



The Dispatch

Spring 2026

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.*

## Letter From the President

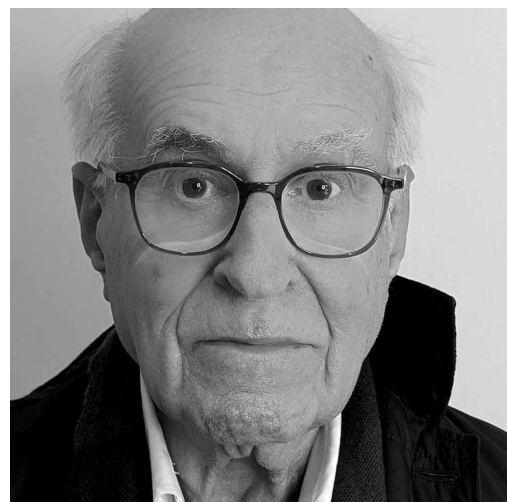


Over the past several years, my work as a Neighbors Abroad board member has taken me to several of Palo Alto's Sister Cities. I've enjoyed touring historic landmarks and breathtaking vistas, but it's the people I've met along the way that have made these journeys so special.

One of my most indelible memories of foreign friendship occurred during a 2023 visit to Enschede, our Dutch Sister City, situated just across the border from Germany. Along with Enschede VP Monica Schreiber, I served as a chaperone for four high school students who won a Neighbors Abroad-sponsored essay contest

based on the heroic work of Leendert Overduin, an Enschede pastor who saved hundreds of Jewish children from the Nazis during World War II.

During a welcome ceremony in Enschede's stunning Art Deco City Hall, Herbert Zwartz, in his mid-nineties but full of vitality, kept the audience in rapt attention with his first-hand account of life as a child who survived the horrors of the occupation through the aid of Pastor Overduin and other members of the Resistance. During his talk, Herbert gently removed a well worn Star of David from his jacket pocket, giving the students a concrete, emotional connection to the past. A few nights later, I



found myself seated next to Herbert during dinner as he regaled our small group of five with tales spanning decades and continents. He recalled moving to the American South after WWII and, despite speaking only passable English, was promoted from maintenance worker to manager of a textile factory in just over a month.

His stories radiated hope and optimism, and he nailed every punchline. When I learned of Herbert's passing last September at the age of 97, my initial sorrow gave way to an appreciation for his remarkable legacy. Herbert showed me the power of human goodness and resilience. As I continue my global travels, I know Herbert's spirit will guide me as I seek out the meaningful personal connections that come from sharing cultures and reaching across borders. - *Ed Fike*

Oaxaca, Mexico

## Sister City Support, Packed Up and Heading South



*Fun (and Quite Remarkable) Fact: Oaxaca's entire fire truck fleet has been sent by, or facilitated through, the Palo Alto Fire Department.*

That says a lot about the long-running ties between our Sister Cities, with fire trucks and equipment having made the journey to Oaxaca for decades. We are building on that tradition through several recent donations, not just of fire equipment, but also medical supplies, and a first for us: sewing machines.

The Palo Alto Fire Department, with our friend Engineer Yovan Sierra leading the effort, recently donated a treasure trove of retired (but still perfectly

functional) fire gear, brush-fire tools, tactical equipment, and shelter supplies. See below for more news about Yovan.

Senior community center Avenidas also recently contributed an eye-popping amount of medical equipment including walkers, wheelchairs, bedside commodes, and other mobility aids for seniors and people with disabilities. In Oaxaca, families are often the primary caregivers, and these basic items can be difficult to afford or access.



*Left to right: Claire Lauing, Tracy McCloud, Sarah Burgess, Candace Gunther, and Alan Stivers. Photo by Roland Wilhelm and HeyRolandPhotography.com*

Also winging their way to Oaxaca: 75 sewing machines, purchased with Neighbors Abroad funds for women served by partner NGOs in Oaxaca, where sewing can open the door to income and independence. Thanks to the North Hunterdon, New Jersey Rotary Club (of which our board members Ken and Flor Sanchez are members) for funding transportation from New Jersey to Laredo.

