



# Around Our World

## ROANOKE VALLEY SISTER CITIES, INC.

Volume 24, Issue 2 | August 2021 – January 2022

Like us on Facebook!

## Virtual dialogue between Chinese, American Gen Zers

By Joe Cobb  
Roanoke-Lijiang chairman  
joseph.cobb@roanokeva.gov

On Monday, Oct. 18, I sat on the dais of the Roanoke City Council Chamber and logged into my laptop for an extraordinary event – a virtual dialogue between Chinese and American Gen Z students celebrating educational growth and talent. (Gen Z, or zoomers, describes people who were born 1997-2012.) Seeing students from different time zones and different lived experiences connect virtually to share their ideas, questions and talents was a truly inspiring moment.

The event was organized by the China Public Diplomacy Association (CPDA) and Global Times Online and hosted in connection with the Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries of Yunnan Province, the People's Government of Malipo County.

Students from William Byrd High School, led by their teacher, Chris Carr, and the Malipo National Middle School participated in the dialogue and exchange of ideas. Participating Byrd students were Wyatt Bowles, Kaitlyn Ferguson, TJ Bunn, Noah Franks, John Kiker, Lexi Aquino, Sela Beatty, Devin Liu, Cassidy Wrye, Corinae Turner, Daniel Letz, Jake Hilliard, Timber Raines and Milla Farrington.

The dialogue included a section of icebreakers exploring different aspects of American and Chinese cultures, then a talent show featuring the playing of musical instruments, singing and poetry, and dialogue topics on emerging ideas in language, sports, industry, entertainment, science and technology and social development. Chris Carr



Chris Carr

gave an overview of Roanoke Valley and WBHS history. Special thanks go to Wei-Li from Lijiang and Mei-Li Foy and Mary Jo Fassié in Roanoke for coordinating our student team from William Byrd High School.

The moderator, Su Yuting, convened the dialogue with opening speeches by Chinese diplomats, including the Chinese Ambassador to the U.S., Qin Gang. I was honored to offer words of welcome on behalf of the City of Roanoke, and highlighted the relationship we share with the people of Lijiang, one of our seven sister cities.

Roanoke has a long connection with Yunnan Province beginning with one

of our beloved citizens, Pearl Fu, who grew up in Yunnan and helped establish our relationship with Lijiang in 1996. Pearl's family was a member of the black Yi tribe; her grandfather was Lung



This is a screen shot of the Chinese students participating from Malipo National Middle School.

(Continued on Page 4)

### In this Issue:

Lijiang report .....	Page 1 & 4
RIP, Dot Roth .....	Page 2
President's report .....	Page 3
Time's top 100 places .....	Page 4
New board members .....	Page 5
Thanks to our donors .....	Page 5
Mark your calendars! .....	Page 5
RVSCI intern's report .....	Page 6
International film festival .....	Page 7
Young Artists Showcase .....	Page 8
Fassiés' Christmas traditions .....	Page 9
Roanoke-Kisumu report .....	Page 10
Roanoke/St-Lô report .....	Page 11
Roanoke-Opole report .....	Page 12
Roanoke-Florianópolis report .....	Page 13
Roanoke-Wonju report .....	Page 14
Roanoke-Pskov report .....	Page 15
Officers and donation/membership info .....	Page 16

# Dot Roth: quiet, hard-working, devoted



*As a young woman, Dot became a missionary to South Korea where she taught for 21 years.*

On Dec. 31, 2021, Dorothy Hubbard Roth, wife of Dr. Robert Roth who passed away in May 2021, departed this life. In fulfilling the mission of Roanoke Valley Sister Cities, Dot worked quietly and cheerfully alongside her husband. She served RVSCI as secretary and treasurer for many years. She was very conscientious and was pleased to tell us each month that our accounts balanced "to the penny!"

Dot grew up in Mississippi and was awarded full scholarships to Millsaps College for her B.A. and to Garrett Seminary for her M.A. In 1954, she became a missionary to South Korea where she taught for 21 years at Ewha University in Seoul and at Mokwan Seminary in Taejon. In 1975, Dot married Bob Roth, a former medical missionary in South Korea.

Mrs. Roth leaves behind their 3 children and their families: Thomas F. Roth (Isabel) of Las Vegas, NV; Luran Glover (Sloan) of Hampton, VA; and Joy Gebhardt (Jon) of Richmond, VA. Grandchildren are Jason C. Roth (Melanie) of Fredericksburg, VA; Richard K. Roth (Lisa) of Suffolk, VA; and Grace E. Glover of Hampton, VA. Dot felt that her children, grandchildren and precious great-grandchildren were a true blessing in her life!

Dr. and Mrs. Roth created and administered a retreat center at their



*Dr. and Mrs. Roth pose with Wonju Mayor Chang-Mook Won and his wife.*

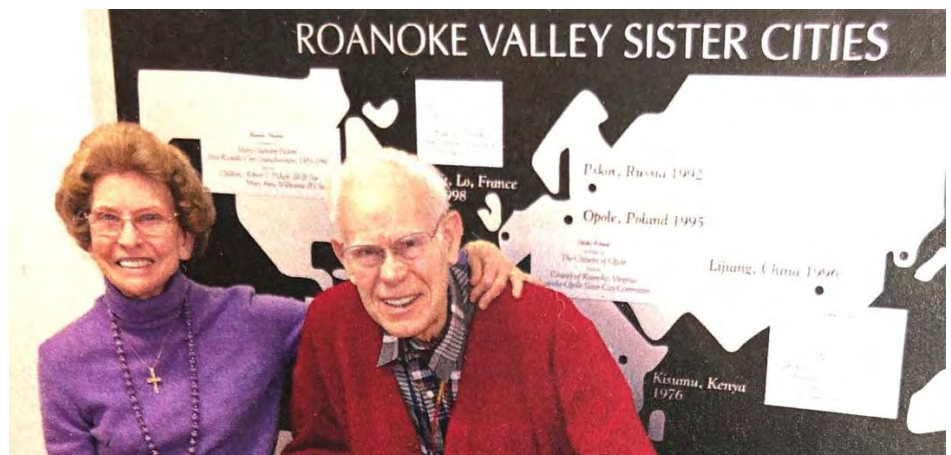
home, "Peace Pagodas," on Smith Mountain Lake where RVSCI members and their families came for a picnic and meeting each summer. Everyone enjoyed not only this delicious potluck event featuring many international dishes but also the camaraderie of our organization. A sweet-natured and caring person, Dot was the perfect hostess at these gatherings. She seemed to revel in having her home overtaken by dozens of hungry people.

