



# AROUND OUR WORLD

ROANOKE VALLEY SISTER CITIES, INC.

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## ADVENTURE IN VIBRANT LIJIANG IS WORTH THE JOURNEY

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*Sara Epperly is a Roanoke native. She served as a public school teacher and principal for 15 years. She is currently pursuing her Certified Financial Planner designation.*

**A**t a recent Roanoke City Council meeting, I had the opportunity to speak with community members about the artifacts on display in the Sister Cities cases at the Noel C. Taylor Municipal Building. Talking with the group about Lijiang, our Chinese sister city, brought out my old sense of wonder... wonder that our Roanoke could have a formal connection to this truly special place on the other side of the world.



*Sara Epperly in Naxi ethnicity traditional dress with local women preparing to go out for the evening dance in the Lijiang Old Town plaza.*



*Dinner with mother and grandmother in the courtyard of her host family's home.*

I am an old China scholar, you could say. I first experienced China in the 1990s as a teenager on travel with my family. We spent time in 7 cities: Beijing, XiAn, ChongQing, Lhasa, ChengDu, WuHan, Hong Kong. For me, it was love at first sight: the busy pace, the surprising diversity, the amazing food, the smart people. China was full of promise and so much more than a CNN soundbite. I wanted more.

College came, and I studied Mandarin from Day 1. Each college summer I found a way back to China — learning the language, teaching English, conducting research. The summer before my senior year (2000), I received fellowship money to research a topic I had developed: the Chinese democracy, understood through the institution of village-level elections.

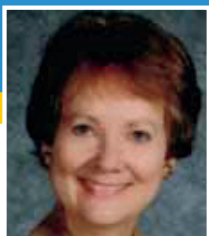
As I developed my research plan, then-Roanoke-Lijiang sister city chairwoman Pearl Fu was my guiding star. Pearl directed me to Lijiang, sharing a list of municipal contacts and phone numbers that I wrote in

*(continued on page 4)*

## IN THIS ISSUE

Sara Epperly in Lijiang .....	Pages 1 & 4
President's report .....	Page 2-3
RVSCI wins culture award .....	Page 3
Young Artist's showcase .....	Pages 5
A call to artists .....	Page 6
Mark your calendars! .....	Page 6
Scenes from annual dinner .....	Page 7
Roanoke-Lijiang report .....	Page 8
Roanoke-Opole report .....	Page 9
Roanoke/ St-Lô report .....	Pages 10-13
Roanoke-Wonju report .....	Pages 14-16
Roanoke-Kisumu report .....	Page 17
Roanoke- Florianópolis .....	Page 18
Board/donation/membership info .....	Page 19
Our donors .....	Page 20





By Mary Jo Fassié  
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## COMMUNICATING OUR MISSION IS KEY TO THIS JOB



*In May, American and Chinese officials met via Zoom.*

From January to July, Roanoke Valley Sister Cities has been busy in the community communicating our mission and planning for current and upcoming exchanges.

As the year began, we met with our Ukrainian friends in Roanoke to

discuss the war in Ukraine and the decision to pause our relationship with our sister city of Pskov. Roanoke City Council decided to remove the Russian flag from Pearl Fu Plaza for the time being.

In February, RVSCI participated in

the Lunar New Year festival and Roanoke Arts Pop in March, both at the Taubman. As part of the Year of the Artist activities, St-Lô, Lijiang and Opole made presentations about their cities at the Roanoke Municipal Building where artists and citizens gathered to learn about RVSCI and to view the artwork done by local artists.



*In July, Mary Jo gave a presentation about RVSCI at Hermitage Roanoke retirement center.*

The RVSCI board met in February and then again in April where we prepared our daisies for the Daisy Art Parade. With the help of Artist-in-Residence Katherine Devine, each “daisy” had our logo on the front and the back spelled out word by word the Sister Cities International mission statement: “Promoting peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation, one individual, one community at a time.” We had a great time gathering on a beautiful day (April 15) and walking together through downtown Roanoke.

The Young Artists Showcase received many entries this year submitted by the April 14 deadline. Our judges were from the Taubman Museum of Art. RVSCI awarded \$1,300 in prize money to local high school art students. Also in April, several board members attended the Virginia



# ADVENTURE IN VIBRANT LIJIANG IS WORTH THE JOURNEY

(continued from page 1)

my travel notebook. A family there would host me, she said. I could teach at a school. And on weekends I could travel to the surrounding villages to conduct my interviews.

I flew to ShangHai and there bought a cellphone, a train ticket, a bag of snacks. I can remember small plastic bags of dried melon and dried meat, and packaged crackers on the train. A troupe of competitive video gamers were my mates in the stacked bunk train compartment on the 48-hour, startlingly scenic ride through the south of China and to YunNan province.

We debarked in KunMing, capital of China's most biodiverse and ethnically diverse province. I spent a few days in a shared youth hostel room. Pearl's contacts included several KunMing businessmen who took me for lunch and a tour of the rock gardens, a tour of the flower markets, a walk through the university. Then I boarded an overnight bus to Lijiang.

Lijiang — our Sister City and the ancestral home of Pearl Fu — rests in the foothills of the Himalayas. It is an old minority ethnic town with precious preserved people and architecture. This place is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and a known jewel among the Chinese. The old town, with its meandering waterways and stone streets, is surrounded by a more modern and typical sprawl, home to more than a million people. And all of it together is so vibrant and worth the journey.

By Chinese character text message, and also by luck, a local affairs minister arranged to meet my backpacker self at Lijiang's morning

station. He took me to a middle school where the kind young women teachers took me in. In the weeks ahead these teachers would host me — would meet me for a fried rice dinner, for a coffee, for shopping. On that first day they connected me to a 7th grade student, a boy, whose family had volunteered to host me. I walked home with the boy to their old-town, courtyard-style home. Mother and grandmother were there. Father worked as manager of a hotel. Quietly they showed me a small room on the second floor of their home. There was access to the rooftop with a water spigot where I could wash.



I lived with this family for about six weeks. In the mornings I would walk to school with the boy. We would buy breakfast rice buns from a corner seller. Sometimes, on the way to school, I would stop off at a hair stall to have my hair washed. At school there was tea. And ping-pong. The teachers allowed me to help deliver their English lessons to the big classroom of perhaps 60 seventh graders. I remember, too, that there were official



At a middle school where Sara (back row, middle) distributed a thousand dollars' worth of scholarship money — a gift from Roanoke.

