to Palo, Leyte, Philippines for an “experience of a lifetime,” as described by one delegate. Neighbors Abroad board members, Palo Alto civic leaders—including two former Palo Alto

mayors—and engaged local citizens were welcomed with warm hospitality and had the opportunity to strengthen important collaborations with the long-running **Palo Children’s Library** and our partner non-profit, **GIANTS**.

The visit included visits to various ecosystems and served as the launch of our collaboration with the environmental non-profit **Guiuan Development Foundation (GDFI)**, which empowers locals to promote sustainability and environmental protection in and around Palo, Leyte and neighboring provinces.

The delegates visited General Douglas MacArthur’s historic residence and learned about WWII’s Battle of Leyte Gulf which occurred in Palo in 1944. They also joined the lively annual Palo Town Fiesta, with music and dance competitions, and cheered on contestants at the Miss Enchanting pageant. They connected with young learners at the library and participated in community outreach at the childcare centers. One of the highlights of the trip was meeting Palo’s **Mayor Matin, Councilman Boycie Roca**, and the **Governor of Leyte, Jericho Petilla** and his wife, **Ann**, former Mayor of Palo. Nodelyn presented the Governor of Leyte with a carbon offset certificate (see photo).

With the guidance of GDFI’s founder and former Professor at the University of the Philippines, **Marge de la Cruz**, the delegation explored the region’s natural beauty, from lush rainforests, to sandbar islands and beaches, to the mangrove forests. These mangroves are natural habitats to many animals including fruit bats that can reach 5.5’ wingspan. The delegation witnessed these beautiful bats soar above the mangroves in a spectacular display. One of GDFI’s many projects is to restore and rehabilitate mangrove forests which are essential to buffering the effects of storms, nurture fish and crabs, and can store vast amounts of carbon.



Neighbors Abroad delegates were: Palo VP **Nodelyn Smith** and her husband **Doug**, Bloomington VP **Wayne Thompson** and his wife **Marilee**, and board member **Ellen Valentine**. Not one, but two former Palo Alto mayors made the trip: **Lydia Kou** (who has since joined the Neighbors Abroad board!) and former Palo Alto Mayor **Nancy Shepherd**.

Neighbors Abroad’s Palo Committee is fundraising to improve broadband digital access at the Palo Children’s Library, to develop a Palo Education Fund for future Scholars, and to support mangrove restoration and rehabilitation.



On the beautiful Kalanggaman Island near Palompon, Leyte. Left to right: Nancy Shepherd, Marilee Moy (sitting), Mark Shepherd, Wayne Thompson, Nodelyn Smith, Doug Smith, Lydia Kou, Marge de la Cruz, John St. Clair III, May Chevalier, Kayla Shepherd, Tyler Shepherd, Ellen Valentine

[Learn More About our Sister City in the Philippines](#)

Global Friendships Bloom at Gamble Garden



Palo Alto Mayor Ed Lauing surrenders to the joy that is Neighbors Abroad while President Ed Fike welcomes new members at a recent mixer.

Neighbors Abroad members gathered on October 29 for our annual meeting and new member mixer at Palo Alto's historic **Gamble Garden**—and what an evening it was! Dozens of members turned out to mix, mingle, and toast another busy year of global friendship.

With outstanding food generously provided by **Coupa Café** and wine donated by **Terún**, the night was equal parts delicious and inspiring. Board members had 30 seconds (give or take...) to spotlight recent highlights from their Sister Cities, and the crowd was amazed by the impact of their work. VPs for Oaxaca, Palo (the Philippines), and Narok, Kenya shared especially powerful updates, from funding libraries to delivering fresh drinking water to Indigenous communities.



Our new president, **Ed Fike**, led his first official event with panache. Among the guests were **Mayor Ed Lauing** and **Vice Mayor Vicki Veenker**, who even pushed back a city meeting by half an hour to attend. (That's the kind of schedule juggling that earns a Sister City sash!)

One attendee summed it up perfectly: *"I don't understand why everyone in Palo Alto isn't involved with Neighbors Abroad."*

To which we can only say—*Indeed!*

And if you've read this far into the newsletter, it's your lucky day. All you have to do to join in future festivities (including our upcoming holiday party, widely recognized as the social event of the season) is scroll to the bottom of this newsletter and join us!

Welcome to our newest members!

Mark and Rene Berlind • Karl Boog • Barbara Dunn Cherry • Fiona Chuang • Candace Gunther and Roland Wilhelm • Megan Swezey-Fogarty • Betsy and Robert Gamburd • Gamble Garden Center • Fen Guo • Sean Vong-Karlage • Taemie Kim • Lydia Kou • Stephen and Jennifer Lanham • CheeTung Leong • Eric Lin • Jiezhong Mo • Grace and Jan Pedersen • Pythia Insights and Strategy • Adelina Rosen • Ivan So • Robert Steinberg and Alice Erber • Christian Straub • James Tran

We look forward to seeing our newest Citizen Diplomats at upcoming events!

