



The Dispatch

Summer 2025

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.

A Warm Welcome for Palo Alto's First Friendship City



[Narok, Kenya](#)

Palo Alto's newly established Friendship City relationship with Narok, Kenya is off to a roaring start. On April 21, during a Palo Alto City Council meeting, Mayor Ed Lauing signed the official agreement, with Amos Kipeen signing on behalf of Narok.

"After a long time wishing for and advocating for a Friendship City relationship between Palo Alto and a city



in Africa, it finally came true,” said Neighbors Abroad board member Barb Mackraz, who has worked in the Narok region for many years through her nonprofit, Oliveseed Foundation, in collaboration with Amos, who directs their Kenya programs on the ground.

Located west of Nairobi, Narok is a gateway to some of Kenya’s most celebrated natural treasures, including the Maasai Mara National Reserve and the annual Great Migration. Like Palo Alto, Narok has a population of around 65,000. It is the commercial and governmental center of Narok County and home to a primarily Maasai community.

A larger delegation from Narok, including County Governor Patrick Ntutu, visited Palo Alto in late May. Their weeklong itinerary, which Barb and others organized, featured visits to Stanford University, the Google Visitor Center, and a walking tour of downtown Palo Alto led by Councilmember Pat Burt. One standout moment was a behind-the-scenes tour of Palo Alto’s GreenWaste recycling facility, arranged by the City’s Zero Waste team. With Narok’s leadership eager to expand their own waste management strategies, the group was intrigued and inspired by the facility’s advanced technology and operational efficiency. Neighbors Abroad President Sarah Burgess capped off the visit by hosting a celebratory al fresco dinner, complete with heartfelt remarks—and a lively group dance that no one will soon forget.

Special thanks to the other board members and volunteers who helped make the visit a success, including Jennifer Kleckner, Evelyn Aguilar Shimazaki, Claire Lauing, and Bruce McLeod.





Besties Across Borders

Palo Alto and Tsuchiura Students Reunite



Tsuchiura, Japan

For more than 30 years, the middle school exchange between Sister Cities Palo Alto and Tsuchiura has been a beloved and enduring program. In March (as we reported in the spring newsletter), cheers, hugs, and welcome signs filled the air as 10 students from Tsuchiura touched down in Palo Alto and met their host families, instantly becoming minor celebrities at local middle schools.

In June, it was the Palo Alto students' turn to feel the love. The group landed in Tsuchiura to the same warm welcome and more than a few happy tears as the students reunited with their buddies.

Tsuchiura VP Evelyn Aguilar Shimazaki, known widely as the MVP of spreadsheets and calm leadership, shepherded the group through a week packed with culture and connection. In addition to the family homestays, highlights of the week included experiencing two days in a Japanese middle school classroom, a Zen meditation session led by a Buddhist monk at a 364-year-old temple (a welcome moment of calm for both students and chaperones), an excursion by bullet train to Nikko's Toshogu Shrine, shopping for anime goods in Tokyo's Shibuya district, and receiving custom portraits of the exchange buddies (drawn by Tsuchiura Middle School art teacher Kazushi Endo), beautifully memorializing the cross-culture friendships.



Click the red button below to read some short essays from the students who participated in this year's program. Their reflections are as touching as they are joyful. One Tsuchiura student wrote:

"It was my first trip abroad, so I was both excited and anxious. When I first met my buddy, we hugged each other. She and her family made me feel so welcome. And she asked me, "What do you want to do?" So, I told her, "I want to be your bestie."

[Read Student Essays About Their Cross-Cultural Experiences](#)



Owen Bittering Goes the Distance in Tsuchiura's Annual Marathon

Congratulations to Palo Alto resident Owen Bittering, who completed the Kasumigaura Marathon in impressive fashion, crossing the finish line in 3:46. Owen was among 40,000 participants in the April race, which provides a scenic

journey near our Sister City and around Japan's second-largest lake.

Each year Tsuchiura extends an invitation to a Palo Alto resident to compete in the event, which is considered to be one of the highlights of the Japanese running calendar.