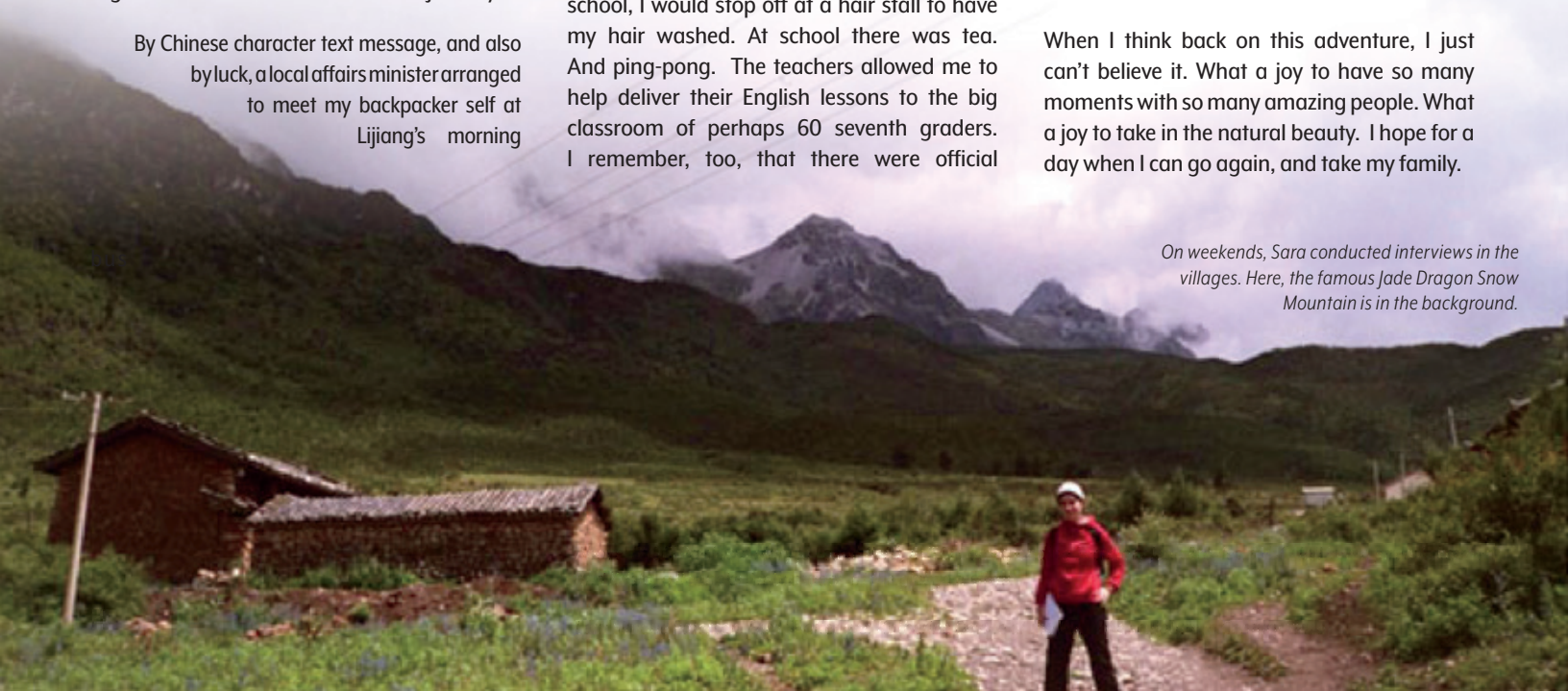
outings in a sort of sister cities capacity. I visited several preschools, and another middle school where I distributed a thousand dollars' worth of scholarship money — a gift from Roanoke.

My host family was of NaXi ethnicity. In this remote place the minority ethnic tradition lived on. Older people wore the traditional blue and white dress. Every evening in this temperate place they walked through the old alleyways, beside old water canals, to the main plaza. There they held hands in big circles and performed simple dances in rounds. I remember well this grandmother, who also practiced Taiji and was both strong and flexible in her seeming old age. She was curious about me. We watched Chinese soap operas together. She made dinner soups with strange ingredients — tiny fish, their entire bodies floating in a broth. I would eat, embarrassed to ever say no.

On the weekends I traveled to the villages. Some of these were primitive, without running water or tourists. We took a bus over the border into the Eastern side of Tibet. The landscape was beautiful, and we took time at the Ganden Sumtseling Monastery, so similar in architecture to the Potala Palace.

When I think back on this adventure, I just can't believe it. What a joy to have so many moments with so many amazing people. What a joy to take in the natural beauty. I hope for a day when I can go again, and take my family.

On weekends, Sara conducted interviews in the villages. Here, the famous Jade Dragon Snow Mountain is in the background.





# Young Artists SHOWCASE

## Young artists address problem of food security

In the spring, Roanoke Valley Sister Cities held its annual Young Artist Showcase for students ages 13-18. The theme for the Sister Cities International competition was "Peace By Piece: Food Security in My Community." Judging was provided by the staff of the Taubman Museum of Art.

The 2023 winners are:

**1st place (tie), with \$300 prize each:** 1 - Valeria Dancea ("Out of Reach") and 2 - Savannah Brooks ("See-Food") - North Cross School

**2nd place (tie), with \$200 prize each:** 3 - Ava Giannini ("Full Table Empty Heart") - Burton Center for Arts and Technology; 4 - Massoki Maka ("Look Around You") - North Cross School

**3rd place (tie), with \$100 prize each:** 5 - Sally Eshelman ("Fresh for the Future") and 6 - Haley Snow ("Fast Food") - Patrick Henry High School

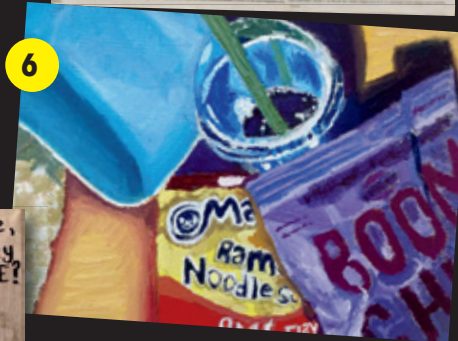
These pieces have been submitted to Sister Cities International Young Artists Showcase for further judging.

**Honorable mentions** (\$25 each) went to 7 - Brooke Justus, 8 - Talmage Dascenzo, 9 - Emma Copenhaver from Burton Center for Arts and Technology, and 10 - Millie Chopski from North Cross School.

