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ASCI Newsletter

July 2020

Promoting International Partnerships



The World in Harmony in Trying Times

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Message from the President

by Ken Nelson



Breaking down Barriers and Building Bridges

Three months ago we began our COVID-19 lockdowns, and I have been heartened by our organization's spirit of community. The Dunkeld & Birnam Committee showed us that in the midst of our separation we can build even stronger virtual bridges through their joint church service, and our board has continued to work on a number of initiatives to strengthen ASCI and raise our profile within the city. I am grateful to everyone's commitment and am confident that once we are able to return to our "normal" lives we will be in position to do even greater things.

However, there are some things that I hope we never "return to".

While the pandemic consumed our attention this spring, I am sure none of us could have imagined that an even bigger issue, one that has been festering among us for centuries, would explode both in the streets of Asheville and around the globe: systemic racism. Our eyes have been opened by the truly horrific actions we have witnessed, and while we struggle to comprehend all the images we see on our televisions we know that the issues are real, and that we cannot turn away.

I know that many of us became involved with Sister Cities in an effort to break down the barriers that separate peoples and cultures across the globe, and with the goal of building bridges of friendship, opportunity and understanding with and among our seven Sister City communities. Now we are being asked if we can do the same thing here at home – can we break down the barriers of prejudice and build bridges of inclusion with and among our minority communities? While all of us (including myself) have much to learn, and while most of us may find ourselves uncomfortable and will even make mistakes, the time for inaction has passed. Let us state unequivocally that Black Lives Matter, that we do need to lean in and listen, and most importantly we need to not keep silent. To paraphrase Sam Cooke, I really do pray that a change is gonna come; let's strive to make ASCI an instrument in bringing about that change.

Board member Jay Harris has launched [Carpe Global](#), a website initiative designed to inform and empower global citizens. As an international education specialist, Jay has seen the benefit of sharing information about international resources and opportunities with students, educators, and global citizens in general. He says, "There is so much out there, much of it not obvious or easily found, so even the most global thinkers often miss these things." Carpe Global features information about a wide range of content types like articles, curriculum supplements, blogs, videos, and fellowships. The content spans dozens of global topics like immigration, foreign policy, education, journalism, art, and much more. The website also features a worldwide events calendar and other special elements.

All content on the website is available for free through August 1 as a public service during the pandemic. On that day, it will revert to a subscription model. On behalf of ASCI, Jay wants to help local educators and students take advantage of the website free of charge.

Those interested in more global content can follow on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

ASHEVILLE SISTER CITIES IN THE NEWS

The August 24, 2020 issue of the *Mountain Xpress* featured a number of articles by reporter Thomas Calder. They feature an overview of ASCI history and purpose by our elder statesman Ken Richards, and a report featuring an interview with Saumur English teacher Élise Guillemet, recounting her and her 34 students' reactions to visiting a group of friends living in a different culture and speaking a different language. Please note below some of the things that were discussed.



“We have the wrong image,” mentioned Ken. We want everyone to know how much better things are in our nation. Well, everyone feels where they live is pretty good too, and they take pride in it. We’re no better than anybody else; we’re no worse than anybody else – we’re all just as good as.”

“Stepping down from the imaginary pedestal of American exceptionalism is essential for the advancement of all global citizens. We have to realize we must respect people, and I daresay must love people. But first, we have to respect and know ourselves.”

In February, **Élise Guillemet** left Saumur, France, to visit Asheville as part of an exchange program co-organized by Asheville Sister Cities. she was joined by a colleague as well as 34 high school students from Lycée Duplessis Mornay. “Asheville was the perfect opposite of the USA cliché,” she said. “We all felt grateful to visit such a friendly and progressive community.” Upon their return home, Guillemet and her pupils prepared for an April reunion, when 13 students from the Franklin School of Innovation we scheduled to arrive in Saumur. COVID-19, however, placed those plans on hold indefinitely.

During France’s nationwide lockdown, which began in mid-March, “We were not allowed to leave our homes except for one hour per day.” Those who disobeyed, she continued, were penalized by fines of 135 euros (roughly \$151). Restrictions ended in May. “We currently see many debates in the news about the French police, about racial profiling, and about our judicial system’s handling of police officers’ blunders. Guillemet continues that she was not surprised to learn about similar conversations and protests in Asheville. “People seemed tolerant, welcoming and open-minded. I’m sure they felt the need to express themselves and I admire their support.”

Élise Guillemet was grateful that she and her students were able to visit Asheville before the pandemic started spreading around the world.



