



# AROUND OUR WORLD

ROANOKE VALLEY SISTER CITIES, INC.

VOLUME 26, ISSUE 2 | AUGUST 2023 – DECEMBER 2023

Brazilian artist Thiago Valdi collaborated with Roanoke artist Jonathan Murrill on "Nightingale," their mural at 11th Street and Moorman Avenue.



## BRAZILIAN ARTIST GIFTS ROANOKE TWO WALL MURALS

By Linda Harrison.  
Roanoke-Florianópolis chairwoman  
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Photos courtesy of Talia Logan

We were fortunate to have Florianópolis muralist Thiago Valdi as artist-in-residence in Roanoke from Sept. 26 to Oct. 4. His visit was sponsored by Roanoke Valley Sister Cities, the Olin Hall Galleries and the Joanne Leonhardt Cassullo Center for Art at Roanoke College. Thiago was housed at Wilson Hughes Gallery AirBnB, 117 Campbell Ave. in downtown Roanoke, run by Suzun Hughes and Daniel Darquea-Basson.

On Thursday, Sept. 28, Roanoke Valley Sister Cities held a dinner in Thiago's honor at Luigi's, a Brazilian-owned Italian restaurant. RVSCI members met him and heard him speak about his background and his career as a muralist. His excellent English skills and friendly personality were enjoyed by local artists and sister city members.

During his visit he created a beautiful mural on the side of Wilson Hughes gallery. On Saturday, Sept. 30, sister cities members, friends and artists were invited to view the mural at a reception at the gallery, sponsored by RVSCI and the Roanoke Arts Commission. As a result of the event, we added a few new members.

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Thiago at Century Plaza  
Florianópolis sculpture



## 2023 ACTIVITIES, EXCHANGES REPRESENTED 4 CORNERS OF THE GLOBE



By Mary Jo Fassié  
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As we begin the new year, we look back on all the RVSCI activities and exchanges since our last AOW issue in July 2023. I hope you were able to attend some of our events.

In August, Cameron McDonald, now a Roanoke College senior, finished his summer internship in St-Lô where he worked as a sports camp counselor for youth. Roanoke-Opole chairwoman Dr. Kris Bulas-Slowikowski visited Opole

and met with the vice mayor, the head of the public library system and the director of the music school. Later in August at the Noel C. Taylor Municipal Building, Roanoke-Wonju chairwoman Ramona Kirsch awarded prizes to the top three entries in the Wonju/Roanoke film contest, featuring video shorts of Roanoke with Korean subtitles. A reception followed for parents, students and RVSCI members.



At a dinner to honor Brazilian muralist Thiago Valdi (left) at Luigi's restaurant are Mary Jo Fassié, Roanoke-Florianópolis chairwoman Linda Harrison, Roanoke Arts and Culture Coordinator Douglas Jackson, and former RVSC artist-in-residence Katherine Devine.

In September, RVSCI collaborated with the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, which hosted an art exhibit, "Our World Village." Plans began last summer, and the official opening was Sept. 14. Artwork came from our sister cities members, from the Young Artists Showcase as well as the Roanoke community. Later in the month, talented Florianópolis muralist Thiago Valdi arrived. Thiago's visit was funded by RVSCI with the help of Talia Logan, director of Roanoke College's Olin Hall Galleries, and the Joanne Leonhardt Cassullo Center for Art. Thiago added two beautiful murals in the city of Roanoke. One is on the outside wall of Wilson Hughes gallery on Campbell Avenue, and the other, done in collaboration with fellow muralist Jonathan Murrill of Roanoke, is at 11th Street and Moorman Avenue.





*RVSC members and friends turned out on a beautiful day for the second annual Ginkgo Festival in Century Plaza.*

In early October, RVSCI received the official trophy for winning the Sister Cities International 2023 award for Innovation in Arts and Culture. It is now on view in the Roanoke display case in the Municipal Building. Also in October, 30 St-Lô students and three teachers visited Roanoke, attending high school classes and touring the region. Students were housed with Roanoke Valley families, and a large potluck dinner was held at the end of the visit.

On November 4, the second annual Ginkgo festival was held in Century Plaza, downtown Roanoke. Members of our sister cities handed out treats from their countries and informed the public about each city. The event featured music, art activities for children and adults and information provided by Roanoke Tree Stewards and Roanoke Master

Gardeners. At the time of the festival, Vice Mayor Joe Cobb and husband James Matthews visited Lijiang, China, meeting with local artists, educators, and officials.