A memorial service will take place at 1 p.m., Feb. 12, 2022, at Nelsen Funeral Home, 3785 Strawberry Plains Rd., Williamsburg, VA 23188.

*-- RVSCI board members and Nelsen Funeral Home*



*Bob and Dot at their 1975 wedding. Dot called her marriage "a bright blessing."*



*For years, Dot and Bob Roth worked side by side in all aspects of Roanoke Valley Sister Cities.*



# President's Report

## Whether on Zoom or in person, we've kept busy planning for 2022



By Mary Jo Fassie  
President, RVSCI  
mjfassie@gmail.com

Even though we have not been able to restart our international exchanges in person, the past six months have been busy.

The RVSCI executive board met virtually Sept. 7 and Feb. 1, but on Nov. 16 we met in person at the Center in the Square board room with all those attending being fully vaccinated and masked. At this meeting, we welcomed three of our four new board members: at-large members Sara Epperly and Archie Freeman, and Roanoke-Lijiang chair Joe Cobb. New at-large member Andreea Mihalache-O'Keef was abroad. See Page 5 for details about our new board members.

I Zoomed several times with Roanoke College's Olin Galleries director, Talia Logan, and Linda Harrison concerning the Florianópolis artist project, which the gallery will help fund this year or next. I also connected with the Wonju committee via Zoom to discuss the Wonju fall short film competition. We judged that competition in December and hope it will be part of the Lunar Festival at the Taubman Museum on Feb. 5.

In October, our intern, Charissa Roberson, represented RVSCI at the Roanoke College Internship Fair and used our display board, which I updated, as a backdrop. Charissa also hopes to do a presentation about RVSCI on the campus, so I completely redid our Power Point for her. With the help of Charissa, Linda Harrison, Kris Slowikowski and Bill Modica, RVSCI was also present at the Century Plaza Roanoke Welcoming Week event in September.

Also in October, I coordinated with new Lijiang chair Joe Cobb and Meili Foy to organize a Lijiang/Roanoke student Zoom exchange event. Roanoke was represented by the World Geography students of Richard Carr from William



*This is the New Year's card RVSCI mailed to our friends in Roanoke and abroad.*

Byrd High School, who carried on a dialogue in English among Chinese and American Gen Zers and even shared some student poetry. Mr. Carr presented his high school and spoke about the Roanoke Valley in general. Joe brought greetings from Mayor Lea and the citizens of Roanoke, spoke about his visit to Lijiang and explained Pearl Fu's connection to the Yunnan Province of China. The event was a great success.

In honor of Dr. and Mrs. Robert Roth, RVSCI asked the city of Roanoke to plant a star magnolia tree. This was done near Pearl Fu Plaza downtown by the Urban Forestry Coordinator for the city of Roanoke, William West. We have ordered a plaque to be placed at the base of the tree. Both Dr. and Mrs. Roth passed away in 2021.

Once again, RVSCI has partnered with Roanoke College in organizing an international film festival this month (see poster on Page 7). Throughout the fall and in January, I Zoomed with members of the committee to discuss the festival and presenters and choose the films. We will also be helping with the publicity.

RVSCI Treasurer Bill Bestpitch prepared the Department of Agriculture and Consumer report, and we mailed it in



*William West, Roanoke's Urban Forestry Coordinator, poses with a star magnolia tree planted to commemorate Dr. and Mrs. Roth. The tree is growing near Pearl Fu Plaza downtown. A plaque will read: In Memory of Dr. Robert & Mrs. Dot Roth for their years of service to Roanoke Valley Sister Cities 1964 – 2014.*

November. This allows RVSCI to keep its 501c3 (tax-exempt) status.

In December, the Saint-Lô committee held its dîner de Noël with intern Charissa Roberson giving a wonderful presentation about her Saint-Lô projects. Members of the Florianópolis group also attended. In January, RVSCI mailed New Year's greetings to officials here in Roanoke and to friends/officials in our 7 sister cities abroad. I submitted the Roanoke County grant application on behalf of our Opole sister city committee as Opole is twinned with Roanoke County.

As we look forward to events in 2022, I am happy to announce that RVSCI will once again sponsor a Young Artists Showcase for students ages 13-18. We have increased the prize money (\$25-\$300), and all Roanoke Valley High Schools have been contacted. This year's theme is "Generation Rescue: Sustainable Water for All." The deadline is March 18, and entries will be done digitally. See Page 8 for details.

We hope that you will renew your membership or join our organization in 2022. This will help us continue to sponsor our art competition and fund our many other projects.

(Continued From Page 1)

Yun, governor of Yunnan from 1927-1945 and commander-in-chief of the 1st Army Group. In 2008, one of Pearl's daughters, Colette, began a photography project, "We are Tiger Dragon People," as she learned about her Yi ancestry and explored her family's heritage. In 2019, the Taubman Museum of Art in downtown Roanoke featured a large exhibit of the pop-up books by Colette Fu and introduced the people of the Yunnan province to Roanoke residents. As the past two years have been

extremely challenging for the health and well-being of the people of the United States and China, our students reminded us of how essential ours are, and how, through exchange programs like this, we can grow our mutual support for one another. Even in difficult times globally and politically, our people -- with our students leading the way -- can overcome any obstacle by growing our relationships with one another.

*Joe Cobb is a member of Roanoke City Council.*



*This is a screen shot of Chris Carr's class participating from William Byrd High School.*

## Time magazine gives shout-out to Lijiang

By TIME staff



JULY 20, 2021: The challenges of the past year and a half have transformed our world, and few industries have been as affected as travel, tourism and hospitality. In many ways, our third annual list of the World's Greatest Places is a tribute to the people and businesses at the forefront of those industries who, amid extraordinary circumstances, found ways to adapt, build and innovate. It shines a light on ingenuity, creativity, revitalization and reopenings in destinations across the world.