After their return to Saumur, the students created a blog (“web log”) in which they talked about some of their favorite moments during the exchange in Asheville. We have room for one of them:

Saumur students in Cooking Class

by Flavien Chapu, student from Saumur

During this trip we were able to taste some typical regional and American dishes. Indeed, after visiting the university we were able to take an active part in the American cooking class. One of these famous dishes was cornbread. This typical American dish is not very famous in France which allowed us to discover quite a different taste from the typical French bread. Then we learnt to cook the White Lightning Chicken Chili. This fantastic spicy soup is amazingly simple and extremely fast to make. This preparation was probably the most appreciated one, along with the last dish. The last preparation is a famous chocolate brownie. This rather widespread dish is a delight for everyone, young and old alike and did not have time to cool down.....to be eaten .



But one of the parts that everyone has probably enjoyed the most was tasting. The soup and corn bread mixed quite well and because the brownie was still hot and melting, it was quite a delight to our taste buds. Unfortunately, after eating our filling we moved on to the less popular part of any cook, cleaning, and storage.

To conclude we can say that this activity led by fantastic people was very interesting to discover new dishes unknown in France and the atmosphere was so pleasant that we could share a good laugh during the preparation of these different dishes.

DUNKELD and BIRNAM joint religious service

The joint service is believed to be the first of its kind. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, churches have been seeking new ways to worship without gathering in person. On Sunday, May 10, the Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church tried something completely new: a joint worship service with its sister congregation, Dunkeld Cathedral, in Dunkeld, Scotland.

“More than any time any of us can remember, churches all around the world are sharing a common grief, while also sharing the common challenge of not being able to meet for worship,” says Rev. Dr. Steve Runholt, pastor of the Warren Wilson Presbyterian congregation. “In talking with our sister congregation in Dunkeld, we thought perhaps we can share in this grief together, and also seek meaning together as we journey through it,” Runholt added.

The joint service included readings of the 23rd Psalm in both English and Scots, also featured a solo violin performance by noted Scottish fiddler, Pete Clark, on a violin played by its original owner in the trenches of World War I.

The service was broadcast on YouTube at 10:00 a.m. local time, 3:00 p.m. in Scotland, and is believed to be the first of its kind. “I don’t know of another example of a service like this, when two congregations separated by an ocean gathered together for a joint worship service,” observed Doug Orr, President Emeritus of Warren Wilson College and co-chair the Dunkeld and Birnam / Asheville Sister City Committee. “It’s such a perfect expression of the Sister Cities’ mission of building bridges between distant communities throughout the world,” added Orr.

The two sister congregations are part of a larger Sister City relationship between Asheville, and Dunkeld and Birnam in Perthshire, which was established in 2017. “This shared service is a lovely way for our two communities to come together during this difficult time,” added Fiona Ritchie, host of the popular radio show *The Thistle & Shamrock*, and a member of the Cathedral congregation. “It’s a way to show that even when we’re staying home and staying safe, we can still connect with one another.”

SAN CRISTÓBAL de las CASAS / HELPING THE MAYA WEAVERS

by Gwem Hughes

Our news from San Cristobal is a wish for our well-being and to let us know they are “staying at home” with family as we are here. Numbers of victims of coronavirus are rising there and we wish to send our best wishes and love to all our friends and colleagues there. We do have several potential projects – a water project and a new wheelchair project. We were very disappointed to announce that our weaver trip, previously scheduled for May of 2020, will be postponed until 2021. Our contacts there are trying to gather student art to send here in September for the Student Art Show, but we are all uncertain of participation at this point also.



News from the earthquake in San Cristobal: Ines Paniagua sends word on “el terremoto” – the recent 7.4

earthquake that shook the west coast of southern Mexico. “We are all fine and there was very little damage. Yes, it was very hard. We always go outside on the street and again this time. It started harder and longer. It was frightening! I think we are getting used to it.”



A message from Lori Davis about helping the weavers:

Friends, as I'm sure you have been, I've been struggling with how to respond to the crisis of COVID in our sister city in Chiapas. I have been quite lost on what can make a big impact, and quickly. Recently, via Paul Worley, the Weaving for Justice Cooperative came back into my life. I found them on instagram, purchased a very beautifully woven blouse, and the money went directly to the woman who made the blouse. It was delivered to my house around 3-5 days after I purchased it, and it came with a story about the design, which community my funds would impact, and other ways I could help Maya weaving women in Chiapas. Christine Eber (author, whom I'm sure many of you know

via her book *When a Woman Rises*) helps to run this organization and she wrote me a very beautiful email and a note in my purchase. *Weaving For Justice* is as fair trade as it gets, and the funds go directly to the weavers. I think supporting this organization either through donations or purchases is a direct and quick way to help our friends in Chiapas, and your funds will impact the women and their families immensely. If you would like to donate, please go to <https://weaving-for-justice.org/> and click the blue DONATE NOW button. On this website they do have an "online store" tab which has bookmarks, small textiles, etc. but they do have many blouses also (if that's your interest) on their instagram. If you don't have instagram, please contact weavingforjustice@gmail.com to ask about their current inventory.