Also thanks to longtime Neighbors Abroad member Alan Stivers, who wrangled the logistics behind this ambitious effort, along with board members Sarah Burgess, Flor Sanchez, and Ken Sanchez. Ed Fike, Claire Lauing, Candace Gunther, and Jennifer Kleckner assisted with the packing and shipping. Finally, a big thanks for member Roland Wilhelm for documenting the packing with some great photos.



*Photo by Roland Wilhelm and HeyRolandPhotography.com*



## Hot News: Fire Engineer Yovan Sierra Promoted!

Neighbors Abroad has long facilitated the donation of surplus fire and emergency equipment from the Palo Alto Fire Department to their *bombero* brothers and sisters in Oaxaca. Engineer Yovan Sierra is our Palo Alto Fire Department liaison and the man who makes it happen, so it was a great honor for some of us to attend his recent promotion and badge pinning ceremony in early February, where his wife and son cheered him on.

# Business Brains and Sister City Spirit

## Heidelberg, Germany

In February, a group of entrepreneurs-in-training from Schriesheim, Germany (a small town just outside our sister city Heidelberg) came to town for a week-long collaboration with students in Gunn High School's BEAM program.

BEAM (Business Entrepreneurship & Math) is a hands-on, real-world course in problem solving and business thinking. Co-developed by a former Neighbors Abroad board member, the program has become such a standout that several of our sister cities have embraced it. Heidelberg's particular brand of enthusiasm has helped turn it into an annual student exchange.

During their week here, the students attended a Super Bowl party, hosted by Gunn BEAM instructor Khoa Dao and his students, shared app development projects with their Gunn counterparts, and experienced other Gunn classes. They also visited the graduate business schools at Stanford and Santa Clara Universities.





Councilmember Pat Burt was on hand to lead his trademark downtown Palo Alto history tour (including the obligatory photo op at the Sister Cities sign). The BEAM-ers also visited the Google Visitor Center, Intuitive and experienced a few other Silicon Valley hallmarks such as breakfast at Hobee's and Stanford women's basketball.

Huge thanks to the trip organizers and leaders, including Schriesheim instructors Johannes Walther and Tobias Wiegand, along with Associate Principal Cristin Seilheimer. Neighbors Abroad board member Bruce McLeod, Gunn instructor Khoa Dao, and our former Heidelberg VP Dr. Jeannet Kiessling (now Executive Director of the German American Business Association), all played key roles in making sure the students enjoyed a week of education and fun.

[Tsuchiura, Japan](#)

## Tsuchiura Exchange Brings New Friendships, Old Connections

Twelve exchange students from our Japanese Sister City Tsuchiura landed in Palo Alto on March 14 to a warm welcome from their Palo Alto buddies and host families, many waving handmade welcome signs. The middle school students have been corresponding since December, so by



the time they met in person, new friendships were already taking shape.

The visit also carried a lovely sense of history. One of the Tsuchiura chaperones, Taeko Banno, first came to Palo Alto as an exchange student on the same program 30 years ago. Now a ninth-grade English teacher in Tsuchiura, she returned this spring as a chaperone, a full-circle moment that says a lot about the staying power of this much-loved exchange.

Tsuchiura co-VP Evelyn Shimazaki, who has skillfully coordinated the exchange for several years, says a huge number of people on both sides of the Pacific make the program possible. "Just a few of

them include Saki Matayoshi, Japanese teacher at JLS and Greene, who worked with us to market the program to parents and students at Back to School night. She also hosted the chaperones in her classroom and included their participation in her lessons. I'd also like to thank JLS Principal Chris Grierson, JLS Assistant Principal Sarah Pierce, Greene Principal Courtney Carlomagno and Greene Assistant Principal Mimi Kwon for their warm hospitality in hosting the Tsuchiura students and chaperones."