While it may not be possible to safely visit each place just yet, they're all well worth reading (and dreaming) about until it's time, once again, to explore.

To see the full list, go to:  
<https://time.com/collection/worlds-greatest-places-2021/>



### Lijiang, China

#### *A launch point for adventure*

With its ancient cobbled lanes and overlapping waterways, the Lijiang Old Town in Yunnan province, named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997, has long been a popular escape destination for China's city dwellers. The smoky flavors of dishes from the country's Naxi minority are popular with visitors, as is the selection of craft beers and cocktails in the charming pub **Stone the Crows**. And several new luxury hotels work to highlight the region's natural beauty. Among them: **Hylla Vintage Hotel** and **Cloud Nature Experience Center**, whose undulating, walkable roof mimics the rolling hills behind it; and **Hilton Lijiang**, which has its own hanging garden. Lijiang is also the main access point for **Tiger Leaping Gorge**—a spectacular hiking trail tracing the Jinsha River—which just reopened after a half-year closure for renovations.

—Charlie Campbell



# Welcome to our new board members



## Roanoke-Lijiang chair:

Joe Cobb is a member of Roanoke City Council, and as Vice Mayor (2018 – 2020) he visited Lijiang, China. Residing in Roanoke since 2001,

he is active on many community boards, and he chairs the Council of Community Services and the Gun Violence Prevention and Audit Committees for the City of Roanoke. Chaplain at Hermitage Roanoke, Joe has an M.A. in Theology from Perkins School in Dallas and a B.A. from Southwestern College in Kansas and is working toward a Doctor of Ministry with Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia. He lives with his husband, James, and their two children, who are students at James Madison Middle School.



**At-large member:** Sara Epperly is an assistant principal and coordinator of advanced studies at Salem High School, and previously taught Spanish and Mandarin

Chinese in Charlottesville. She earned a bachelor's degree in Politics and East Asian Studies from UVA and a Master's degree in Teaching and Educational Specialist from UVA's Curry School. Her PhD in Educational Leadership, through

Old Dominion University, has special research focus on leadership through sociopolitical crisis events. In 2004, she conducted a research trip to Roanoke's sister city of Lijiang, China, and she taught at the American International School Dhaka (AISD) in Bangladesh. Sara, her husband and three daughters live in Roanoke.



**At-large member:** Archie L. Freeman III is the Chief Academic Officer for Roanoke City Public Schools. He previously served as principal at

Woodrow Wilson Middle School and at William Fleming High School. He earned his B.S. and M.A. from Virginia Tech where he is a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Active in the community, he received the NAACP Youth Council Impactors of Excellence in 2015 and was NAACP Roanoke Citizen of the Year for Education in 2018. An associate minister at Pilgrim Baptist Church, he assists in the music ministry, and is on the board of the Roanoke Boys and Girls Club.



**At-large member:** Andreea Mihalache-O'Keef is an assistant professor of Political Science at Roanoke

College. A native of Romania, she holds a B.A. from Randolph-Macon Woman's College, an M.A. and PhD from Pennsylvania State University, and she completed postdoctoral work at Princeton University. She enjoys exploring the world both in a professional capacity—traveling with students, teaching courses on International Relations, and conducting research—and with her family. Since settling in Roanoke in 2010, she has learned the value and rewards of positive community engagement, and she also discovered the joys of hiking, biking, and urban gardening.

## Thank you to our generous supporters

Since July 2021, these are our Benefactor and Patron donors and All-Cities member :

### Benefactor:

William Jefferson  
Patricia Kelly  
Evan Maxey

### Patron:

Archie Freeman

### All-cities member:

George Kegley

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

### February

- **Feb. 12:** Memorial Service for Dot Roth: 1 p.m., Nelsen Funeral Home, 3785 Strawberry Plains Rd., Williamsburg, VA
- **Feb. 16-27:** Roanoke College International Film Festival

### March

- **March 1:** Roanoke College Internship Fair, 4:30-6:30 p.m. (Charissa staffing)
- **March 4-6:** Roanoke Arts Pop – Taubman Museum. (RVSCI participating March 5-6.)
- **March 18:** Deadline for the Young Artists Showcase
- **March 31:** Kim Kyusik Virginia Historical Marker dedication at Roanoke College

### April

- **April 2:** Virginia Sister Cities state-wide meeting in Newport News (in person and/or Zoom), 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.
- **April 2:** "Le Carrefour de Saint-Lô/ The Crossroads of Saint-Lô," 7 p.m., Wortmann Ballroom, Roanoke College
- **April 5:** RVSCI board meeting, CITS boardroom, 5 p.m.

### May

- **May 21:** Local Colors, Elmwood Park, 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.

### June

- **June 7:** RVSCI Annual Meeting & Outdoor Dinner Gathering (venue TBD)

### July

- **July:** Roanoke/St-Lô annual Bastille Day potluck pique-nique. (Date TBA)

## College senior's internship has a French accent

By Charissa Roberson  
cbroberson@mail.roanoke.edu



This academic year (Sept. 2021-May 2022), I am interning with RVSCI as part of my studies at Roanoke College (RC). Because I am majoring in French, my internship has been focused primarily on the sister city of Saint-Lô, France, and our connections there. I would like to share about my experiences so far and the various exciting projects I have had the privilege of working on during my internship!

A major project that I have undertaken is the creation of an Instagram account to promote the relationship between Roanoke and Saint-Lô. The goal of the account is to share interesting information about both cities, in French and English, so that residents of Roanoke and Saint-Lô can follow the account and learn about their sister city across the ocean. To acquire this information, I created a questionnaire to poll residents about things such as their favorite cafés or parks, the best things to do and see in their city, or what the topography and flora/fauna are like. Mme. Mary Jo Fassié and Mme. Jeanine Vérove were instrumental in delivering the French questionnaire to residents of Saint-Lô. Through their help, I received a number of responses from Saint-Lô, including responses from a school. I have also received responses from Roanoke residents by posting the questions on my personal Instagram account.