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.

Support Neighbors Abroad at the membership level that works for you, and be part of something that reaches far beyond city limits. Click the red button below and explore our membership levels and join today!

Oaxaca, Mexico

Congratulations to our Jim Newton Scholarship Fund Graduates!

Following the passing of longtime board member Jim Newton in 2023, his wife Barbara—also a dedicated Neighbors Abroad board member—established a scholarship fund in his name to support students in Oaxaca, Mexico. For decades, Jim and Barbara devoted much of their time and energy to strengthening our partnership with Oaxaca, making this fund a deeply meaningful continuation of their shared work.

We're proud to announce that the first two recipients of the Jim Newton Scholarship Fund, Fredy E. Díaz and Camila L. Cruz, graduated from the Preparatoria de la Santa Cruz on July 4.



Both students have been under the care of the Albergue Infantil Josefino, a shelter that provides support and stability to children whose families are unable to do so. Neighbors Abroad has partnered with the Albergue for many years. The scholarship recipients were selected by the dedicated nuns who run the shelter, in collaboration with Barbara.

Congratulations to Fredy and Camila. Jim would be proud.

Yangpu District, Shanghai, China

From Palo Alto to Shanghai

A Summer of STEAM and Sisterhood



As a follow-on to its International Student Art Biennale held last December, Yangpu District invited 10 Palo Alto-area students to participate in the Yangpu International STEAM Youth Camp in June. The camp focused on the core STEAM disciplines: Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math. "Our amazing Palo Alto students did a dance performance and participated in many STEAM workshops," reported Yangpu VP Yudy Deng, whose own children were among the participants.

Eva, one of the participants, said: "I quickly made friends and enjoyed diverse activities: learning long-spouted tea serving, savoring Nanjing Road food, visiting the Shanghai Natural History Museum, and exploring Zhujiajiao Ancient Town. I tried karting, learned kung fu fan, and visited the Shanghai Museum and Urban Planning Exhibition Hall. At Tongji University, we created STEAM projects, and I performed at the closing ceremony. This camp not only deepened my understanding of Chinese culture but also broadened my global view and formed lasting friendships, making it a life-changing memory."

Ian agreed that the camp "was an amazing experience."

"Staying with a host family for a week, I learned more about China and its language. I made friends with international kids and visited many attractions, trying different foods and taking lots of photos. I'm grateful to Yumao and her family for their help. They translated Chinese for me, showed



me around, and introduced me to delicious snacks like rose tea and orange cake mochi. We visited museums, created STEAM art at Tongji University, and made crafts, performed in a violin and singing group, and got souvenirs from other kids. This camp expanded my horizons, and Shanghai feels like a second home. I hope to return soon."



Meanwhile, Neighbors Abroad board member Bing Wei, who also serves as a Palo Alto Parks Commissioner, joined delegates from around the world at the Mayors' Global Dialogue and Sister City Collaboration Forum in Shanghai. Bing, who hails from Shanghai, made a well-received presentation to participants from around the globe about Palo Alto and its Sister City programs, which includes a pairing with Shanghai's Yangpu District.

"Sister city programs are evolving into dynamic social innovation hubs," Bing said. "In Shanghai, I experienced firsthand how cities act as collaborative labs, developing scalable, community-centered solutions for sustainable development."



Neighbors Abroad board member and Palo Alto Parks Commissioner Bing Wei, second from right, traveled to Shanghai for the Mayors' Global Dialogue and Sister City Collaboration Forum.

A Transcontinental Road Trip, Sister City Style



[Enschede, The Netherlands](#)

When Enschede committee member Cor Bouwhuis and his wife Edith decided to visit Palo Alto this summer, they took the scenic route—*very scenic*. Starting in Florida, where they visited family, the pair embarked on an epic cross-country road trip. New Orleans' French Quarter was smaller—and sketchier—than expected, they reported, but Monument Valley earned a solid 10 out of 10. In Texas, they were momentarily speechless when a waitress offered to top their sweet potatoes with marshmallows and maple syrup. Their favorite stop? Palo Alto, of course!