First-place winners Valeria Dancea and Savannah Brooks were honored at the Roanoke Valley Sister Cities Annual Meeting held at the Center in the Square rooftop on June 6.

Many of the top entries will be featured at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine fall art show, "Our World Village, the Global Impact of a Personal Connection."

-- Mary Jo Fassié



# A Call to Artists:

The Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine,  
in partnership with Roanoke Valley Sister Cities,  
invites you to participate in our Fall 2023 Exhibit:

## Our World Village the Global Impact of a Personal Connection



Art work will explore the profound influence of personal connections in bridging cultures, transcending borders, and fostering unity across the globe.

This captivating display of artistic expressions will highlight the transformative power of human relationships and celebrate the ways in which individual connections can have far-reaching implications.

This exhibit will hang in the Medical School, at 2 Riverside in Roanoke, from September 11 through December 15, 2023.

If you would like to submit your artwork - all media will be considered - please send photos and dimensions of each piece (up to 3 total) to Courtney Powell at [cbrakes@vt.edu](mailto:cbrakes@vt.edu) by Friday, Aug. 11.

Applications and lending agreements will follow once the submissions are approved.



**ROANOKE VALLEY  
SISTER CITIES**

Committed to fostering and encouraging mutual understanding, friendship and peace through cultural, medical, economic, educational and professional exchanges among the people of the Roanoke Valley and the citizens of our seven sister cities on four continents.

**VTC**

**Virginia Tech Carilion**  
School of Medicine

## Mark your calendars!

**Aug. 15:** 4:30 p.m., Wonju film winners at the Municipal Building

**Sept. 5:** RVSCI board meeting

**Sept. 11- Dec. 15:** VTCSom "Our World Our Village" art show

**Sept. 25-Oct. 4:** Florianópolis artist Thiago Valdi in Roanoke

**Oct. 4-6:** Wonju mayoral delegation in Roanoke

**Oct. 11-19:** St-Lô student group in Roanoke

**Oct. 28 or Nov. 4:** Ginkgo Festival in Century Plaza - TBD

**Dec. 6:** Dîner de Noël at Anello's (Montano's)



# SCENES FROM OUR ANNUAL Dinner Meeting



SCI State Representative for Virginia Fred Blanton (left) and Bobby Barron



Local Colors President Courtney Campbell, board member Hicsa Vivas and Dr. N.L. Bishop



Beverly and Dr. Lee Leafman



Roanoke Councilwoman Vivian Sanchez-Jones and Thomas Jones



Andreea Mihalache-O'Keef



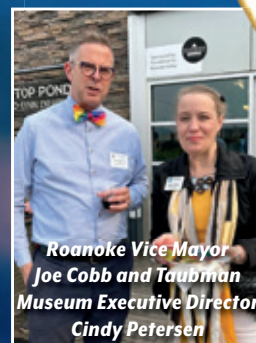
Dave Epperly, James Matthews and Sara Epperly



Former RVSCI Artist-in-Residence Katherine Devine and Roanoke Arts Commission Chairwoman Meighan Sharp



Roanoke Mayor Sherman Lea and former Mayor David Bowers



Roanoke Vice Mayor Joe Cobb and Taubman Museum Executive Director Cindy Petersen

## SHARING THE CHARM OF CHINESE CULTURE

By Vivien Sparks  
Roanoke-Lijiang chairwoman  
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Roanoke has a tradition of kicking off its annual events by celebrating the Lunar New Year. On Feb. 4, Local Colors hosted this year's celebration at the Taubman Museum of Art, where Roanoke-Lijiang members demonstrated the ancient Chinese art form of calligraphy. The Lijiang representatives transliterated guests' names into Chinese with beautiful meanings and wrote them on red paper. Many guests showed great interest in this display and expressed their willingness to have a deeper understanding of Asian culture.

On March 27, Roanoke City Mayor Sherman Lea Sr. sent a letter to congratulate newly elected Lijiang Mayor Li Gang. In the letter, he expressed his vision for a deeper relationship between the two cities.

RVSCI initiated a virtual meeting with Lijiang city on May 9. It was hosted by me, and Roanoke was represented by Vice Mayor Joe Cobb and RVSCI President Mary Jo Fassié. Mr. Zhang Liwei, director of the Foreign Affairs Office of Lijiang Municipal People's Government in Yunnan, and his staff attended from



*In February, a dragon danced at the Lunar New Year celebration at the Taubman Museum of Art*

Lijiang. At the meeting, the two sides reached a consensus on jointly promoting the relationship between the sister cities. Both groups plan to invite each other and local artists to visit for cultural and artistic exchanges in the next year.

Roanoke's most popular annual cultural festival, Local Colors, was held on May 20. Roanoke-Lijiang members from the Roanoke Chinese community attended the Parade of Nations. Participants dressed in traditional dress from different eras, and once again shared the charm of Chinese culture with the public.

It has been a great and eventful first half of the year. Roanoke-Lijiang is planning to hold more cultural gatherings among members in the second half of the year. RVSCI and Lijiang also jointly plan to provide additional communications, along with learning opportunities for college students from both cities. Stay tuned for our next report!



*In May, sister cities members marched in Local Colors' Parade of Nations in traditional dress from different eras.*

## GIFT OF ART REFLECTS OUR INTERNATIONAL DIVERSITY

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



*Chico Harkrader's "Riverside," mixed mediums (glass, fibers, paint) on canvas.*

Poland continues to welcome Ukrainian refugees as the Ukrainian-Russian war enters its second year. Our monetary support for Ukrainian refugees in Poland is greatly appreciated. The Opole committee will continue to accept donations, which will be forwarded to the Kosciuszko Foundation for distribution to verified NGOs. To donate, use the links on the RVSCI website and donate accordingly.

Chico Harkrader, a well-respected Roanoke artist, has graciously donated a mixed-medium painting to the Opole Committee/RVSCI, in gratitude for participating in an art exchange in Opole in 2011. After discussion with Roanoke County Administration, the work tentatively may be displayed at the South County Library for all citizens to enjoy. We are honored to receive such a beautiful gift and would like to start the trend of having visiting international artists leave/donate pieces of their work for our citizens to admire and enjoy. What a great way to solidify our unique impact on international diversity in the valley and remind us that we are one global family!

We represented Poland at the Multicultural Night held at Cave Spring Elementary School on April 11, the Daisy Art Parade on April 15 and Local Colors on May 20 this spring.