The account, @roanoke\_saintlo, currently has nine posts and 65 followers. I have posted historical information, such as how the cities were twinned, as well as more light-hearted information, such as the best cafés and parks in each city. I hope to continue adding to this account in the upcoming months, and I hope that it will be a fun and informative resource for people looking to learn more about RVSCI and the connection between Roanoke and Saint-Lô.

In addition to working on the Instagram project, last semester I conducted an interview with former



*This image, from Charissa's multimedia production, "The Crossroads of Saint-Lô," shows the shrouded body (left) of the late U.S. Army Major Thomas Howie after the liberation of the city; at right are the young sons of French Resistance fighter Raymond Robin overlooking the ruins of Saint-Lô, which was nearly leveled in the Allied bombings.*

RVSCI intern Liesl Greider. She completed two internships, one in Saint-Lô and one based in Roanoke. Over Zoom, we talked at length about her experiences and what she learned while working with RVSCI. Afterward, I transcribed, edited, and formatted our conversation into an article; Liesl also sent me pictures that I was able to incorporate. The article was sent to RVSCI, and a copy is posted in Lucas Hall, the Department of Modern Languages at RC. I hope to post the article on RC's website as well. Liesl graciously and eloquently shared a wealth of information about her experiences, and I thoroughly enjoyed hearing from her. I hope that our conversation will be informative and inspiring to anyone seeking to intern with RVSCI!

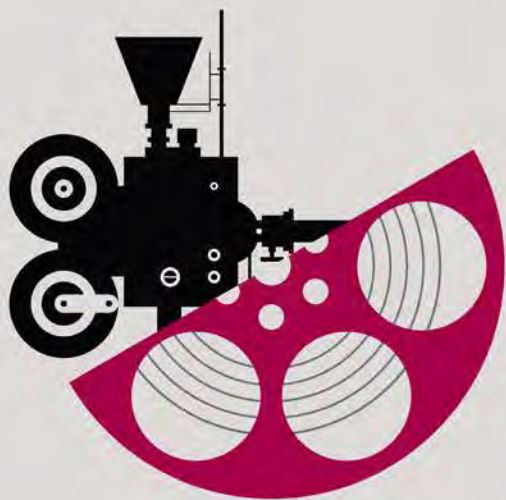
As part of my internship, I have also assisted at RVSCI events. In September, I attended a salsa night for Roanoke City's Welcome Week. We danced and enjoyed international foods, and we also got to talk to people about RVSCI. Later, at RC's internship fair, I represented RVSCI and spoke with many of my fellow students about the opportunities available. We had a sign-up sheet for people to write down their contact details if they wished to receive more information. At the end of the night, we had two pages of sign-ups! The internship fair was an excellent opportunity to raise awareness about the organization on RC's campus. In upcoming months, I plan to host an

information session on campus to inform even more students about the local and global opportunities RVSCI offers.

I have greatly enjoyed learning more about Saint-Lô through my work with RVSCI. However, my interest in Saint-Lô extends beyond my internship. As part of my senior year at RC, I am working on a multimedia, bilingual (French/English) production that will tell two stories from WWII-era Saint-Lô. The production, "Le Carrefour de Saint-Lô/ The Crossroads of Saint-Lô," follows the parallel lives of Thomas Howie, a major from Virginia, and Raymond Robin, a member of the French Resistance in Saint-Lô. With the invaluable help of RVSCI and other connections in France, I have been able to conduct extensive research into the French side of the story, through newspapers, books, and personal accounts. I have also received tremendous help from the Howie family as I researched their family's story. The production is set to take place on April 2, at 7 p.m., in the Wortmann Ballroom at RC. I hope that anyone interested in RVSCI, Saint-Lô, and/or WWII will consider joining us for this immersive evening, as we explore these incredible stories together!

*Charissa Roberson is also managing co-editor for the literary magazine Roanoke Review, and she edits the Entertainment page for the student newspaper, The Brackety-Ack.*





ROANOKE COLLEGE

Roanoke College International Film Festival

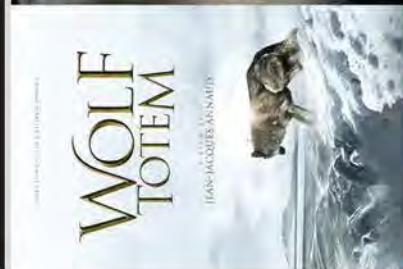
# International Film Festival

February 16–27, 2022

► roanoke.edu/RCIFF

The Department of Modern Languages is pleased to present the fourth Roanoke College International Film Festival. Seven films, representing seven foreign languages, will be shown virtually in order to make them accessible to the entire community! Our goal is to put the community and different disciplines in meaningful dialogue with one another and to increase community awareness of international cultures. Animals are the theme of our films this year. All screenings are free and open to the public and will have English subtitles. Each film will be followed by a post-screening, panel-led discussion. **Masks are required to attend the screenings.**

The festival is sponsored by: Roanoke College, Roanoke Valley Sister Cities, the Grandin Theatre, and the Taubman Museum of Art. Roanoke College sponsors include the Jordan Endowment; Office of Community Programs; Fintel Library; Departments of Modern Languages, English, and Religious & Philosophy; the Anthropology, Screen Studies, and Peace & Justice Studies concentrations; and Student Activities Board.



MANDARIN CHINESE & MONGOLIAN

**Wolf Totem**

February 16, 5:00 p.m.

The Grandin Theatre

Jean-Jacques Annaud

2015, PG-13



ENGLISH & KOREAN

**Okja**

February 17, 7:00 p.m.

Antrim Chapel at Roanoke College

Bong Joon Ho

2017, PG-13



SPANISH

**Amores Perros**

February 18, 7:00 p.m.

Olvin Recital Hall at Roanoke College

Aléjandro González Iñárritu

2000, R



ITALIAN

**Umberto D.**

February 22, 7:00 p.m.

Wortmann Ballroom at Roanoke College

Vittorio de Sica

1952, NR



ENGLISH

**KES**

February 24, 7:00 p.m.