Cor and Edith met with Enschede VP Monica Schreiber to brainstorm fresh ideas for strengthening the Sister City partnership, which dates back to 1980. Cor first came to Palo Alto decades ago as an exchange student, staying with the family of the late Ralph White, a longtime Neighbors Abroad board member. That experience planted the seeds for Cor's lifelong connection to our community. On this visit, Cor and Edith made a special trip to Napa to visit Ralph's son, Boomer. The reunion was a heartfelt full-circle moment and a reminder of how Sister City ties can span generations and continents.

Cor and Edith also enjoyed a Neighbors Abroad-sponsored gathering at local favorite Terún and a strategy session/dinner hosted by Neighbors Abroad's President-elect Ed Fike and his husband Bill at the Fremont Hills Country Club. The group hit the pickleball court post-dinner and post-wine—and in street clothes—but still had a great time. BTW: This isn't the first time Ed has introduced our Sister City friends to the joys of pickleball. At this point, Ed's favorite pastime has evolved into a true foreign policy strategy (take notice, President Trump!).

Cor and Edith's visit was a joyful reminder that while video calls are fine, nothing beats face-to-face connection—and a shared laugh over a wildly errant backhand.



Left to right, Cor Bouwhuis, Ed Fike, Bill Jeffrey, Edith Bouwhuis and Monica Schreiber

[Heidelberg, Germany](#)

Young Innovators Unite: Gunn and Heidelberg Students Exchange Ideas in BEAM Program

Neighbors Abroad has long been a proud champion of BEAM (Business, Entrepreneurship & Math), an innovative program that teaches high school students how to think like entrepreneurs—and actually *be* entrepreneurs—through hands-on mentorship from industry pros. Co-developed by a former Neighbors Abroad board member and launched at Gunn High School, BEAM has proven so effective that several of our Sister Cities wanted in on the action. Heidelberg—home to one of Germany's top universities and major hub for start up companies—was first in line.



Even better, Heidelberg's enthusiasm helped spark an annual BEAM exchange between the two cities. As reported in our spring newsletter, a dozen students from Heidelberg's Hölderlin Gymnasium spent a week in Palo Alto in February, collaborating with their Gunn counterparts. Neighbors Abroad board member Bruce McLeod and Gunn BEAM instructor Emily Yun helped make it all happen.

Then in April, it was Gunn's turn to head to Germany. During spring break, Emily led a crew of Palo Alto's finest budding entrepreneurs to our German Sister City, where, in addition to their business-building activities, they toured SAP headquarters, took a boat tour on the Neckar River, visited Heidelberg City Hall (see photo), and experienced a taste of everyday German life with their host families.

Congrats to our next-gen business leaders. We expect to see at least *two* future unicorns from this group.



Biryani, Bridges, and Battery Power: Lord Mayor Eckart Würzner's Whirlwind Visit

In early May, we had the pleasure of hosting a delegation from our German Sister City, including Lord Mayor Dr. Eckart Würzner and his Chief of Staff Aline Moser. A highlight was their visit to electric truck maker Rivian, which enjoys a productive joint venture with Germany's Volkswagen

Group. Rivian showcased its various sustainable vehicle models—including electric Amazon delivery trucks—followed by a hands-on session where Mayor Würzner and

some of the German engineers took some thrilling test drives in Rivian vehicles. Yes, they had to stay in the parking lot, but if you squinted hard, it almost looked like a mini-Autobahn.

At dinner, things got spicy at California Avenue hotspot Zareen's, where chef-owner Zareen Khan made a surprise appearance with a gift of her brand-new cookbook (see photo).

The group also attended a gala event with the German American Business Association (GABA), where Mayor Würzner and Palo Alto's Mayor Ed Lauing toasted the strength of the Sister City relationship. In a fitting exchange of gifts, Palo Alto presented a piece of the Golden Gate Bridge, and Heidelberg returned the gesture with a fragment of their beloved city bridge. Was it a little too "on the nose" with the whole "building bridges of international understanding" thing? Maybe. But we'll take it!



