

Charlotte's family of 7 sister cities soon will become 8

NEIGHBORHOODS

MICHAEL J. SOLENDER



Dining at one of my favorite neighborhood Chinese restaurants recently, I asked the waiter about the Chinese city that bore the restaurant's name, Baoding.

He explained that Baoding lies about 70 miles south of Beijing, nearly halfway between Beijing and Shijiazhuang, the capital of Hebei province. He also told me that Baoding was an official sister city to Charlotte.

The Queen City has a sister? Actually we have several. Charlotte has an official filial bond with eight cities across the globe. According to the Charlotte International Cabinet, our sister cities are:

Arequipa, Peru: Charlotte's first sister city, a relationship that was established in 1962. The city, famous for its historic center built from volcanic rock, is called the White City.

Krefeld, Germany: Situated on the west bank of the Rhine River, near Holland. The city is known as the silk and velvet capital of Europe.

Baoding, Peoples Republic of China: Only 70 miles from Beijing, Baoding is more than 2,300 years old.

Voronezh, Russia: Lies 350 miles south of Moscow and dates from 1585. Czar Peter the Great later established a ship-building center there.

Limoges, France: Just 229 miles south of Paris, Limoges is famous for its beautiful porcelain and enamel pieces.

Wroclaw, Poland: Located 170 miles from Warsaw, the city dates to the 11th century and has rebuilt itself in the last decade.

Kumasi, Ghana: The second-largest city in Ghana and the



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Charlotte Symphony Youth Orchestra teens Hayley Drennon, Katherine Turner and Avery McGuirt celebrate recognition of their concert in Limoges, France, in December.

capital of the Ashanti region, a land of ancient African royalty.

Hadera, Israel: Hadera means "green" in Arabic, a name derived from being built on top of swampy marshland in the late 1800s. Hadera will officially become Charlotte's newest sister city when final administrative requirements are completed later this year, according to the Charlotte International Cabinet, a nonprofit group that advises the City Council and mayor.

The tradition of establishing sister cities, or town-twinning, as the practice is referred to in Europe, can be traced to the ninth-century Germany and France, with the cities of Paderborn and Le Mans respectively. In North America, the first sister city arrangement was established between Toledo, Ohio, and Toledo, Spain, in 1931.

Global cooperation at the municipal level, cultural understanding and economic development lead the list of objectives behind the concept of sister cities.

Alina MacNichol, executive

director of the Charlotte International Cabinet, noted that sister cities are an important part of the group's work. The cabinet's mission, she explained, is to promote Charlotte as an international city and serve as a resource to foster international relationships.

"Our role is to nurture international relationships wherever we find them," said MacNichol, "Our sister city programming is a large part of that, though our work is not exclusive to those cities."

In 2009, MacNichol said, 850 foreign-owned firms were doing business in the Charlotte region, with at least 16 countries represented. These firms are responsible for more than 50,000 jobs and make a significant economic contribution to the region.

She noted that sister city programming and outreach extends beyond economic development and into cultural and educational exchange and benefit as well.

"We are proud of the strong cultural and educational ties we've been able to help estab-

lish and maintain," she said.

One such example is found in the Charlotte School in Arequipa, Peru. In 1988, a citizen effort, headed up by Jerald Melberg, helped build a K-12 school in an extremely disadvantaged area of the Peruvian city. The school provides the opportunity for children to learn in a positive environment that they would not otherwise have. Today, the school has more than 600 students and continues to get support from Charlotte citizens.

Loren Fauchier is director of global studies at Providence Day School. Their program affords students exchange opportunities and welcomes foreign students from a number of international locales, including three of Charlotte's sister cities: Arequipa, Krefeld and Limoges.

"We believe it is important to have a serious education and cultural component with our exchange program," said Fauchier. "In addition to English language studies, exchange students that visit Charlotte explore local cultural landmarks, including the Levine Museum of the New South, the Raptor Center, Lowe's Motor Speedway and participate in community service through work at Second Harvest Food Bank."

"There is nothing like establishing face-to-face relationships to enhance cultural understanding," said MacNichol, "Even in our world where we rely so heavily on virtual connections, putting people together in the same room provides tremendous benefits for all parties involved and the community at large."

Michael J. Solender is a freelance writer who covers Charlotte neighborhoods. Reach him at michaeljsolender@gmail.com.