Visual Arts Center Auditorium at Hollins

Ken Loach

1969, PG-13



JAPANESE

**Godzilla**

February 25, 7:00 p.m.

Antrim Chapel at Roanoke College

Ishiro Honda

1954, NR



FRENCH

**The Rabbi's Cat**

February 27, 2:00 p.m.

Taubman Museum of Art

Antoine Deleux and Joann Sfar

2011, NR



# RVSCI's 2022 Young Artists Showcase



The 2022 Showcase theme is  
**“Generation Rescue: Sustainable Water for All.”**

Sister Cities International aims to promote peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation – one individual, one community at a time. Climate change has become an undeniably harsh reality in our lives, making the importance of raising awareness and taking action more essential every day. As temperatures rise, water patterns are disrupted, ecosystems are disturbed, cultures are affected, and energy resources are proven to be unsustainable for long-term use. These ongoing changes impact our local and global communities in every aspect, and youth are the key to tackle this global reality.

#### Eligibility

- Students must be between 13 and

18 years of age at the time of the 2022 international deadline. (April 1, 2022, for the Roanoke top 5 submissions to Sister Cities International)

- The student must be affiliated with a dues-paying member of Sister Cities International. This is Roanoke Valley Sister Cities.

#### Sister Cities International Awards

- Photographs of all artists' work will be published on Sister Cities International's website.
- One artist will be selected as a Grand-Prize Winner, 2nd-Place Winner, and 3rd-Place Winner.
- The Grand-Prize Artist Winner will receive \$1,000; 2nd-Place Winner will receive \$250; 3rd-Place Winner will receive \$100.
- The winners will be announced at the virtual Youth Leadership Summit, tentatively scheduled for August 2022.

#### Roanoke Valley Sister Cities Awards

- Photographs of the 1st- through 3rd-place artists' work will be published on the RVSC website and Facebook page.
- 1st Place, \$300; 2nd Place, \$200; 3rd Place, \$100; and Honorable Mentions, \$25 each.

#### Submission Requirements to RVSC

- Students may select one (1) piece of original artwork to submit for this showcase.
- **Important note:** This year we will not be accepting physical artwork, only photographs of the artwork. To ensure that our judges have the best quality view of your artwork, please confirm that photographs are no less than 1350 x 1080 pixels.
- Photos of media that are accepted include oil, acrylic, watercolor, charcoal, colored pencil, crayon, ink, marker, etching, collage. Digital medium artwork will be accepted this year. This is not a photography contest.
- Only two-dimensional (2D), unframed artwork will be accepted.
- A teacher must send the photograph(s) of the student artwork along with the application to [roanokevalleysistercities@gmail.com](mailto:roanokevalleysistercities@gmail.com)
- All photos of artwork must be e-mailed by March 18, 2022.
- Judges will evaluate submissions based on theme interpretation, originality, and creativity.

#### ROANOKE VALLEY



#### SISTER CITIES



# Magazine spotlights Fassié family holiday traditions

*This excerpt is from a feature in The Roanoker Magazine's Nov/Dec 2021 issue, written by Ashley Wilson Fellers, reprinted with their permission. For more local stories, visit their website at TheRoanoker.com or get their latest issue on newsstands now.*

It would be hard to talk about Dr. Pierre and Mary Jo Fassié's love of French culture without first talking about another love story – their own.

Pierre Fassié grew up in southern France, and the couple met when Mary Jo came to Avignon to study French language and literature in her junior year of college.

"He was my conversation monitor," Mary Jo remembers with a laugh. "We would eat lunch together and speak in French, and our conversations kind of continued on for the rest of the afternoon."

The rest was history, as they say. The pair married and moved to Roanoke, where they dedicated their lives to sharing the language and culture they loved. Pierre served more than 30 years teaching French and Spanish at William Fleming High School; Mary Jo taught French for 40. Both led pen pal programs and student exchange programs, and now, post-retirement, they continue to promote cultural exchange through the Roanoke Valley Sister Cities organization, where Mary Jo serves as president.

"I think that most people will agree that a cultural exchange is a life-changing experience," says Mary Jo. "One learns to look at life from another person's or country's point of view."

So it should come as no surprise that, during the holiday season, the Fassiés' home is alive with the French point of view – the sights, sounds and flavors of a region that means so much to them.

"Christmas is our major family celebration," Pierre says. That's why, on any given day in December, you might hear traditional French Christmas carols or modern French holiday music in the background in their home. You might also spot an assortment of their favorite *friandises* – small French holiday candies

and candied fruits – mailed specially by Pierre's brother, just in time for the season.

"It's hard to get that here," Mary Jo says, "so he sends us a big box that will last us several months."

But perhaps most special of all is the Fassiés' elaborate *crèche Provençale*, which the family sets up about three weeks before Christmas. "It is a Nativity scene animated with over 60 colorful figurines from southern France," explains Pierre. The *santons* or "little saints" that populate the scene – each about two to three inches tall and hand-carved by a *santonnier* from baked clay – represent "nineteenth-century rural characters in traditional garments, each bringing an offering emblematic of their profession to Jesus and his family," Pierre says.

The Fassiés have collected these slowly, adding to them from their travels throughout France, and they include "the mayor, the village *curé*, who is the priest, a miller, a painter – just all kinds

of different occupations," Mary Jo says. "And they might be bringing their local garden vegetables or produce or animals or flowers as offerings to the *crèche*."

Each acquisition represents a special place or memory from their travels, Mary Jo says.

These days, the couple looks forward to a time when – free of COVID concerns – they can once again hold the *dîner de Noël*, or French holiday dinner, with other families in the Saint-Lô committee for Roanoke's Sister Cities program. And of course, they can't wait to engage in international exchanges once again.

"Exchanges let us learn how people live, eat, speak, worship and think, as well as learning about the history and customs of the host country," Mary Jo is quick to note. "We experience the local cuisine and have fun together."

For the moment, though, they'll celebrate a little of the spirit of *Noël Provençal*, right inside their home.