In December, Roanoke-Kisumu chairman Bill Modica and RVSCI member Ruphina Okeyo flew to Kisumu. Bill was able to meet with the governor's chief of staff and Samba Nixon of the City of Kisumu Urban Area Association as well as view the site for the completed water purification system.

In January, we look forward to working with Hollins University intern Halo Montgomery, who will be busy with several projects for RVSCI.

Happy new year to all. 2024 is the year of the dragon. According to Chinese mythology, the dragon is a powerful and auspicious creature,

representing courage, creativity, and innovation. 2024 promises to be a year full of possibilities and opportunities!



*The trophy representing the Sister Cities International 2023 award for Innovation in Arts and Culture is now in the Roanoke display case in the municipal building.*



## BRAZILIAN ARTIST GIFTS ROANOKE TWO WALL MURALS

(continued from page 1)

Working cooperatively with Roanoke muralist Jonathan Murrill, Thiago created a large mural, "Nightingale," at 11th Street and Moorman Avenue. Thiago painted a wall-size likeness of Danielle Austin, a Roanoke educator and neighborhood activist. Jonathan added a lovely painting of a colorful bird. The work was done in a multiethnic neighborhood, and it had the support of members of the Roanoke nonprofit group The Humble Hustle Co. for enhancing their neighborhood.

"After almost 20 years of trying to improve my art, it became popular around the world because my technique is very realistic with brilliant colors. So people in other cities started asking me to do it in their own places," Thiago said in an interview with television station WFXR. "I use two kinds of techniques, a very precise one, very rational techniques of realism. I also use a lot of expression that I learned from Brazil. The way that they do things, very loose, very free. When you mix those antagonistic things, the art becomes more powerful."

Many thanks to Talia Logan, director of Olin Galleries at Roanoke College, and Lacey Leonard, assistant director, who helped with organizing and funding this exchange as well as sightseeing and entertainment for Thiago.

Visit Thiago's extensive Instagram account to view his artwork <https://www.instagram.com/thiagovaldi/> as well a video of his experiences in Roanoke. RVTV also filmed him working [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsXZXZ\\_hFyY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsXZXZ_hFyY)

Thiago's artwork was well received, and we appreciate his help in connecting us with the new Florianópolis mayor.

It is our hope to send a Roanoke muralist to Florianópolis in the near future to work with Thiago on a similar project as we further the mission of RVSCI to connect the people, art



Thiago (right) with Roanoke artist Jonathan Murrill and Talia Logan, director of Olin Galleries at Roanoke College.

and culture of the Roanoke Valley to our sister city in Brazil.



Thiago and Mary Jo Fassie in front of Wilson Hughes gallery mural which was commissioned as part of his visit to Roanoke.



# Young Artists SHOWCASE

Sister Cities International aims to promote peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation – one individual, one community at a time. This year's Young Artist Showcase theme is "ClimateScape: Resilient Cities for Tomorrow's Climate." This theme not only aligns with the United Nations' 2030 agenda but resonates deeply with Sister Cities International's commitment to fostering cooperation among cities. We invite young artists to delve into the challenges of climate change and its profound impact on cities. The theme encourages students to unleash their creativity and showcase the transformative power of resilient cities that can adapt and flourish in the face of a changing climate.

## ELIGIBILITY

Students must be between 13 and 18 years of age at the time of the 2024 international deadline (April 1, 2024, for RVSCI's 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 are published on Sister Cities International's website (<https://www.sistercities.org/2022-yaas>).

One artist will be selected as a Grand Prize winner, 2nd Place winner, and 3rd Place winner.

The Grand Prize 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 2024.



## ROANOKE VALLEY SISTER CITIES AWARDS

Photographs of the 1st- through 3rd-place artists' works will be published to the RVSC website and Facebook page.

1st Place receives \$300; 2nd Place receives \$200; 3rd Place receives \$100; and Honorable Mentions receive \$25 each.

## SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS TO RVSC

Students may select one (1) piece of original artwork to submit for this showcase.

**We will not accept physical artwork, only photographs of the artwork.** To ensure our judges have the best quality view of your artwork, please confirm that photographs are no less than 1350x1080 pixels.