VLADIKAVKAZ RETROSPECTIVE



Constance Richards with three of the children that were at The Beslan School when the terrorists bomb did so much damage, killing and injuring so many. ASCI and SCI raised funds to get medical assistance to these children and the community.

On Sept. 1, 2004, armed Chechen rebels took some 1,200 children and adults hostage at a school in **Beslan**,

North Ossetia, Russia, at approximately 9 a.m. local time. The siege ended on September 3, 2004, with more than 330 killed, including 186 children, and more than 700 people wounded.

Constance and her late husband Vadim Bora, a talented artist and native of Vladikavkaz. Photo taken in offices of major newspaper Severnaya Ossetia, *North Ossetia*. Asheville has been twinned with this area for the last twenty-plus years.



OSOGBO UPDATE



In speaking with Osogbo Sister Cities Committee Chair Dr. Seyi Atanda, Nigeria is continuing to push through a sluggish economy. Agriculture and the fish markets are hard hit with the strong decline in demand as travel has halted. Schools are not in session and due to a great loss of jobs, many cannot pay tuition for their children to even attend. Almost every industry has been impacted directly or indirectly.

Overall, Nigeria's rate of infection is not as high as the US and has a 2.5% death rate of those who contract Covid-19. The city of Osogbo currently has 150 reported cases and while the rate continues to climb, they are hopeful that

domestic flights will soon reopen as well as the economy. In terms of needs, face shields and masks or any protective equipment for front line workers is very sought after.

KARPENISI UPDATE

A delegation to Karpnisi is planned for May 20th-29th, 2021 and there are still spaces available. Please contact Sophie Mills (smills@unca.edu) to be added to the interest list. Photo: Karpnisi delegation to the ASCI world Congress 2005



GREAT ASCI MOMENTS!

THANK YOU TO OUR AMAZING SISTER CITIES ALL OVER THE WORLD!



1. Hiram Marina (San Cristóbal) and Seyi Atanda (Osogbo) after a dinner together here in Asheville



2. The Amber Guys - from San Cristóbal with Saumur Mayor Marchand after a lovely brunch together in Asheville



3. ASCI gathering with Dunkeld and Birnam delegation on the roof at Highland Brewery

4. Wheelchair Distribution moment with Rotary Asheville and Club Rotario and ASCI



5. Maya Performers and ASCI with Cherokee elders at sacred mound site of Kituwah

6. Delegation members from Valladolid with ASCI members Lisa Marie Quinlan and Jane Goldthwait visiting the Boundary End center for Maya studies - home of the late George Stuart and his amazing library of the Maya



OUR 2020 CORPORATE MEMBERS
Earthart Network, Kudzu Brands, Purplecat Networks, Spaceplan

President - Ken Nelson	knelson (at) bluedeltaenergy.com
Vice President – Andrew Craig	kurmugon (at) bellsouth.net
Secretary – Alice Keller	gakeller (at) gakeller.com
Treasurer – Jackie Craig	appcraft (at) bellsouth.net

ASCI COMMITTEE CONTACTS

ASCI Board Meeting	3 rd Thursday of each month – 6:00 pm <i>United Way Office Conference Room, 50 S. French Broad Ave</i>
Dunkeld&Birnam Committee	time and date TBA – Contact Committee Chair <i>Rick Lutovsky – rlutovsky (at) gmail.com</i>
San Cristóbal Committee	2 nd Thursday, 5:30 pm <i>Gwen Hughes – gwengh (at) charter.net</i>
Saumur Committee	4 th Monday of each month – 5:30pm <i>Jessica Coffield – jeallen8 (at) gmail.com</i>
Karpenisi Committee	1 st Monday of the month <i>Sophie Mills – smills (at) unca.edu</i>
Valladolid Committee	4 th Wednesday of the month – 6:00pm <i>Janell Cooper – janellcooper7 (at) gmail.com</i>
Osogbo Committee	1 st Monday of the month (contact Chair for time and venue) <i>Eboné Graham – ebone.graham9 (at) gmail.com</i>
Vladikavkaz Committee	Time and Date TBA – Contact Committee Chair <i>Constance Richards – schtanzi (at) aol.com</i>
Global Outlook Committee	<i>Jay Harris – jayharrisglobal (at) gmail.com</i>



USA



France



Greece



Mexico



Nigeria



Russia



Scotland

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