*This pair of santons is one of the Fassiés' most recent acquisitions. These "little saints" represent 19th-century Norman peasants and join a Nativity scene animated with more than 60 colorful figurines.*

## Ensuring clean water for 2 schools, nearby villages

By Bill Modica  
Roanoke-Kisumu chairman  
modicabill2@aol.com

Following a November 2021 conference call with the African Committee of Sister City International, we took on a project to improve drinking water supplies in two villages near Kisumu. Phyliss Venable provided information about CampWater Industries, which had done a water treatment project in Mombasa, Kenya, and arranged for her contacts there to work with us. I asked Joseph Akeyo of Support Aid Ministry in Richmond to set us up with a site at the God's Little Angel private school in Kisumu to serve as a demonstration project. Our Sister City committee provided support for the school in 2021.

By the end of November we had a contract to provide the water tests and had engaged Simon Okoth, a Virginia Commonwealth University professor who has experience with water projects in Kenya and elsewhere, to assist. He has helped with Magunga Primary School in Katito Township near Kisumu and offered to have that school be a part of



*Demonstrating the FUV2C to the director of the Kenya Water Institute and people from villages in the region. – Photo from CampWater.com*

the project as well. I hope that once the water supplies are validated we can set up a distribution network that will not only provide clean water for the two schools but also for nearby villages.

In December, I formally agreed to provide the funds to pay for the water tests and arranged to hire CampWater Industries to do the contract work. Our Sister City board approved the expenditure and transferred the funds

to Joseph who visited Kisumu and met with Joshua Sila and CampWater. Once the two water sources are tested, we will ensure that they meet water quality standards. Then we will determine what it will cost to install the purification equipment. Simon and Joseph were to have done the final site visits in January.

To raise the funds to install the systems, we will seek donations, grants and in-kind support. Our goal is to engage the County of Kisumu government and the United Nations Africa Support team. If we are successful, we can consider expanding to other communities in Kenya and in East Africa. The communities can then take on the maintenance and distribution challenges and may even sell bottled water to pay expenses.

I followed up with John Wiercioch, a Roanoke Valley artist who has friends in Kenya and who plans to visit there this month. He agreed to photograph the project sites and meet with local representatives at each place. I put John in touch with Samba Nixon of the City of Kisumu Urban Area Association, another group we have supported, to document the installations and engage local government officials. In the meantime, we received an offer of financial support from the Rev. Paul Fritts of Macedonia Christian Church in Orange, Va.



*An engineer with the Kenya Water Institute tests a portable CampWater FUV2C on the Mbgathi River between Karen and Ngong, Kenya. – Photo from CampWater.com*



On Dec. 15, 25 Roanoke/St-Lô members and friends met for our *dîner de Noël* at Anello's, an event space at Montano's restaurant. Members of the Florianópolis committee attended, too. Our speaker was Charissa Roberson (above), RVSCI's intern for the 2021-22 academic year. One of Charissa's sister cities projects has been the creation of an Instagram account to promote the relationship between Roanoke and Saint-Lô. The second project she described is a multimedia, bilingual production that tells two stories from WWII-era Saint-Lô. "Le Carrefour de Saint-Lô/ The Crossroads of Saint-Lô" follows the parallel lives of Major Thomas Howie and Raymond Robin, a member of the French Resistance in St-Lô. Read more about Charissa's work in her report, Page 6.



## Brief but memorable Normandy trip centered on friendships

By Sherrie Henshaw  
sherriehenshaw@gmail.com



Dinner chez Jeanine Vérove, who is seated second from the right.

In October 2021, my husband, Tim, and I took a short trip to Normandy. We stayed with Louis and Domitille Blondeau and their children, Paul, Isabelle, Constance, Georges and Jean. Their oldest daughter, Marie-Victoire, was away at college.

We spent our first full day in St-Lô shopping with Domitille because Tim's backpack with his clothes hadn't arrived in France with us. Tim did come home with a very nice, warm sweater made in Normandy. That afternoon, we attended an exhibition of photographs of France's liberation. Nearby was the Saint-Lô National Stud Farm, where we visited briefly.

We had a surprise waiting for us back at the house. Longtime friends and teachers from L'Institut St-Lô, Sophie Pradat and Maud Mourtoux Mimoun came over for a pre-dinner drink and snack. But the night was only beginning because Jeanine Vérove had invited us to dinner. The 7 courses made for a long, relaxing meal. And as many of you know, Jeanine is quite the cook. That morning she had dug up the scallops we ate that evening.

Jean Mesnildrey spent the next day with Tim and me at St. Malo, a beautiful walled town in Brittany. The famous crepes were a highlight at lunch.

On Saturday, our hosts took us to the

coastal town Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue. We enjoyed looking out at the sea, walking around town and visiting the sailors memorial chapel.

At the end of this memorable trip, as we got ready to leave, the youngest Blondeau, Jean, leaned over and in French whispered in Tim's ear, "Are there really cowboys in America?"

*Sherrie Henshaw is treasurer of the Roanoke/St-Lô committee.*



Sherrie Henshaw and Domitille Blondeau shop at St-Lô's farmers market.



Louis and Domitille Blondeau, Tim Henshaw, Georges and Jean Blondeau, and Sophie Pradat.

## Former intern returns to first passion, opens new business

By Aurélie Genest Lecoœur

"After my studies, I began my career with the French nuclear group Orano in Normandy. I was in charge of organizing visits to the nuclear plant. I had the chance to meet people from the USA, China, Japan and Germany. After two years, I moved to the south of France for a job in the communications department of another plant. In 2002, I joined the head office in Paris. During all this time, I was married to my husband, François-Xavier Lecoœur. I met him during my internship in Roanoke in the summer and fall of 1997, which is why this town will always be in my heart.

"After Orano, in 2003, I worked as communications manager for a consulting company in Paris. Six years later, we decided to return to Normandy with our first kid, Candice. I found a job in Deauville as communications office director. Each year, we hosted the American Film Festival, and many

American people came to Deauville. It's great! I stayed in this mission for 9 years. Our second kid, a beautiful boy named Clarence, was born in 2012. Last year I was chief of protocol for the Normandy Region. I stayed just one year. In December 2021, I started my own business. I am aiming at being a creator and publisher of printed matter (a sort



Aurélien and her husband, François-Xavier Lecoœur, are the parents of Candice and Clarence.

of textile designer). A new professional life is beginning, linked to the arts, which was the theme of my student training in Roanoke. I've come back to my first passion, art!"