Discussions are ongoing between RVSCI and Roanoke County regarding next year's 30th anniversary of partnership between Opole and Roanoke County. Plans should be solidified by the end of the year. Hopefully, a Polish artist will be able to come for a 2-week artist-in-residence stay at Hollins University, to be followed by an official delegation from Opole for the celebratory event.

Of historical news, this year Poland is celebrating the 550th birthday of the father of modern astronomy, Nicolaus Copernicus. He was a mathematician and astronomer and is famous to this day as the one "who stopped the sun and moved the earth." He was instrumental in correcting the understanding of how the solar system works. His work contains seven axioms that include the earth orbiting the sun and the moon orbiting the earth. February 19, Copernicus's birthday, is celebrated as the Day of Polish Science and 2023 as the Year of Nicolaus Copernicus.

*Roanoke-Opole chairwoman Kris  
Slowikowski and her husband,  
Jacek, represented Poland at the  
Local Colors festival in May.*





Seated (from left): Nicole Genest, Clarence Lecoœur, Peggy Wells. Standing (from left): Candice Lecoœur, Hugh Wells, François-Xavier Lecoœur, Noël Genest, Aurélie Genest-Lecoœur.

## A MARVELOUS TRIP TO REUNITE WITH DEAR FRIENDS

By Peggy Wells  
Roanoke/St-Lô sister cities co-chair  
hpgwells@aol.com

In mid-June, Hugh and I traveled to St-Lô. We began at the Mont St-Michel, where we walked across the mudflats at low tide on a guided tour. Hugh had done the walk previously, but I hadn't had the chance. It was a lot of fun!

Jeanine Vérove and her sister Louise met us at the main gate of the Mont St-Michel! They drove with us back to Avranches, where we were staying. We had a wonderful visit, including dinner together that evening. We had hosted Louise in Roanoke previously during a Sister Cities exchange.

The next day, we drove to St-Lô for a visit with Noël and Nicole Genest. Their daughter, Aurélie, came too, along with her husband, François-Xavier, and children, Candice and Clarence. We had a marvelous reunion! Aurélie stayed with us in 1997, when she did an internship from St-Lô. Her father stayed with us the following year.

The second day in St-Lô, we visited the Art and History Museum, which has a fascinating historical display, as well as art galleries. It was well worth the visit.

The next day, we headed for a visit to Brittany, which is a story for another time!

## ST-LÔ AGAIN WELCOMES STUDENT-ADULT DELEGATION

By Marsha Taylor  
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After an extended pause due to COVID, two educators, eight students and four community members from Roanoke reignited the St-Lô/Roanoke group exchange program with a one-week homestay in St-Lô from May 29 to June 5.

Led by myself, a Roanoke County French teacher, and chaperone Dr. Kurt Gingrich, the RoCo high school students – Ashleigh Barton, Azyon Brooks, Sydney Coles, Noah Franks, Tyler Morrison, Kylie Pampani, Christian Parker and Kaelon Thompson – excitedly departed Roanoke on Sunday, May 28, and arrived sleep-deprived in Paris on Monday morning, May 29. Joined as well by Roanoke community members Jennifer Barton, Celeste Parker and Drs. Andy and Penny Muelenauer, the group of 14 then took a chartered bus for the beautiful, 4-hour drive to St-Lô. Arriving at L'Institut Saint-Lô, the ensemble was greeted by St-Lô students, parents and townspeople who graciously opened their homes to their American guests.

The group began their stay on Tuesday, May 30, by attending morning courses at the high school with their respective French student hosts. Later, the group enjoyed a guided walking tour of St-Lô and then arrived at the Town Hall for a lovely reception. St-Lô Mayor Emmanuelle Lejeune warmly welcomed the group with a poignant speech, underscoring the importance of the ongoing relationship between St-Lô and Roanoke: "A unique friendship connects

us, and we count on the French and American young people to pursue it, to consolidate it, and to renew it...Benefit from your stay in St-Lô and carry our friendship back home with you to the people of Roanoke."

On Wednesday, May 31, the group embarked on the first of their field trips to significant sites in Normandy, arriving at le Mont St-Michel. The students enjoyed a self-guided audio tour of the UNESCO World Heritage site, a thousand-year-old monastery and town, affixed to a barren rock off the Norman coast.

Thursday, June 1, was the most historically impactful and moving experience for the group. On a suitably cold and wind-swept day, the Americans visited four significant sites associated with the D-Day invasions. The emotional visit included walking through bomb-scarred terrain, battered beaches and the mammoth American Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer. Special thanks go to Saint-Lô 44-Roanoke President Jeanine Vérove for her guidance and expertise.



Marsha and Kurt with their French hosts and friends.



*Penny (left) and Andy Muelenaer (center) with their French friends.*

The final visit was to the city of Bayeux on Friday, June 2. Here the group toured the soaring, Gothic cathedral and the vault preserving the Bayeux Tapestry, the medieval embroidery that tells the engrossing story of the Norman conquest of England in 1066.

To cap off the week, the Saint-Lô 44-Roanoke organization hosted a lovely and delicious potluck dinner for the Americans, with dozens of local students and citizens in attendance. This occasion perfectly reaffirmed the ongoing relationship between Roanoke and St-Lô, complete with speeches of appreciation and gratitude.