This year, Evelyn was delighted to share program planning duties with our new co-VP for Tsuchiura, Lydia Kou, former Palo Alto mayor and city councilmember.

The Tsuchiura students spent time shadowing their Palo Alto buddies for a real taste of middle school life here. They also got a behind-the-scenes look at Palo Alto civic life, enjoyed outings to San Francisco, visited Silicon Valley landmarks including Google and Stanford, and even squeezed in an overnight adventure in Yosemite.



"It was such a joy to see the students connect so quickly and so naturally," Lydia says. "What makes this exchange so special is not just the places they visit, but the friendships they build and the window it gives them into each other's daily lives, families, and communities."

This reciprocal middle school exchange has been going strong for 33 years.



*Photo by Roland Wilhelm and HeyRolandPhotography.com*

## Welcome, Candace!



Please join us in welcoming Candace Gunther to the Neighbors Abroad Board of Directors.

Candace has built a multi-track career spanning programming, systems design, and management consulting, working with companies in both manufacturing and commercial real estate. And as if that weren't enough, she also owned and ran her own antiques and art business for 25 years, which feels like the kind of experience that makes a person exceptionally fluent in the language of culture and connections.

Candace entered the world of real estate in 2007, and she and her photographer-

husband Roland Wilhelm have been working together in real estate ever since.

Candace is joining Neighbors Abroad as Co-Vice President for Albi, France, alongside Jennifer Kleckner, and the role is especially meaningful to her given her French maternal heritage. We're thrilled to have her on board!

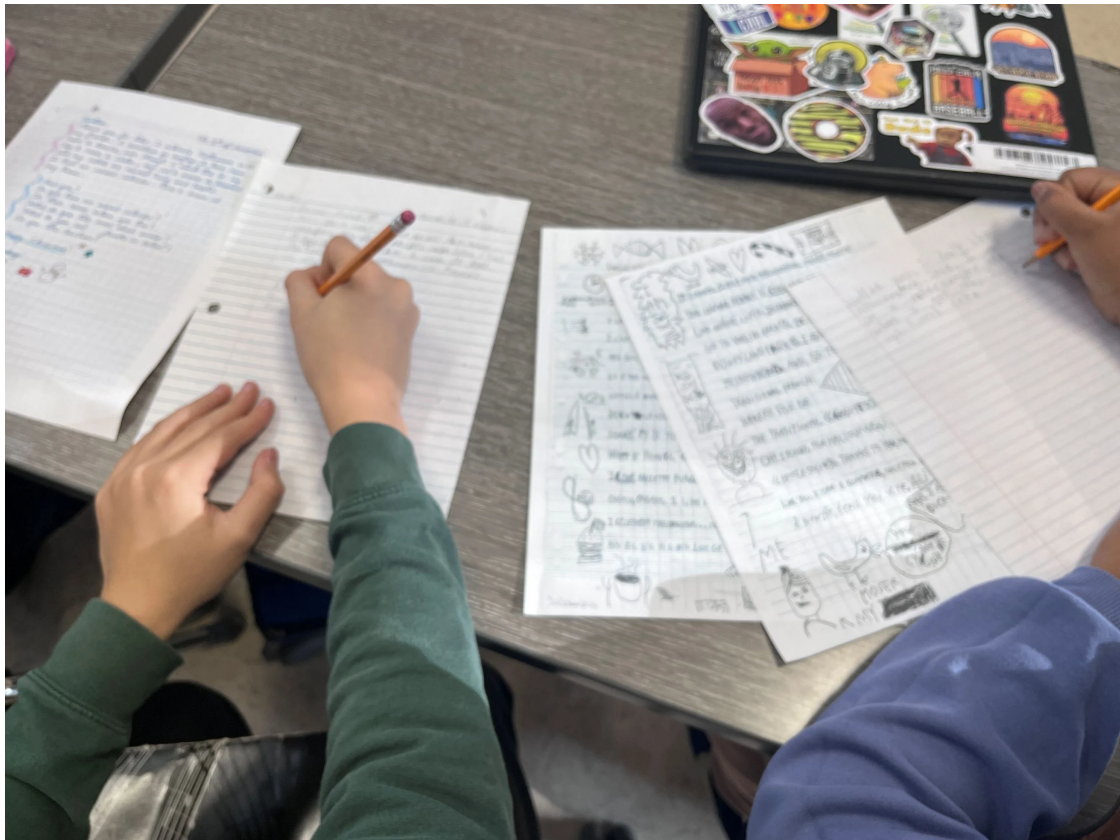
Welcome to our newest members, including several high school French learners who will be visiting Albi this summer thanks to our partnership with a Gunn High School French teacher:

Susan Borg • Maria Brown • Kanda Isihara • Makoto Kawai •  
Linda Lenoir • Kirsten Tasker • Kai Xin

We look forward to seeing our newest Citizen Diplomats at upcoming events! To become a member of Neighbors Abroad, scroll to the bottom of the newsletter and click the button.

Albi, France

## Albi/Palo Alto Pen Pal Exchange: Let's Hear It for "Courrier Escargot"



Three years ago, Neighbors Abroad's Albi team helped JLS Middle School French teacher Jacqui Kandell connect with Laëtitia Fabre, an English teacher at Collège Bellevue in Albi, to launch a classic classroom letter exchange between their students.

Turns out, handwritten letters still hold magic while also serving as a great vehicle for language learning. Madame Kandell reports that her students remain delighted by this "old-fashioned" pen pal tradition.

"Our students write three to four letters each throughout the course of the school year, and it continues to be an enriching experience for my students," Jacqui told us. But don't take it from us. Here's what a few of Madame Kandell's current students have to say:

*"I really liked writing to my pen pal over the last two years because I got to expand my French to the way that locals speak it, and I got to know someone I've never met. It was a really lovely experience overall. I hope to do something like this again!" — Radhika*

"I really like writing the letters because it gives the chance to share about yourself to someone in another country. You can also see what life is like there and how they live. Also writing a letter is nice in a digitized world." — Rhea

"I loved doing the letters because it gave me a chance to see how kids in France live and how different we are from each other. I also enjoyed getting to use my French in a conversational way." — Sarah

Albi 15/12/2025

Dear Dhyana,  
My name is Calie. I'm fine and you? I live in France in Albi. My birthday is on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2012, I am 15 years old. I am girl too. I have brown hair and brown eyes. I am shy, funny and kind. I have a mother, a stepfather, 3 sisters, 2 half sisters and a little sister. I have a dog and 2 cats. I love music too, I like listening to BABY METAL, it's a group. In France it's nice, but I'm tired at school. I like playing video games. During the winter break, I celebrated Christmas and New Year's.

I wake up at 6:50 AM. I go to school by car. On Monday I have Spanish, English, Technologie, French, History, Math and Arts. My favourite subject is English because is fascinating, and I don't like Math because he add more lessons. Then I back home on car or on bus.

Tu as fêté Noël? Si oui, qu'est-ce que tu as eu comme cadeau? Tu es partie quelque part pendant les vacances d'hiver? Tu aimes les jeux vidéo? Quelles sont tes origines?

Bonne année 2026! Que tous tes projets se réalisent!  
I wish you a happy and joyful New Year 2026!

Regards,  
Calie

Chère Calie!

ça va, merci. Ton nom est très beau, j'aime ton nom. Je n'aime pas le maths aussi parce que c'est un peu difficile. J'ai maths pour ma première période. Pendant les vacances d'hiver, j'ai voyagé en voiture à San Diego avec ma famille. Mon grand père habite à San Diego et j'ai une amie qui habite à San Diego aussi! J'aime le chanteur Black Pink, HLT, et Babymonster (des groupes filles) et j'adore les chanteur GIMS et Quiddad. Et j'adore le CORTIS group de garçons. J'adore beaucoup de groupes Indiens aussi. J'ai célébré Noël aussi! Mais, je ne suis pas que je reçoive  
Je suis né à Coimbatour en Inde mais j'ai déménagé en Californie quand j'avais un ans. Et toi? J'aime les jeux vidéo aussi.