Aurélien Genest Lecoœur launched her own design company, Adilys Creations, in December 2021. She organized an opening event to showcase her work and was able to sell some items as well. She has also started teaching communications classes at a business school in Caen.

## Roanoke-Opole

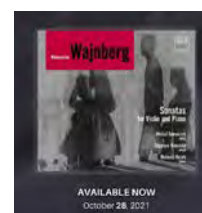
## Former medical, music students are thriving professionally

By Dr. Kristina Bulas-Slowikowski  
Roanoke-Opole chairwoman  
krisbulas@gmail.com

COVID continues to stymie plans for all future in-person special planned events. The holidays allowed for personal holiday greetings from our friends in Opole and Wrocław. There have been some organizational changes to our contacts in Wrocław with the medical exchange program. Hopefully the new year will allow us to reconvene and share ideas and possibilities. One former medical student now graduate, physician Alexandra b., is doing her internship in the U.K. and has been unable to travel home due to COVID restrictions.

Our music friends in Opole have had many opportunities to perform. Our former visitor students are scattered around the E.U. -- principally in Poland, Germany, Austria and Switzerland. A few have new music albums, some formed performing groups -- see Apeiron Trio on Facebook -- some are furthering their education in higher learning institutions and some are teaching at their former music school. This year's prestigious Chopin Competition winner in Warsaw was a rising star, Canadian Bruce Liu. Enjoy through the link below.

<https://www.udiscovermusic.com/classical-news/bruce-liu-chopin-competition-2021-winner-album/>



Former music students are on tour and producing albums.



## Sister Cities to celebrate twinning anniversary artistically

Delayed by the pandemic but moving forward with our original plans, RVSCI plans to partner with Roanoke College's Olin Hall Galleries in order to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Sister Cities relationship between Roanoke and Florianópolis.

Olin Hall Galleries at Roanoke College in Salem is proposing to host one artist from Florianópolis, Brazil, for a two-week residency at 202 Market Gallery in downtown Roanoke.

Olin Hall Galleries will provide round-trip airfare from Florianópolis to Roanoke, accommodations located in downtown Roanoke, studio space in 202 Market, an opportunity for the artist to exhibit their work at 202 Market Gallery and PR on the galleries' website and social media. The artist may be asked to lead a workshop for local artists and/or meet with Roanoke College art students and to possibly donate one piece of art

to the public collection. The work may be completed while in residence or before arrival with the artist being responsible for shipping. A similar project is in the works with Hollins University and Opole, Poland.

The city of Florianópolis has been working hard to get their residents vaccinated for COVID and as of the fall had the highest vaccination rate in Brazil. Because of COVID restrictions and after a long absence from their home in Florianópolis, Sister Cities members Marilia and Mike Deisenroth have returned to Brazil for a month. They are planning to get caught up on domestic chores and help us find an artist that will share their talents with the Roanoke Valley. Roanoke College and Olin Hall Galleries are being very generous with their money and time in helping us to sponsor this project.

-- Mary Jo Fassié and Linda Harrison



From the Facebook page of Prefeitura de Florianópolis: "Florianópolis is the most efficient capital in combating COVID in Brazil! According to the index drawn up by the Votorantim Institute, Floripa leads the country's capitals in public management of the pandemic, orientation campaigns, reduction in the number of deaths, welfare programs and contagion prevention."



Olin Hall Galleries is collaborating with RVSCI on an artist's residency.



Sister Cities members Marilia and Mike Deisenroth are in Florianópolis now for a month. They hope to find a Brazilian artist to share their talents with the Roanoke Valley.

## First phase of video contest ends in a tie

By Ramona Kirsch, Ed.D.  
Roanoke-Wonju chairwoman  
kirschrr@hollins.edu

In November 2021, the Wonju held its annual Wonju Dynamic Dancing Carnival (원주 이내믹댄싱카니발). The carnival, sponsored by the Wonju Cultural Foundation, was held Nov. 19-21. An international festival, it is led by Wonju citizens and includes Dynamic dance parade performances. I was asked to record a welcome video, and it was played during the event.

### Video competition

The Wonju committee here in Roanoke has been working with their counterparts in Wonju over several months to organize a video competition. The first phase of the contest was in Wonju where a call was put out to all residents to create a brief (no longer than three minute) video about Wonju in English. Once the videos were submitted in Wonju, finalists were selected, and the YouTube videos were sent to the RVSCI Wonju video subcommittee, which comprised Brian Counihan, Mary Jo Fassié, Seung-Hee Han, and me. The subcommittee reviewed the videos, considering the following criteria – creativity, interest, suitability of theme, organization, editing techniques, and counted likes/views on YouTube. The subcommittee ranked the videos, and there was a tie for the winner! The winners are below with links to each video. The videos were screened during the Lunar New Year Festival at the Taubman Museum on Feb. 5. The festival is in collaboration with Local Colors and

RVSCI.

### Ms. Yerin Kim, “The Present”

View the video here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oql6Orkhq5I>

### Ms. Hyobin Hwang, “Wonderful Wonju”

View the video here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrMQ2\\_EbCsQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrMQ2_EbCsQ)

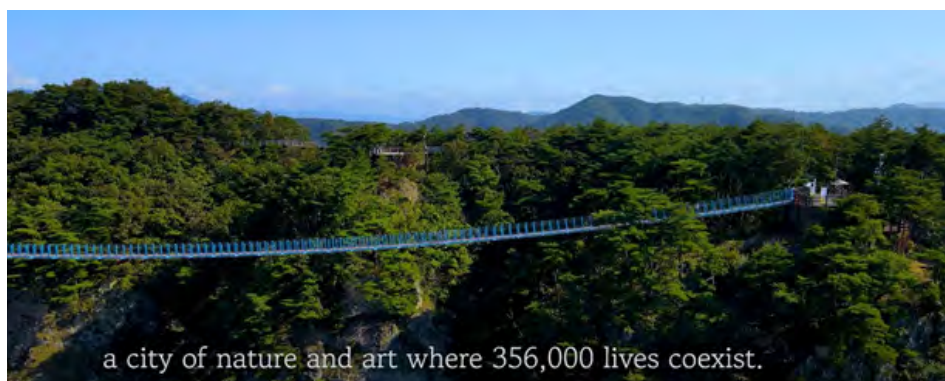
The second phase of the competition

will be in Roanoke. Look for an announcement this spring on the details for creating a video about Roanoke in Korean!