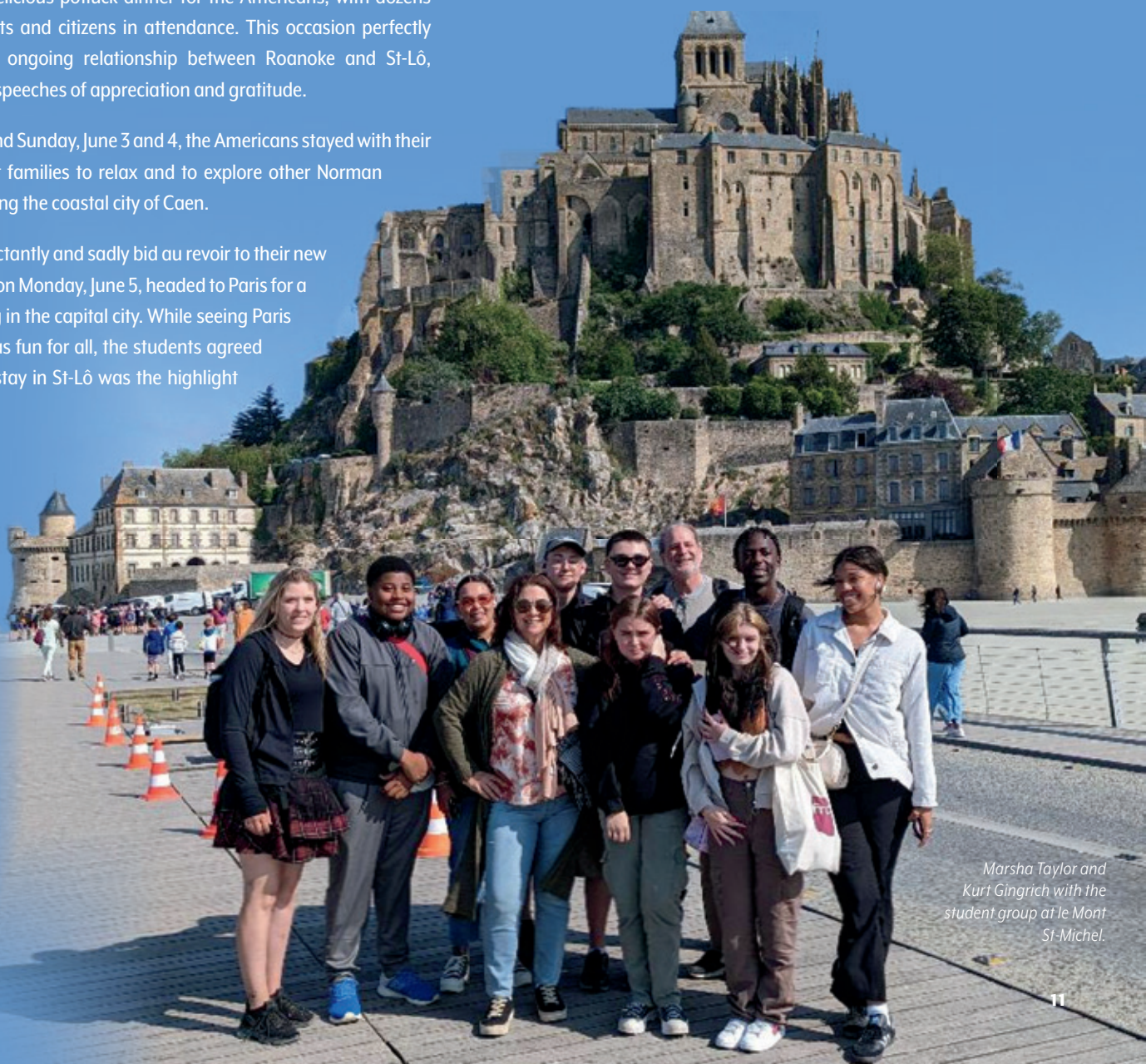
On Saturday and Sunday, June 3 and 4, the Americans stayed with their respective host families to relax and to explore other Norman regions, including the coastal city of Caen.

The group reluctantly and sadly bid au revoir to their new French friends on Monday, June 5, headed to Paris for a week of touring in the capital city. While seeing Paris and its sites was fun for all, the students agreed that the homestay in St-Lô was the highlight

of their whirlwind, two-week experience. The relationships that they made, the language and culture that they learned and the overall authentic experience of living in a French home were moments that they will always remember and cherish.

The American travelers, Roanoke Sister Cities members, and other Roanoke-area families look forward to welcoming and hosting 30 students and three teachers from St-Lô for their visit to Roanoke from Oct. 11-19.

On behalf of all the travelers, I wish to express our most sincere thanks to the Roanoke Sister Cities for their moral and financial support of this exchange trip! We will forever hold dear this remarkable voyage!



*Marsha Taylor and Kurt Gingrich with the student group at le Mont St-Michel.*

## NOT A LOT OF DOWN TIME FOR THIS SUMMER INTERN

By Maxime Vérove  
verovemaxime@gmail.com



Maxime (left) with his first hosts, Sydney and Steve Nichols of Roanoke.

**H**ello, I'm Maxime from Grenoble, which is a city of the size of Roanoke located in the Alps in France. I went to Roanoke the 1st July 2023 for a month, thanks to the sister city program between Roanoke and St Lô in Normandie. I know this exchange program thanks to my grandmother Jeanine Vérove, the chairman of Saint-Lô 44-Roanoke.

After a long fly I finally arrived to the Roanoke

airport and I got welcome by the Nichols family, Dionne, Steve and their son Sydney. They were so nice with me and we got on very well together. I pass the first weekend with Steve and Sydney. We went fishing to the Smith Mountain Lake, visited the Natural Bridge and the transportation museum of Roanoke. After that Steve was working and Sydney went to his summer camp, so I was driven all around by the people of the sister city program and I thank them very much. It was so nice to meet all. I have been to two hiking [trips] with Ann and Bill to McAfee [Knob] and the Cascades [Falls Trail]. The McAfee hike was a really long walk in the forest, but the reward at the end was amazing with a wonderful view of the Appalachian mountains.

Next, I have visited some museums. I've been to the Taubman thanks to Mary Jo and Pierre, and the pinball museum with Debra. It was a lot of fun. Also, I visit the D-Day memorial at Bedford with Peggy and Hugh, which was really interesting to see the link between the battle that happened in Normandy and the memorial and the story of the soldiers who came from Roanoke and the arounds. I wanna thank all of these people for their kindness and for make me visit all these places, it was really nice to meet them.

Part of the time I worked for the caterer Chris Hamm to prepare the [annual] sister city dinner, but most of the time at Feeding Southwest



At Feeding Southwest Virginia with caterer/chef Chris Hamm (center) and Mick, a co-worker.

Virginia for 3 weeks. It was a very interesting experience. The atmosphere in the kitchen was really nice. I worked with Chef Chris and many volunteers who were different people every day. We work from 8h30 am to 3 pm. It was quit intense work: we have to prepare 500-600 meals per day that are distributed to at-risk children in Roanoke.

After two weeks I move to another welcoming family, Mary, Alex and their daughter Bella Ferrate. We share a good time to visit Washington, D.C., with Alex and Bella the first weekend. Seeing all the famous monuments of the United States was really impressive. I spent very good time with the Ferrate family while we cycling, visiting Roanoke College and looking at some movies. After that I continued my trip to U.S. by visiting New York by myself, which was wonderful.

My trip to Roanoke was an amazing experience. I met so many wonderful people and I wanna thank all of the sister city program people and the Nichols and Ferrate families who welcome me really well. I hope to see you in France soon!

Many thanks to Ann, Peggy and Mary Jo who organized all my stay.