Left to right: Zareen Khan, Lord Mayor Eckart Würzner, and Chief of Staff Aline Moser.

[Palo, Leyte, The Philippines](#)

A Global Gift of Reading: Books Head to Palo Children's Library



In early May, Neighbors Abroad board member Nodelyn Smith turned her Palo Alto home into a temporary shipping center. The occasion? A good old-fashioned “book boxing” party to pack up donated reads for the Children’s Library in Palo, Leyte, one of our longest-running Sister City partnerships.

Board members and volunteers rolled up their sleeves (and wielded packing tape with surprising skill), including special guest Amos Kipeen, our visiting dignitary in town from Narok, Kenya for the Friendship City signing. There was a lot of sorting, stacking, and labeling, and by the end of the evening, a hefty stack of boxes was ready for the trans-Pacific journey, filled with stories just waiting to be discovered.

HONRALES, REYMOND D.
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN ELECTRICAL
ENGINEERING

EASTERN VISAYAS STATE UNIVERSITY
CLASS OF 2024



Congratulations to One of Our Palo Scholars

We’re thrilled to share that Raymond Honrales, one of our dedicated Palo Scholars in the Philippines, has recently passed his certification exam and is now a licensed, registered Electrical Engineer!

Raymond’s hard work and determination—combined with the \$500/year support from Neighbors Abroad—have opened new doors and made a lasting difference in his life. Congratulations, Raymond! We can’t wait to see what you’ll do next.

Motorcyclists from Albi Roll into Town, Gift in Hand



Left to right, Jean Francois Miquel, David Vernes, Jennifer Kleckner, and Pierre Nicoules.

Three adventurous business owners from our French Sister City of Albi made a brief but memorable stop in Palo Alto in April during their motorcycle tour of California. Well, technically the motorcycles had already been sent ahead to Monterey, so the “roaring into town” part was more symbolic than literal.

The trio delivered a gift from Albi’s mayor, Stéphanie Guiraud-Chaumeil, to Palo Alto Mayor Ed Lauing—a beautiful book about their hometown. Albi Co-VP Jennifer Kleckner was on hand to greet them and capture the moment with a photo in front of the Sister City sign at City Hall.

The group included two restaurateurs and a wine merchant, ambassadors of French hospitality if ever there were.

Bon voyage, and come back soon—next time, avec les motos!

In Memoriam

We are saddened to learn of the recent passing of two former leaders of Neighbors

Abroad, both of whom served the Palo Alto community in numerous ways over many decades:



Joyce Marie Leonard

Former Neighbors Abroad President Joyce Leonard passed away peacefully at her home in Palo Alto surrounded by her loving family on May 21st. She was two months shy of her 94th birthday..."

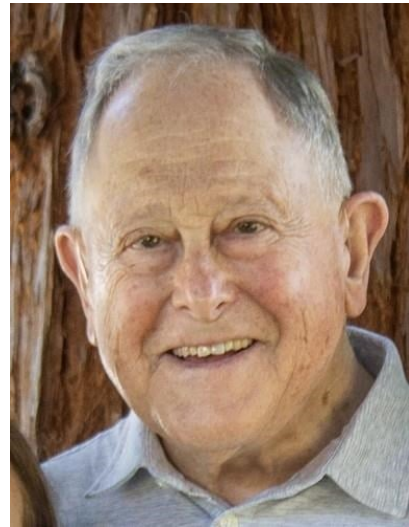
Continue reading her obituary [here](#).

Leland Levy

Leland Levy, a former Palo Alto mayor who was known as well for his satirical songs as for his lifelong commitment to building playgrounds, improving parks and enhancing local infrastructure, died this week. He was 90.

A former stockbroker and financial adviser, Levy had spent three terms on the City Council between 1979 and 1991 and served as mayor in 1985. He also represented the city on various regional boards and associations, including League of California Cities, Neighbors Abroad and Santa Clara

Intergovernmental Council, according to a resolution that the council passed for him in 1992, just after he concluded his term. Continue reading his obituary [here](#).



May Fete Festivities

