

## Video creators help highlight sister-city relationship

by Betzabé “Mina” Turner Amigo Club President  
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*Amigo club photo: Ramiro Padilla (left) and José Arreguín got together for breakfast Saturday at Padilla's El Tapatio Mexican Family Restaurant to reminisce with other Amigo Club members about their longtime support of sister city ties between Ashland and Guanajuato, Mexico.*

A handful of Ashland Amigo Club members had breakfast Saturday with José Arreguín and Ramiro Padilla, creators of a video that captured the highlights of last year's 50th Sister City Anniversary celebrations in Ashland and Guanajuato, Mexico.

Padilla, owner of the El Tapatio Family Mexican restaurant, traveled with more than 90 other Ashlanders to Guanajuato in May, filming celebrations from start to finish. Arreguín edited and produced the video that was shown for the first time at the Amigo Club's annual Guanajuato Nights dinner in November.

Arreguín and Padilla have long been associated with the sister city relationship.

Arreguín, originally from Guanajuato, has worked in the Rogue Valley for many years as a business and employment specialist.

He moved to Medford in 1992, where he met Señora Chela Tapp-Kocks, a founder of the Ashland-Guanajuato connection and the Amigo Club in 1969. A talented singer and guitar player, Arreguín became a popular participant in Rogue Valley Hispanic community activities. He joined in annual Mexican celebrations organized by Tapp-Kocks with the help of Southern Oregon University students, including those from Mexico in the SOU Amistad (Friendship) exchange program.

“I consider myself lucky to have been able to share with my people who were so homesick for their songs and celebrations that some of them who participated even shed tears,” Arreguín said.

The celebrations from 1968 to 1997 involved harvest farm workers and the valley’s general Hispanic population.

They were held on Ashland’s Calle Guanajuato, Hawthorne Park in Medford, the Ashland and Medford armories, and the SOU ballroom and gymnasium in Britt Hall.

Arreguín joined Tapp-Kocks in visiting labor camps to organize dramas and singing among the workers. For eight years, he helped her stage annual Christmas “posadas” and International Days on the SOU campus, even assisting in directing singing and dancing presentations by the Mexican exchange students.

“I can see now how important these events were in helping elevate the appreciation of students and the Valley in the rich culture and history of the Mexican people,” Arreguín said.

Padilla came to Ashland from Guadalajara in 1997, establishing his restaurant alongside State Route 99 on the western edge of town.

At Saturday's breakfast, he reminisced about his 23-year participation with Amigo Club and sister city activities.

Gesturing toward the Guanajuato mural that covers a dining room wall in the restaurant, Padilla said, "I became part of the Amistad Program because I wanted to help SOU students learn more about my (native) country and to help Guanajuato exchange students appreciate our beautiful region here. The Guanajuato students come to my place to relax and, when they grow homesick, to gaze upon this mural."

During his visit to Guanajuato in May, the Ex-Alumnos Club of Amistad participants presented him with an appreciation award for "his never-failing support."

Padilla's restaurant is a magnet for Ashland and Guanajuato dignitaries and others during special sister city events, including the Fourth of July, when the summer festival queen accompanies a city delegation to Ashland. Diners during the years include Guanajuato mayors, city councilors and staff, firefighters, police officers, student nurses, visiting psychology professors, and Little League baseball players.

The Ashland Amigo Club recognizes Padilla's support of its activities that include the breakfasts and lunches he prepares for the visitors.

After Saturday's breakfast, Amigo Club board member Kernan Turner said, "The long-term dedication of Padilla and Arreguín, and hundreds of other volunteers through the years, have made the Ashland-Guanajuato connection one of the most active and warmest since the Sister City program began in 1956."