Thanks. Best regards.



At the Air & Space Museum in Washington, D.C., with Bella Ferrate, daughter of Maxime's second hosts, Alex and Mary Ferrate of Salem.

(From left) Betsy Bohannon, Sherrie Henshaw and Chris Bohannon represent France in Local Colors' Parade of Nations.

# DOES IT SEEM AS IF NO ONE STAYS HOME ANYMORE?

By Ann Hackworth  
Roanoke/St-Lô co-chairwoman  
avhack@aol.com

It's been a blur of activity for our committee since the beginning of the year. In February, Peggy Wells and I spoke about our history and our exchanges to a group of about 30 artists and citizens at the Noel C. Taylor Municipal Building downtown. We found the presentations by two young Roanoke Valley artists to be fascinating.



Liz Allison

Also in February, sadly we learned of the death of Liz Allison. Liz had been a member of our executive board for over 20 years and had hosted visiting Normans at her home in South Roanoke. She was a member of our delegation to St-Lô in 1999, when we made our sister city relationship official. In June, Bill and I attended a memorial gathering for her, hosted by Liz's cousin Joe Obenshain and his wife, Marcia, at their home in Fincastle. There, Liz's daughter, Suzanne, told us how much Liz valued her work with our committee.

On May 20, several of us turned out to march in the Parade of Nations and to staff our booth at Local Colors. Also in May, we welcomed long-time, active member Debra Boule to our executive committee. From May 28-June 11, Roanoke County French teacher and Rke/St-Lô executive committee member Marsha Taylor led a group of 8 students and 6 adults to St-Lô and Paris. Read Marsha's account of their trip on Page 10.



Camille Timerie turned 18 during his second visit to Roanoke. His hosts, Sherrie and Tim Henshaw, threw him a surprise birthday party.

In June, we welcomed Maxime Vérove to Roanoke. Maxime is the grandson of Jeanine Vérove, the president of Saint-Lô 44-Roanoke, our committee's counterpart in Normandy. Read Maxime's report about his experience on Page 12. Peggy Wells relates her and Hugh's adventures in Normandy on Page 10.

In July, rising Roanoke College senior and former RVSCI intern Cameron McDonald left for a month-long

internship in St-Lô. His report will appear in the January 2024 issue of AOW. Also in July, we welcomed Anaëlle Vérove (Maxime's younger sister)



At a memorial gathering for Liz Allison, long-time Rke/St-Lô executive committee member, were (from left) Liz's cousin Joe Obenshain; her daughter, Suzanne; her son, Will; and her brother, David Garland.

to Roanoke. We will also publish her account of her month here in the January issue of AOW. The Vérove siblings were hosted by five amazing and generous families, most of whom are new to sister cities. We thank them as well as the staffs of Feeding Southwest Virginia and the Taubman Museum of Art, who provided their internships.

On July 16, we celebrated Bastille Day with our annual picnic at Longwood Park in Salem. We had 35 in attendance, including Camille Timerie, who interned here in August 2022. Camille, who will enter law school in Paris in the fall, was hosted once again by Tim and Sherrie Henshaw while he interned with Matt Broughton in the Roanoke law firm of Gentry Locke Attorneys. He also attended the Roanoke City general court (criminal). Camille plans to be a prosecutor in France.

In August, Institut St-Lô student Margot Leray-Jeanne arrives in the valley and will be hosted for a month by the Blevins-Russell family of Salem. Margot will attend Glenvar High School with Ainsley Russell.

From Oct. 11-19, we will welcome a delegation of 30 Institut St-Lô students and 3 teachers. Roanoke County French teachers Marsha Taylor and Rebecca Taylor will attempt to house the students with families of their students. Please contact me or Peggy Wells if you would like to host a Norman teenager.

St-Lô multi-media artist Cornelia Marin will return to Roanoke in December. She will bring artwork for two shows to be exhibited in early 2024. Her host and long-time friend, Brenda Barksdale, has reserved the Grandin Theatre for Cornelia to exhibit in January 2024. In February 2024, ElectricCoArt in Bedford will display Cornelia's works.

Finally, we have scheduled our annual holiday gathering at Anello's (the event space next door to Montano's) on Dec. 6.

# WONJU, SOUTH KOREA

## LOTS OF NEWS, BUT FIRST A TRIP TO S. AFRICA

*Ramona Kirsch, Ed.D*  
*Roanoke-Wonju sister cities chairwoman*  
*kirschrr@hollins.edu*

I was asked to represent Roanoke Valley Sister Cities in February at Sister Cities International's first African Regional Summit in Cape Town, South Africa.

I participated in Call-to-Action Activity: Libraries & Literacy Project by visiting Siyabulela Primary School in Langa Township, Cape Town. (Siyabulela means "we thank you" in Xhosa, one of the native languages). The group delivered books donated from across the USA (including from Roanoke), read to classes and presented prizes to winners of the Langa Township Youth Authors program. I also met young South African author Stacey Fru, who at 15 has already published six books.

In addition, I met with local social justice organizations and visited Robben Island and the prison cell once occupied by Nelson Mandela.

## UPCOMING FALL EVENTS

### KOREAN CLASSES TO BEGIN AGAIN!

Korean classes will resume this fall at the William Byrd High School in Vinton. Classes will be held every Saturday morning. The classes are free and open to the public. More information will be shared once details are finalized.

### WONJU MAYOR'S VISIT

The Wonju Mayor and council members are to make a brief visit to Roanoke in October. The visit will focus on setting plans for an official Wonju delegation visit in May 2024 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Roanoke Wonju sister cities relationship. Look for more details about the spring 2024 delegation visit in our next newsletter.



*Ramona visits Nelson Mandela's former prison cell at Robben Island.*



*Ramona with South African author, Stacey Fru, age 15.*



The Wonju video contest was a great success. We had wonderful submissions and three spectacular winners.

**FIRST PRIZE: Abby Estrada** for her video "Exploring Roanoke."

**SECOND PRIZE: John Taylor and Carter Crouch** for their video "Roanoke."

**THIRD PRIZE: Abigail Phillips** for her video "Shining Roanoke."

The winners will be announced, and their videos viewed, on Aug. 15, 2023, during a ceremony in the Roanoke City Council chambers (4th Floor) in the Municipal Building at 4:30 p.m., followed by a reception in the North Atrium. The three winning videos will be placed on the RVSCI website for public viewing.



