



by David Bloom

“A sister,” wrote Toni Morrison, “can be seen as someone who is both ourselves and very much not ourselves — a special kind of double.”

She was referring to flesh-and-blood siblings, of course, but the same sentiment holds for the special relationships between Texas cities and their sister cities around the world. And those bonds are becoming closer as communities in Texas and other nations look to one another in new ways.

In the wake of our national recession and global financial uncertainty, “more and more Texas sister city programs are focusing on ways to increase economic development,” says Mae Ferguson, CEO of Fort Worth Sister Cities.

“[The] sister cities [concept] is about exchanging people, not just keys to the city,” says Ferguson, recently named Texas state coordinator by the Sister Cities International board of directors.

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Texas’ sister city offices work closely with chambers of commerce and economic development authorities to bring jobs and opportunities to Texas.

President Dwight Eisenhower created the sister cities program in 1956, as a way to encourage “citizen diplomacy” and get average



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Americans involved in global affairs. It was and is an ambitious and worthy project, and Sister Cities International continues to promote Eisenhower's goal of "connecting people and communities in an effort to foster a more peaceful world."

Sister city programs increase tourism, encouraging cities to send delegations and private citizens to visit, and provide participants with reliable business contacts. It's also a way to better understand the cultural differences among different countries — and an opportunity for Texas businesses to show that they want to understand the international markets in which they hope to compete.

Nationally, 600 U.S. cities and communities have sister city programs. These relationships extend to all corners of the globe, involving 136 countries and nearly 2,000 cities.

At least 27 Texas communities have sister city programs, and many have multiple relationships. Laredo, for example, has 29 sister cities, while Houston has 17. And you don't have to be a metropolis to have an international sister city; Goliad, with about 2,000 residents, is linked with Hidalgo, Mexico.

Sister city programs are funded in various ways. Some operate through local chambers of commerce or as a part of a city's convention and visitors bureau. Others are created as nonprofit organizations, as is the case with Fort Worth's program, which receives just 4 percent of its annual budget from the city's hotel occupancy tax.

Fort Worth's "Best Program"

In July 2012, Fort Worth's Sister Cities program received Sister Cities International's "Best Overall Program in the U.S." award for cities with populations of more than half a million at its annual conference in Jacksonville, Florida. This was the eighth time the 28-year-old program had received this honor, more than any other city in the country.

Fort Worth's program, which has an estimated economic impact of \$2 to \$4 million annually, recently added an economic development component as part of its selection criteria for sister cities.

Last year, the Fort Worth city council approved an eighth sister city, Guiyang in China.

"It's considered an up-and-coming city in China. Today, its population is 4.5 million, which is considered a small city over there," says Ferguson. "The city stands to grow as China wants to move its population off the coast. We thought it would be a

DISTANT RELATIVES



Bad Königshofen, Germany has a downtown recreational park named "Arlington" in honor of its Texas sister. In 2006, the city of Arlington returned the favor by opening a water park called the Bad Königshofen Family Aquatic Center.



New Braunfels had considered Braunfels, Germany its sister city since the Central Texas town was founded in 1845, but it didn't become official until their respective mayors signed a sister cities agreement in 2010.



Houston's only been around since 1857. Its sister city of Huelva, Spain has been inhabited since 3000 B.C.



The space between the sister cities of Nassau Bay, Texas and Star City, Russia is immense, but then space is literally what unites them. Star City hosts the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center, while Nassau Bay is adjacent to the Johnson Space Center (and home to many of its personnel).



Fort Worth's sister city Nagaoka, Japan contributed plants and construction materials to the creation of a Japanese garden in the Fort Worth Botanic Garden.



San Antonio is the only Texas city with a sister in India. It celebrates its relationship with Chennai every November, with the release of thousands of floating candles into the San Antonio River to mark Diwali, the Indian festival of lights.

good fit for us.”

In June, Ferguson traveled with Steve Boecking of Hillwood Properties to the U.S./China Cities Economic and Investment Conference in Nanjing, China. The goal of such trips is to build long-term relationships that lay the groundwork for future business deals. They don't necessarily happen overnight, though.



The Fort Worth delegation shares its expertise on economic development at a conference in the city's Chinese sister, Nanjing.

Fort Worth and Toluca, Mexico — a hub of private and public-sector activity in the nation's center — established a sister cities relationship in 1998. Earlier this summer, Spirit Airlines initiated nonstop flights between the two sister cities, a move that businesses and government officials on both sides of the border hope will make it easier to forge mutually beneficial partnerships. Among the first travelers on the new flights north were members of a delegation of Toluca businesspeople, as part of a trade mission the program coordinated.