Photos of media accepted include oil, acrylic, watercolor, charcoal, colored pencil, crayon, ink, marker, etching, and 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 **April 12, 2024**.

Judges will evaluate submissions based on theme interpretation, originality, and creativity.





# INTERNATIONAL FILM SERIES

IN COLLABORATION WITH HOLLINS UNIVERSITY



## February 7–25, 2024

The Department of Modern Languages is pleased to present the sixth Roanoke College International Film Series, co-presented by Hollins University. This year's theme is **Nature**. Each film will be followed by a post-screening, panel-led discussion.

The year's film series is sponsored by Roanoke College, Hollins University, 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; Center for Studying Structures of Race; Departments of Modern Languages, English, Sociology & Public Health, and Religion & Philosophy; the Anthropology, Screen Studies, and Peace & Justice Studies concentrations; and Student Activities Board.



JAPANESE

### Princess Mononoke

February 7, 7:00 p.m.

The Grandin Theatre

Hayao Miyazaki  
1997, PG-13



ITALIAN

### I Am Love

February 12, 7:00 p.m.

Antrim Chapel at Roanoke College

Luca Guadagnino  
2009, R



CHINESE

### The Hole

February 14, 7:00 p.m.

Visual Arts Center Auditorium at Hollins

Tsai Ming-Liang  
1998, PG-13



RUSSIAN

### Stalker

February 16, 7:00 p.m.

Wartmann Ballroom at Roanoke College

Andrei Tarkovsky  
1979, TV14



SPANISH

### Ciénaga

February 21, 7:00 p.m.

Visual Arts Center Auditorium at Hollins

Lucrecia Martel  
2001, NR



BENGALI

### Pather Panchali

February 22, 7:00 p.m.

Wortmann Ballroom at Roanoke College

Satyajit Ray  
1955, NR



GERMAN

### Aguirre Wrath of God

February 23, 7:00 p.m.

Antrim Chapel at Roanoke College

Werner Herzog  
1972, PG



FRENCH

### Winged Migration

February 25, 2:00 p.m.

Taubman Museum of Art

Jacques Perrin, Jacques Clauzod,  
and Michel Debats 2009, G

# CONGRATS!

*To these  
high achievers!*



## JOE COBB

**Congratulations to RVSCI at-large board member and Roanoke Vice Mayor Joe Cobb, who received his Doctor of Ministry degree and is now the Rev. Dr. Joseph L. Cobb.**



## RUPERT CUTLER

**Congratulations to RVSCI member and donor Rupert Cutler, who was named the 2023 Roanoke Citizen of the Year by the Roanoke City Council for his unwavering commitment to environmental stewardship, wildlife conservation, and community service throughout his life.**

## MEET OUR JANUARY TERM INTERN FROM HOLLINS UNIVERSITY



*Halo Montgomery*

RVSC is thrilled to introduce our newest intern, Halo Montgomery! As she embarks on this exciting, month-long journey with us, let's take a moment to get to know her a little better.

Halo is pursuing a degree in communication at Hollins University. With this, she brings a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm to our team, combining academic excellence with a passion for global community. Beyond the classroom, Halo spends much of her time putting her English minor to use tutoring at the university's Writing Center, helping students refine a multitude of projects including papers, presentations, and formal letters to potential employers. Looking ahead, Halo has ambitious plans. Upon graduating this spring, she envisions finding a career in social marketing or social media management, and she is eager to apply the skills and knowledge she will have gained during this internship.

In the role of intern at RVSC, Halo will be contributing to the creation of a Mailchimp account, learning how to use this email marketing platform then teaching others on the team. This will make sending out messages and our monthly newsletters easier as well as making it more accessible to you, our supporters!

Please join us in welcoming Halo to the RVSC team for the month of January! We look forward to a mutually beneficial collaboration and are confident that she will bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to RVSC.





Polish tapestries.

## ‘OUR WORLD VILLAGE’ EXHIBIT ANOTHER COLLABORATION WITH MEDICAL SCHOOL

By Mary Jo Fassié

**R**oanoke Valley Sister Cities collaborated with Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine to present a fall art show at VTCSOM. The opening was Sept. 14. “Our World Village: The Global Impact of a Personal Connection” featured artwork from our sister cities as well as from the Roanoke community. The exhibit was testimony to how art can bring together and connect people from all over the world.