How is life in France? The word around America is that people in France love poetry, is that true? If so (or even if not,) what's your favorite poetry? Sorry for the bad handwriting this time, my ink is running out :-). What do people in France think about Americans? I know a lot of people don't like us because of our president, but what do you think? To be honest, as much as I like it in Palo Alto, when I get older, I want to go to the University of Melbourne in Australia. But I'm not sure what I want to study in college yet so I might change my mind. Where do you want to go to college? I like Australia because of the weather, the public transit, and the people and things to do. How is the social state of France? I hope to speak to you soon!

## A Journey to Narok, With Purpose and a Little Adventure

Neighbors Abroad Helps Launch New Children's Library with Nonprofit Oliveseed Foundation



In mid-March, a Neighbors Abroad

delegation headed to Narok, Kenya, and surrounding communities to visit Palo Alto's first Friendship City, which also happens to be the first branch of the Neighbors Abroad family tree on the African continent. The trip was organized by Narok VP Barb Mackraz. Pictured here: Governor Patrick Ole Ntutu, Barb Mackraz, and Neighbors Abroad board member Sarah Burgess.



The delegation spent time deepening relationships with partners in the region, learning from local communities, and exploring future collaborations.

One especially happy milestone: the opening of a new library at Ololchura Primary School, a project of the Oliveseed Foundation, one of Barb's nonprofits.

The group also met with Narok County leaders to continue conversations that began when county representatives visited Palo Alto last year. From there, they visited Maasai Mara University and the Maasai Mara Conservancies Headquarters to learn more about education, conservation, and community-led stewardship in the region.



As always, the most meaningful moments were the most personal. Delegates spent time with Maasai women and families in their homes, learning about daily life and the rich tradition of Maasai beadwork, one of the most striking and expressive parts of the culture.

And yes, there were safaris too. The group explored both the Maasai Mara National Reserve and community-owned conservancies, taking in the astonishing wildlife and landscapes that make the region unforgettable.

Other delegates included a much appreciated donor to the new library in Narok, Karen Drucker, along with board members Bruce McLeod, Nodelyn Smith, and Claire Lauing, as well as Neighbors Abroad members Sue Correll, Ron Valencia, Carla Befera, and Doug Smith. And, as always, center stage was Amos Kipeen (pictured here), director of Oliveseed Kenya, and Barb's close collaborator.



*Local children have fun at the launch of the new library.*





Thank you, Pat Burt! Welcome George Lu!



A big thank-you to Palo Alto City Council Member and former Mayor Pat Burt for his many years as the liaison between City Council and Neighbors Abroad. Pat is pictured above, on the left, with Dr. Eckart Würzner, Heidelberg's Mayor.

Because we work so closely with the city, this role really matters, and Pat helped bring us into a new era of cooperation, connection, and plenty of Sister

City fun. He has been a terrific partner, bridge builder, and friend to Neighbors Abroad, and we're deeply grateful.

Now, as Pat passes the passport, we're delighted to welcome Councilmember George Lu, pictured here, who will take up the mantle. Get ready, George!

## Service, Support, and a Big Thank You to Kiwanis



In late January, board members Edward Gerard Fike, Sarah Burgess, Barb Mackraz, and Hank Heubach attended the 7th Annual Kiwanis Club of Palo Alto Charitable Foundation Grantee Reception. We were honored to be one of 36 local organizations that Kiwanis recognized with grant money.