*Ramona Kirsch (4th from left) at Siyabulela Primary School with the donated books.*



*Roanoke College  
Research Team outside  
the old Gangwon  
governor's office.*

## ROANOKE COLLEGE RESEARCH TEAM DOES FIELDWORK IN WONJU

*By Whitney A.M. Leeson, Ph.D  
Professor of history and anthropology, Roanoke College  
wleeson@roanoke.edu*

Six Roanoke College students traveled to South Korea to spend three weeks in June researching the legacy of American Protestant missionaries in contemporary South Korea. Their fieldwork took them to Wonju, where they had the opportunity to strengthen Roanoke's sister city relationship. The students look forward to sharing information about their experiences in South Korea at future sister city events. The research team was led by Stella Xu, Ph.D., the John Turbyfill professor of history, and I. Professor Xu and I received a competitive ASIA Network Student Faculty Fellowship grant that fully funded the team's research expenses.

Professors Xu and I found inspiration for the project in three cases of U.S.-Korea interactions where people in the Roanoke community impacted the development of Korea as a modern nation-state. In our grant application we drew attention to Roanoke College's role as the U.S. institution of higher education that hosted the greatest number of Korean students from the 1890 to the 1930s, including Kim Kyusik, a prominent leader of the Korean Independence Movement, and Prince Eui Hwa, fifth son of King Kojong. They also highlighted their recent discovery

of Mrs. Ye Cha Yun's baptismal certificate in the session minutes of Salem Presbyterian Church. Mrs. Ye was the wife of Mr. Ye Cha Yun, Korean chargé d'affaires in Washington, D.C., from 1890 to 1893, and was baptized in Salem where she and her husband spent one week visiting Roanoke College faculty in 1892. Linnie Davis, a native of Abingdon, made arrangement for the baptism. As a member of the first missionary cohort from the Southern Presbyterian Mission to Korea, Davis traveled with Mrs. Ye back to Korea and they forged a close friendship.

Professor Xu's close personal relationship with Dr. Bob Roth, the Roanoke-area plastic surgeon and medical missionary who established the Roanoke-Wonju sister city program in 1964, also played a significant role in the project's conception. She wanted to do something that served as a reminder of his commitment to bettering the lives of Koreans in the post-war era and his insight in developing cultural, medical, economic, educational and professional exchanges between Roanoke and Wonju as a way of encouraging mutual understanding, friendship and peace.

*continued on page 16*

## ROANOKE COLLEGE RESEARCH TEAM DOES FIELDWORK IN WONJU *continued from page 15*

The six students—Owen Collander, Lewis Edwards, Ashton Howard, Cameron McDonald, Jake Strohl, and Elizabeth Walton— will use their fieldwork experiences in Korea to produce a six-episode podcast exploring past and present mission efforts in South Korea. Their lines of questioning: What do Koreans today think about the legacy of U.S. missionaries 137 years after their arrival in 1885? How do Korean Protestants continue to navigate differences between the faith practices of Anglo-American Protestantism and those of highly localized Korean churches? What motivates Korean Protestants to evangelize abroad?

The Roanoke College research team made site visits and conducted interviews in Seoul, Wonju and Chŏlla province. They met pastors, lay leaders and congregational members from three of the oldest churches in Korea: Jeongdong Church, established in 1885 by American Methodist missionary Henry Appenzeller; Saemunan Church, founded by Horace Underwood in 1887 and the church where Roanoke College alum Kim Kyusik worked for many years; and Chŏnju Sŏmun Church, organized by the Southern Presbyterian Mission and the church where Linnie Davis was stationed. The students also formed close ties with their peers at two of Roanoke College's exchange partners, Ewha Womans University, founded by the U.S. Methodist Mission, and Yonsei University, founded by the U.S. Northern Presbyterian Mission.

The students appreciated the generous hospitality extended to them by Mr. Won Gang-soo, mayor of Wonju, and his staff during their research trip. Cameron McDonald, who worked as an intern for Roanoke Valley Sister Cities this year, described his trip to Wonju as a “rewarding experience. The people of Wonju treated us well while the city offered unforgettable food and beautiful views.” Cameron said he especially enjoyed “the delicious lunch with Korean specialties” and meeting the mayor, “who spoke to us on the importance of the sister city connection and why it is crucial to continue extending cultural programs between Wonju and Roanoke.”



Professor Xu and I delivered a letter of greeting and goodwill from Mayor Sherman Lea to Mayor Won Gang-soo as well as glassware and coasters marked with Roanoke's star logo. The mayor of Wonju, in turn, talked about his desire to visit our “Star City” and see the Roanoke College campus before giving each student a beautiful set of wooden chopsticks and spoon. Cameron expressed his gratitude for the gifts he received, and the arrangements made by Ms. Soohyun Paek who coordinates international affairs for the municipality of Wonju. “Before parting the city, Ms. Paek even took us to a gigantic suspension bridge stretching between two mountain tops!”

While in Wonju, the research team met with the dean of Yonsei University Wonju College of Medicine as well as several department heads and teaching faculty affiliated with Wonju Severance Christian



*The Roanoke College research team poses with Wonju Mayor Won Gang-soo.*

Hospital. We toured the facilities, taking special note of an exhibit in the entrance foyer dedicated to the pioneering medical missionaries who brought modern healthcare systems to the area.



*An exhibit at Yonsei University Wonju College of Medicine dedicated to pioneering medical missionaries includes a medical bag that belonged to the late RVSCI president Dr. Bob Roth.*

Dr. Roth's medical bag was a featured item in the exhibit as well as an issue of Yonsei Medical Journal published in his memory as founder of plastic surgery in the Gangwon

Province. Dr. Roth served as a medical missionary in South Korea from 1961-1972 and worked to reconstruct patients with deformities who lived in the “leper village.” Staff also remembered his kindness as in-house doctor for the Hoit Adoption Agency, noting that Dr. Roth personally escorted children to meet their adoptive parents in the United States and Europe when needed. Dr. Roth and his wife, Dot, adopted three Korean orphans.

Another research highlight in Wonju was seeing a 1918 house where Wonju medical missionaries lived. The Residence for Wonju Medical Missionaries is now on South Korea's registry of cultural heritage for its role in introducing Western medicine, architecture, education and lifestyle into the nation's central region. It serves as a museum interpreting the history of Wonju Severance Christian Hospital for the public.