Donor Spotlights

Thank you to the Gamble Garden, Terún, and Coupa Cafe for their generous support of Neighbors Abroad's new member mixer and more.



Grazie mille to Terún—the buzziest patio in Palo Alto, where the pizza is blistered to perfection and the Calabrian hospitality flows as generously as the wine. If you haven't dined with Maico, Giuseppe, Franco and crew yet, you're missing the closest thing



A heartfelt thank-you to Coupa Café for its generous support of our new member mixer! For 20 years, this family-run institution has blended Venezuelan warmth with Bay Area energy—serving arepas and mochas with flair and creating

Palo Alto has to a true neighborhood Italian vibe.

community gathering spots across various locations.



A huge thank you to the Gamble Garden Center for generously donating their beautiful historic space for our new member mixer. A true Palo Alto treasure, Gamble Garden has been welcoming the community for more than a century with its lush gardens, charming carriage house, and year-round programs for all ages. Admission to the gardens is always free!

This is Your Sign to Visit Albi



We offer a big *félicitations* to our French Sister City, which is having a well-deserved moment in the spotlight. Albi recently landed at 5th place on Forbes' "Top 10 Culturally Rich European Towns to Visit in 2026.

Of course we are not surprised.

With its UNESCO World Heritage sites, stunning brick cathedral, the world-renowned Toulouse-Lautrec Museum, and streets that practically hum with

history and art, Albi is a must-see for anyone dreaming of a European getaway.

In the summer of 2026, a group of Palo Alto students will be heading to Albi as part of a broader French language and cultural immersion program. We can't wait to tell you more about that!

Read more [here](#) about the designation for Albi.

A 'Peak Lifetime Experience' — Sister City Marathoner Reports to City Council

At an August Palo Alto City Council meeting, Neighbors Abroad's own marathon man, **Owen Bittinger**, took the mic to share highlights from his unforgettable run in the Lake Kasumigaura Marathon in Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan (as featured in our last newsletter). Owen was sponsored by our Sister City friends in nearby Tsuchiura, which annually invites a Palo Alto runner to the race.

Owen called the April 2025 trip “a peak lifetime experience” — and judging by the smiles in the room, the council agreed. Several Neighbors Abroad board members cheered him on in person, while friends and supporters from Tsuchiura tuned in live from across the Pacific.



Marathoner Owen Bittinger, center with white T-shirt, with the Palo Alto City Council.

Yangpu Business Delegation Visits

Palo Alto

In mid-October, a delegation from Yangpu, Palo Alto's Sister City in China, visited Palo Alto to meet with members of Neighbors Abroad and others at the Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce. The group included representatives from Yangpu's government, business, and innovation sectors.



The conversation focused on how Palo Alto's startups and Yangpu's growing innovation ecosystem might best collaborate. They also explored opportunities to share arts and culture, including plans to possibly bring performers from Yangpu to the Palo Alto Festival of the Arts, presented annually by the Chamber of Commerce. Neighbors Abroad's Yangpu VP **Yudy Deng** participated in the conversation, along with President **Ed Fike** and board member **Bing Wei**, as well as Chamber CEO **Charlie Weidanz** and the Chamber's Board Chair **Christina Hood**.

When Mayors Talk, Ideas Fly



Palo Alto Mayor **Ed Lauing** recently met up with **Heidelberg Lord Mayor Dr. Eckart Würzner** at a roundtable in Bremen, Germany, where more than 20 U.S. and German mayors gathered to swap notes on everything from affordable housing to “smart city” innovation.

"On both sides of the Atlantic, mayors in so many cities are setting excellent examples of good governance," noted German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepful in the German embassy's social media posts. "We want to shine a spotlight on this and give them recognition, because their work forms the basis of mutual trust and fosters new partnerships."

**Think Global, Support Local:
Become a Member of
Neighbors Abroad!**

For more than 60 years, Neighbors Abroad has been creating meaningful people-to-people connections between Palo Alto and our communities around the globe. From youth exchanges to cultural delegations, from sustainability summits to book donations, we bring our city's values—curiosity, compassion, collaboration—into global action.

Our work thrives on local support. By becoming a member, you're not only helping us sustain global friendships and life-changing programs, you're also joining a community of people who believe in diplomacy at the human level.

Click the red button below and join today!

[Support Neighbors Abroad by Becoming a Member](#)



Congratulations Neighbors Abroad!

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*Palo Alto Adult School recognizes local organizations for excellence in their field.



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