
**SONOMA-PENGLAI SISTER CITY COMMITTEE WINS SISTER CITIES INTERNATIONAL'S
INNOVATION AWARD (YOUTH AND EDUCATION)**

WASHINGTON, DC – The Sonoma-Penglai Sister City Committee (SPSCC) won Sister Cities International's 2015 Innovation Award (Youth and Education) for a city with a population less than 100,000. The 2015 Sister Cities International Innovation Award (Youth and Education) recognizes the accomplishments of outstanding community and individual sister city programs that promote peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation.

SPSCC's objective is to introduce the youth of Sonoma, California to the larger world and teach them the importance of creating and maintaining global relationships. SPSCC connected fourth and fifth grade students in Sonoma with children in the Shandong Province of Penglai in China through a pen-pal correspondence program. Through educational and cultural activities, the SPSCC Committee fosters a greater understanding between the two communities through mutual cooperation.

When the Mayor of Penglai visited Sonoma in June 2013, he quickly agreed to endorse this project and assigned staff to identify an elementary school in China for the pen-pal correspondence. A member of SPSCC contacted the local school district superintendent who endorsed the project – El Verano Elementary School was recruited to serve as the first sister city school.

Lynne Joiner, a Sonoma committee member, traveled to Penglai and hand-delivered artwork, photos, maps, and books from the Sonoma students to the Yisan School in China. She returned home with beautiful paintings and souvenirs created by the Chinese students for their friends in the U.S. There are now 100 elementary-aged students writing and communicating with one another.

Sister Cities International's Annual Awards are awarded in several categories including Best Overall, Innovation (Arts & Culture, Economic Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and Youth & Education), Volunteer of the Year, and Youth Leadership. Award winners will be honored at a special ceremony on Saturday, July 18 during Sister Cities International's 59th Annual Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The Sister Cities International 59th Annual Conference will bring together elected and municipal officials, engaged citizens, diplomats, and business leaders in Minneapolis, Minnesota to discuss, "Building Generations for Peace." Conference sessions will provide attendees with opportunities to learn about strengthening their sister city programs through informative sessions led by experts and industry leaders. For more information on the 2015 Sister Cities International Annual Conference, please visit: www.SisterCitiesConference.org.

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About Sister Cities International

Founded by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956, Sister Cities International serves as the national membership organization for over 545 individual sister cities, counties, and states across the United States with relationships in over 2,100 communities in 145 countries. This sister city network unites tens of thousands of citizen diplomats and volunteers who work tirelessly to promote peace and understanding through programs and projects focusing on arts and culture, youth and education, economic and sustainable development, and humanitarian assistance.

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