Travel to sister cities, to truly get a feel for the nation and the people, is a big part of the program. This fall, eight young businesspeople from the Fort Worth area will travel to Nagaoka, Japan as part of the Young Professionals Japanese Business Mentorship Program. The contingent includes men and women from Northwestern Mutual, the Texas Department of Transportation, HGC Real Estate Services and Texas Christian University's Neely School of Business. They'll work alongside Japanese business leaders, and next year, Japanese young professionals will travel to Texas for similar mentorships.

San Antonio: Jobs, Investment, Soccer

San Antonio's program has a long history of economic development efforts. More than 20 years ago, the city opened its first Casa San Antonio foreign trade office in Guadalajara, one of its sister cities. The Casa San Antonio initiative, which builds upon sister city relationships, helps San Antonio-area companies that wish to export their products and services south of the border. It also facilitates trade from Mexico and has opened up investment opportunities for Mexican companies and entrepreneurs. Today, the city has Casa San Antonio offices in Monterrey, another sister city, as well as in Mexico City.

But it's not just jobs and investment capital moving back and forth; there are soccer balls, too. In June, the Monterrey Rayados played in a soccer doubleheader that also featured the San Antonio Scorpions. The exhibition drew nearly 12,000 fans to Heroes Stadium and led to hopes that clubs from other of San Antonio's sister cities, such as those in Spain and South Korea, may someday travel to the River City.

San Antonio also has a longstanding sister-city relationship with the city of Kumamoto in Japan. That partnership and San Antonio's Texas-Japan Office "help promote economic strategies," says Sherry Dowlatshahi, chief of protocol for San Antonio's International Relations office, and laid the foundation for Japanese investments in the city such as the Toyota manufacturing plant.

"Today, there are 29 Japanese companies with operations in San Antonio," Dowlatshahi adds.

In summer 2013, San Antonio will host Sister Cities International's 57th Annual Conference. The event will offer scores of educational seminars and opportunities to share best practices with other sister cities programs from around the country. At the 2012 conference in Jacksonville, Florida, San Antonio's former director of International Affairs Beth Costello gave several presentations to attendees eager to learn more about how sister cities can work together to create economic opportunities.

"Texas is ahead of the curve," Costello says. "We've long been reaching out to local companies to train our exporters in how to reach international markets." She encouraged sister city personnel from around the U.S. to examine their cities' strategic plans and consider how sister cities could help achieve their goals. "They really are the custodians of their community's international relationships," she says.

Sister cities "are the custodians of their community's international relationships."

— Beth Costello,
former director,
San Antonio International
Relations Office

Houston Humanitarians

It's certainly not surprising that Houston, a major port city where 25 percent of the population is foreign-born, would have a strong affinity for international sisterhood.

Recently, the Houston-Karachi Sister City Association joined in a historic memorandum of understanding with the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Greater Houston Partnership. Together, the three organizations will join forces to share business and investment information and to develop import-export strategies between the U.S and Pakistan.



Representatives from Houston and Karachi ink the historic agreement to foster stronger economic ties between the two sister cities.

The Houston-Karachi Sister City Association also has a humanitarian focus. Sister Cities International gave the association its 2011 Innovation: Humanitarian Assistance Award, which honors efforts that promote peace through “mutual respect, understanding and cooperation,” for coordinating Houston’s aid efforts for Pakistan following devastating floods in 2010. **FN**

Learn more about [Sister Cities International](http://www.sister-cities.org) at www.sister-cities.org.

SISTERS AROUND THE WORLD

According to Sister Cities International, Texas communities are partnered with 160 sister cities on five continents.

Arlington:

- Bad Königshofen, Germany

Austin:

- Adelaide, Australia
- Antalya, Turkey
- Gwangmyeong, South Korea
- Hackney, United Kingdom
- Koblenz, Germany
- Lima, Peru
- Maseru, Lesotho
- Oita City, Japan
- Orlu, Nigeria
- Saltillo, Mexico
- Taichung City, Taiwan
- Tehuacan, Mexico
- Villefranche sur Mer, France
- Xishuangbanna, China

Bandera:

- Strzelce Opolskie, Poland
- Tysmenytsia City/District, Ukraine

Big Spring:

- Hadera, Israel
- San Miguel el Alto, Mexico

Bryan/College Station:

- Greifswald, Germany
- Kazan, Russia
- Salamanca, Mexico
- Zuazua, Mexico

Corpus Christi:

- Agen, France
- Keelung City, Taiwan
- Monterrey, Mexico
- Toledo, Spain
- Veracruz, Mexico
- Yokosuka, Japan