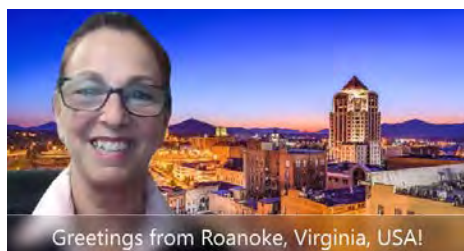
Finally, the RVSCI Wonju committee hopes to have a gathering in late spring/early summer at the Wonju Korean Restaurant in Roanoke, which has just reopened! Details to come.



A scene from Yerin Kim's "The Present."



A scene from Hyobin Hwang's "Wonderful Wonju."



Roanoke-Wonju chairwoman is shown in a recorded welcome to the Wonju Dynamic Dancing Carnival.



A scene from Yerin Kim's "The Present."



A scene from Hyobin Hwang's "Wonderful Wonju."



## Pskov officials dedicated to making a greener city

By Jessie Coffman  
[jah.coffman@gmail.com](mailto:jah.coffman@gmail.com)

Roanoke made a name for itself within the biking community with its interconnected greenways, bicycle lanes, and dedication to alternative forms of urban transportation. Similarly, Pskov will become the first Russian city to develop a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (the “SUMP”). As in Roanoke, Pskov’s officials realized that making their city greener would also make it healthier and more sustainable for its citizens.

Reliable, affordable public transportation is a global issue. Public transportation isn’t widely used in Russia because of its systemic limitations. For many citizens, it simply isn’t available as a travel option. In April 2014, Russia adopted the World

Health Organization and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe’s Paris Declaration, dubbed THE PEP. This acronym stands for “Transport, Health, and Environment: Pan-European Programme” and uses the slogan “Cities in Motion: People First!” The 2014 Paris meeting amended the 2009 Amsterdam Declaration’s original four goals by adding a fifth, “[t]o integrate transport, health and environmental objectives into urban and spatial planning policies.” ([unece.org/DAM/thepep/Publications/2015\\_and\\_pdf\\_Signs\\_and\\_signals/Paris\\_Declaration\\_in\\_English\\_Final.pdf](http://unece.org/DAM/thepep/Publications/2015_and_pdf_Signs_and_signals/Paris_Declaration_in_English_Final.pdf)).

Pskov City planners face similar challenges as those in Roanoke: capacity, zoning, and implementation. To implement the best and most successful policies, Russian cities have been studying what works in other nations,

particularly those within the Nordic region. With a goal of reducing the number of personal vehicles on its roads, Pskov City Administration is conducting a traffic study to estimate demand. In 2017, Pskov was awarded the Green Mobility Award, and it continues to take great strides forward.

“The SUMP will help to develop solutions for better use of urban space, to reduce the number of personal vehicles and plan a compact transport infrastructure, allocating as much space as possible to the historical center of Pskov for citizens and city guests.” ([www.cities-multimodal.eu/news/city-pskov-develops-russias-first-sump](http://www.cities-multimodal.eu/news/city-pskov-develops-russias-first-sump)). Pskov’s laudable efforts should be of interest to Roanoke as it undertakes the work we also value -- making our city greener and our citizens healthier.



*Pskov city center. Image from [cities-multimodal.eu](http://cities-multimodal.eu).*

## RVSCI Corporate Board Members

### RVSCI Corporate Board Members

**President:** Mary Jo Fassié

**Recording Secretary:** Bill Modica

**Corresponding Secretary:** Jean Broyles

**Treasurer:** Bill Bestpitch

### Members at large:

Sara Epperly, Ph.D.

Archie Freeman

Lee Learman, M.D., Ph.D.

John Makay

Andreea Mihalache-O'Keef, Ph.D.

### Sister City committee chairmen and chairwomen:

**Florianópolis:** Linda Harrison

**Kisumu:** Bill Modica

**Lijiang:** Joe Cobb

**Opole:** Kristina Bulas-Slowikowski, M.D.

**Pskov:** Jessie Coffman

**St-Lô:** Ann Hackworth & Peggy Wells

**Wonju:** Ramona Kirsch, Ed.D.



**Contact us at:** roanokevalleysistercities@gmail.com

Annual Membership - Roanoke Valley Sister Cities      New ☐      Renewal ☐      July 1, 20\_\_\_\_ - June 30, 20\_\_\_\_

Cities:      ☐ Wonju      ☐ Kisumu      ☐ Pskov      ☐ Florianópolis      ☐ Opole      ☐ Lijiang      ☐ St-Lô

Student:      \$10 - one city      \_\_\_\_ # cities x \$10 = \_\_\_\_

Individual      \$15 - one city      \_\_\_\_ # cities x \$15 = \_\_\_\_

Family      \$30 - one city      \_\_\_\_ # cities x \$30 = \_\_\_\_

*Example: 7 cities x \$15 = \$105*

**Other Levels:**      Patron ☐ \$50 | Benefactor ☐ \$100 | Diplomat ☐ \$250 | Consul ☐ \$500 | Ambassador ☐ \$1,000

Specify for: ☐ RVSCI Corporate \$\_\_\_\_ &/or for: ☐ City or Cities checked above: \$\_\_\_\_

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED \$\_\_\_\_ Check #\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Tel (home) \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to **Roanoke Valley Sister Cities** | Mail to **RVSCI – P.O. Box 136 – Roanoke, VA 24002**

All gifts/donations are tax deductible to the extent provided by law. RVSCI is a 501c3 – Fed ID #51-0246592

**www.rvsci.us | Like us on Facebook!**



Roanoke Valley Sister Cities  
P.O. Box 136  
Roanoke, VA 24002

## ROANOKE VALLEY