The students learned much from the museum's curator before immersing themselves in local history and culture. They toured Gangwon Gamyeong and its adjacent pond; visited the Korean Paper Museum to make Hanji, a traditional Korean paper made from mulberry bark; and finished the day hiking to Wonju's famous suspension bridge at Ganhyeon. Elizabeth Walton described Wonju as “an amazing city in Korea filled with welcoming people. During our time there, I made paper, walked across a suspension bridge, and delivered gifts from the mayor of Roanoke to the mayor of Wonju. I can see why Roanoke created a sister city connection with Wonju — not to mention that in terms of physical geography the two cities look similar, and we felt right at home.”

# WATER TREATMENT SYSTEM TO BE PLACED AT MAGUNGA SCHOOL

By Bill Modica  
Roanoke-Kisumu chairman  
Modicabill2@aol.com



The Magunga Water Committee. The chairman, Zadock Kute, is the third man from the right.

We are happy to report that the Roanoke-Kisumu Water Project has been approved for construction of a water treatment system to be installed at the Magunga School in Kisumu. This system will provide clean drinking water to the school and to the nearby community. The project is going to be built by Campwater Enterprises from Mombassa and will be managed and maintained by the Magunga School community oversight committee made up of local parents and school officials. Funding was provided by the Roanoke-Kisumu sister city committee

through donations obtained over the past 2 years. The initial cost was set at U.S. \$4,656 but was renegotiated down to \$4,016 by eliminating some travel costs.

The school will provide a secure room to house the system components. Free water for the school is included, and area residents will be able to buy water at low cost. Funds will be converted from U.S. dollars to Kenyan shillings to hire construction workers and operations trainers and to buy filters and supplies. We thank all those who contributed to this effort. Our goal is to finish this project and then proceed to do a second similar system at another school in Kisumu. We are still seeking donations for that. To support this work, please access the RVSCI website at and add your name to our membership roll.



In late July, Linda Harrison and Bill Modica represented RVSCI at the SCI annual business meeting in Durham, N.C.

Many Kenyans get their daily water from local streams that is not treated or purified. We hope this success motivates other schools to install water treatment units.

While attending a recent community program in Salem, I was able to meet some Kenyans who have business and craft enterprises in our area. I purchased a Maasai figurine of a mother and child, which has been added to our Roanoke-Kisumu sister city display case in the Noel C. Taylor Municipal Building in downtown Roanoke.

Linda Harrison and I represented RVSCI at the SCI Summer Leadership and Annual Business Meeting from July 26-28 in Durham, N.C. The program included workshops on economic development and maintaining relationships with our sister cities.



This Maasai figurine of a mother with her baby on her back is now in the Roanoke-Kisumu display case in the municipal building downtown.

## VINTON POLICE CHIEF JOINS OUR SISTER CITY COMMITTEE



*New members Fabricio and Julianna Drumond attended the RVSCI annual dinner in June.*

**F**abricio Drumond is a native of Brazil. He and his family moved to the United States in 1990 when he was 8 years old, settling in the Boston, Mass., area.

Upon graduation from high school, Drumond enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and spent much of his time in the military deployed in Afghanistan, Iraq, Djibouti and Cuba. He is fluent in Portuguese, Italian and Spanish.

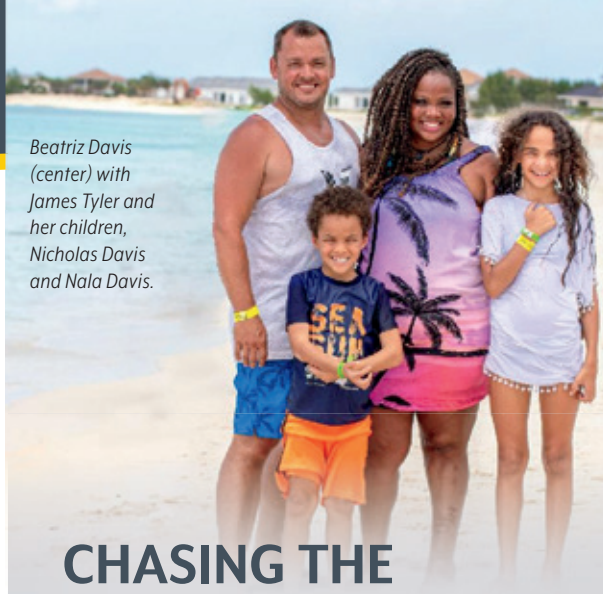
At the end of his enlistment, he joined the Roanoke City Police Department, where he served as a patrolman. Chief Drumond has been a member of the Vinton's force since 2009, beginning as an officer before being promoted to Deputy Police Chief in 2016 and Chief of Police in 2020.

He has a multidisciplinary bachelor's degree, specializing in both Criminal Justice and Business, and a master's degree in National Security, both from Liberty University. He has been the recipient of drug recognition awards, personal and unit citations, leadership awards and has been named Officer of the Year. He is a strong advocate for community policing.

Fabricio is married to Julianna Drumond and has two stepchildren, Dakota and Morgan, and one daughter, Athena.

— From online sources

*Beatriz Davis (center) with James Tyler and her children, Nicholas Davis and Nala Davis.*



## CHASING THE AMERICAN DREAM

*By new sister cities member Beatriz Davis  
beatrizduarte86@gmail.com*

**W**hen I was 9 years old and growing up in Praia Grande, Brazil, I told my dad that I would like to work for a bank. He smiled and said that I would have to work hard to accomplish that. My parents quit studying in the 4th grade, so they dreamed about having an educated daughter. Once I finished high school, I decided to study Business Administration at Universidade Catolica de Santos.

My first full-time job was as a credit card collector. That position gave me the skills needed to finally get a job at a bank.

I finished my degree and worked for the same bank for 8 years. I always loved my job, but I felt the need to improve my English to further my career. I learned about an au pair program and was placed with a lovely family in Roanoke. In September 2012, I arrived in America with only two pieces of luggage and a big dream.

In a little over two years, I found myself getting married, becoming a mom and getting separated. I was always self-conscious about my accent, but I applied for a position at a well-known bank, and to my surprise, I was hired. Overcoming my fear of being judged was my most powerful decision.

I became passionate about fraud, money laundering, financial crimes and the dispute process. I was always studying and learning new ways to make the bank safer for my customers. After 6 years of working on different types of disputes, I was recruited to join Dave, a digital banking service. It was my time to give back to the community as a loss management specialist.

As a leader, I believe that your history, flaws and your strength make you unique. Do not be afraid to put yourself out there. You will reach the American Dream once you believe in yourself. I believe in you!

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### RVSCI Corporate Board Members

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**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 = \_\_\_\_\_

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

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