Farmers Branch:

- Bassettlaw District, United Kingdom
- Garbsen, Germany
- Schonebeck, Germany

Fort Worth:

- Bandung, Indonesia
- Budapest, Hungary
- Guiyang, China
- Mbabane, Swaziland
- Nagaoka, Japan
- Reggio Emilia, Italy
- Toluca, Mexico
- Trier, Germany

Goliad:

- Hidalgo, Mexico

Grand Prairie:

- Baden bei Wien, Austria
- Charlesbourg, Canada
- Gueishan, Taiwan
- Kalush, Ukraine

Houston:

- Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
- Baku, Azerbaijan
- Chiba City, Japan
- Grampian Region, Scotland, United Kingdom
- Guayaquil, Ecuador
- Huelva, Spain
- Istanbul, Turkey
- Karachi, Pakistan
- Leipzig, Germany
- Luanda, Angola
- Nice, France
- Perth, Australia
- Shenzhen, China
- Stavanger, Norway
- Taipei City, Taiwan
- Tampico, Mexico
- Tyumen, Russia

Irving:

- Boulogne-Billancourt, France
- Darkhan, Mongolia
- Espoo, Finland
- Marino, Italy
- Merton, United Kingdom

Karnes City:

- Lesnica, Poland

Killeen:

- Osan City, South Korea
- San Juan, Puerto Rico

La Grange:

- Frenstat, Czech Republic
- Olfen, Germany

Laredo:

- Acambaro, Mexico
- Chenzhou, China
- Cienega de Flores, Mexico
- Ciudad Valles, Mexico
- Cuernavaca, Mexico
- Escobedo, Mexico
- Guadalajara, Mexico
- Guadalupe, Mexico
- Jerez de Garcia Salinas, Mexico
- Lampazos, Mexico
- Laredo, Spain
- Lazaro Cardenas, Mexico
- Leon, Mexico
- Los Herreras, Mexico
- Mexticacan, Mexico
- Moncolva, Mexico
- Montemorelos, Mexico
- Murray Bridge, Australia
- Nuevo Laredo, Mexico
- Papantla, Mexico
- San Antonio de Areco, Argentina
- San Miguel de Allende, Mexico
- Tainan City, Taiwan
- Tepatitlan, Mexico
- Tlahualilo, Mexico
- Tonalá, Mexico
- Torreon, Mexico
- Veracruz, Mexico
- Zixing City, China

McAllen:

- Acapulco, Mexico
- Belize City, Belize
- Cadereyta Jimenez, Mexico
- Cuidad Victoria, Mexico
- Ciudad Guadalupe, Mexico
- Garcia, Mexico
- Ganzhou, China
- Irapuato, Mexico
- Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo, Mexico
- Monterrey, Mexico
- Reynosa, Mexico
- San Jose, Costa Rico
- Tampico, Mexico
- Taxco, Mexico
- Ville Saint Laurent, Canada

Nassau Bay:

- Star City, Russia

New Braunfels:

- Braunfels, Germany

Pasadena:

- Hadano, Japan

Pharr:

- Abasolo, Mexico
- Burgos, Mexico
- Cancun, Mexico
- Ciudad Valles, Mexico
- Dolores Hidalgo, Mexico
- Escobedo, Mexico
- Metepec, Mexico
- Reynosa, Mexico
- San Andres Tuxtla, Mexico
- San Jose de Iturbide, Mexico
- San Luis de la Paz, Mexico
- San Luis Potosi, Mexico
- Santa Maria del Rio, Mexico
- Teziutlan, Mexico
- Veracruz, Mexico

Prairie View:

- Belize City, Belize

Prairie View:

- Punta Gorda, Belize
- Pabellon de Arteaga, Mexico
- Aseseeso-Akwapem, Ghana

San Antonio:

- Chennai, India
- Guadalajara, Mexico
- Kaohsiung City, Taiwan
- Kumamoto, Japan
- Kwangju, South Korea
- Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain
- Monterrey, Mexico
- Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain

Seguin:

- Millicent, Australia
- San Nicolas de los Garza, Mexico
- Vechta, Germany

Southlake:

- El Fuerte Sinaloa, Mexico
- Suzhou, China
- Tome City, Japan

Tomball:

- Telgte, Germany
- Jelinia Gora, Poland
- Lo Barnechea, Chile

Tyler:

- Yachiyo City, Japan
- Jelinia Gora, Poland
- Yachiyo City, Japan
- Lo Barnechea, Chile
- San Miguel de Allende, Mexico

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