A special shout-out to our own Hank Heubach, who has served (and occasionally led) both organizations valiantly for decades, going way back to a more genteel time when retail ruled downtown, parking was actually possible, and nobody needed an app to buy a cup of coffee. Hank has long been the connector cable between Kiwanis and Neighbors Abroad, linking two organizations that share the same belief in service, community, and showing up for others.

[Enschede, the Netherlands and Linköping, Sweden](#)

## When Two of Your Sister Cities Become BFFs ...



### *Brasset Linköping*

If sister cities had sleepovers and invited their friends, Linköping, Sweden and Enschede, The Netherlands would be hanging out at Palo Alto's house, braiding each other's hair and swapping playlists.

Over the past few years, these two charming Northern European cities have gone from friendly acquaintances to full-on besties, teaming up on sustainability initiatives and a growing list of collaborations. Now it is time for a little musical fun.

On May 20, 2026, Brasset Linköping (a delightful brass band that performed in Palo Alto a few years ago) and Het Rockkoor Enschede (Enschede's massive "rock choir") will take the stage together in Linköping for a concert titled "*Brass Meets Rock.*" Think tubas meet power ballads!

The concert is an example of what an active international Sister City network can do, turning decades of connection into an unforgettable musical mash-up.

The concert is one of the highlights of an upcoming delegation to Linköping. We look forward to reporting on that in our next newsletter.

[Learn More About Brass Meets Rock - May 20 in Linköping](#)



*Rockkooor Enschede, a large rock cover choir from Enschede, was established approximately eight years ago.*

## Palo Alto Camera Club Helps Deepen Sister City Ties



*"Playful Nibbles" garnered Palo Alto Camera Club Co-President Bob Fisher a first place award in the Print - Fauna category of a recent Palo Alto Camera Club competition.*

Some partnerships just make sense: Peanut butter and jelly. Bikes and the Netherlands. Photography and Sister Cities.

That's why the growing friendship between Neighbors Abroad and the Palo Alto Camera Club feels so natural. After all, photography is a language that needs no translation.

Over the past year, that connection has really come into focus (we couldn't resist), beginning with a rich collaboration between the Camera Club and Fotoclub de Zoeker, its counterpart in Enschede — and now expanding to a budding partnership with Albi, France's aptly named photo club, Albimage (more on that soon).

The Palo Alto Camera Club's Annual Competition just wrapped up and we wanted to share some of the highlights. More than 700 images were submitted, spanning print

and digital entries, with awards given in roughly 10 categories for each format.

We're proud to spotlight several winners who were active in our recent Enschede photographer exchange: Camera Club co-presidents Bob Fisher and Sue Borg, along with new-ish member of both Neighbors Abroad and the Camera Club, Roland Wilhelm — yes, *that* Roland, whose wife Candace just joined the Neighbors Abroad board. See photos above and below.



*At left, "Portal, Humuyum's Tomb, India," a first place submission from Palo Alto Camera Club Co-President Sue Borg in the Digital - Travel category. At right, "Simply Pink," a second place submission from Roland Wilhelm in the Digital - Person Made Objects category.*

[See More of the Winning Photos](#)

[Learn More About the Palo Alto Camera Club](#)

## Celebrating the Season with Our Community



*Neighbors Abroad + Palo Alto leaders + holiday cheer = an epic group photo.*

Neighbors Abroad's 2025 Holiday Party was a wonderful way to close out the year, bringing together Palo Alto city leaders with Neighbors Abroad members and friends.

A heartfelt thank you to our generous event sponsors: Hobe's, Terun, Vicolo Pizza, Zareen's, Sweet Diplomacy, and VITA Catering. Your support helped make the evening possible and strengthens the connections we build across our Sister, Sibling, and Friendship cities.

And special gratitude to Yudy Deng, co-VP for Yangpu (at center of above photo), for hosting in her beautiful home with such warmth and festivity.



*Left to right, Vice Mayor Greer Stone (rocking the best sweater of the evening), then-Mayor Ed Lauing, and Neighbors Abroad President Ed Fike*

# 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!

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Neighbors Abroad

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