“VTCSOM has had a strong relationship with RVSC,” said David Trinkle, associate dean for community engagement. “Both of our deans have served on the organization’s board of directors, and we have an international elective that offers our fourth-year medical students a



The collaborative exhibit “Our World Village” was on view this fall in the halls of 2 Riverside Circle at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine.

global health rotation in one of Roanoke’s seven sister cities. This art show is another outstanding partnership that we hope will resonate in our community.”

The exhibit featured 13 local artists. In addition, artwork by students from Patrick Henry High School, Arnold R. Burton Technology Center, and North Cross School who had competed in the Roanoke Valley Sister Cities 2023 Young Artists Showcase was displayed.

The show ran through Dec. 15.

Many thanks to Courtney Powell, director of community engagement for VTCSOM, who organized and curated the show.





*In Opole last August, Kris Slowikowski (seated, right) met with Opole Deputy Mayor Maciej Wujec (standing left), Public Library Director Marcin Duda (standing right), and Music School Director Magdalena Czercowcy.*

## LOTS OF MEETINGS, CONVERSATIONS ON EVE OF OUR 30TH ANNIVERSARY

*By Dr. Kristinia Bulas-Slowikowski  
Roanoke-Opole chairwoman  
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I traveled to Opole in August 2023 for a short visit while in Poland on a personal vacation. There I was able to meet with the vice mayor, the international relations department, the director of the main public library and director of the music school. We were able to discuss our proposal for a Polish artist to spend a 2-week workshop at Hollins University as well as plans for celebrating the 30th anniversary of our sister city partnership in Roanoke during the fall of 2024. Kaelyn Spickler is our Roanoke County liaison and has been working hand-in-hand with us on preparing a wonderful visit for our international guests. We are looking forward to engaging our community business leaders and administrative leaders in a program to highlight our public emergency management programs, music, arts, and cultural attractions plus educational offerings from elementary schools through higher institutions of learning in the area.

It was wonderful to meet again with Anna and Mateusz Rozek, who have chaperoned talented high school music students in Roanoke on several occasions. I was honored to meet with the Honorary Ukrainian consul for Opole on Ukraine's Independence Day in August and share bread with the Ukrainian community who thanked Roanoke for its fundraising efforts last year. I was also treated to a special concert held in honor of the 50th anniversary of partnership between Opole and Potsdam, Germany. High school students from both Potsdam and Opole expertly performed several orchestral musical selections for the Opole community.

As always, I am treated with graciousness and generosity of spirit and wonderful food. It will be important to explore virtual communication to better connect our two cities as distance makes frequent travel difficult. Stay tuned for further updates on progress for the fall events in 2024.



*Musicians Mateusz, Anna and Tadeusz Rozek. Mateusz and Anna have chaperoned music students to Roanoke.*



*Left: A special bread to celebrate Ukrainian Independence Day in Opole.*

*Above: High school music students from Opole and Potsdam, Germany, performed a concert to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the partnership between the two cities.*



## LARGE GROUP OF VISITORS DIDN'T SEE IT ALL, BUT THEY TRIED

By Peggy Wells  
Roanoke/St-Lô co-chairwoman  
hpgwells@aol.com

In October, we welcomed 30 students and 3 teachers from the Institut St-Lô. All of the visitors were housed with local families, thanks to the hard work of teachers Marsha Taylor and Rebecca Wright and our committee. The students stayed with families of local students, and they attended school 2 of the 8 days of their visit.

We hosts and visitors toured Roanoke, including spending an hour with Mayor Sherman Lea, who was very welcoming. He gave us a tour of the Noel C. Taylor Municipal Building and city council chambers, and led the students through some role-playing. Some of the students took the seats of city council members, including the mayor. They also met with Brian Kelley, editor of The Roanoke Times, and had a tour of the Taubman Museum of Art, led by Katrina King-Singh, the museum's deputy director of community engagement.

Our committee rented a bus and driver, so that the group could spend a day at the D-Day Memorial in Bedford, and Poplar Forest. They also spent a full day at Hollins University. Hollins provided transportation and lunch, and the group attended a class. Hollins is discussing creating an annual exchange of students; the details are not yet decided.

We concluded the visit with a huge potluck dinner at Cave Spring Baptist Church, thanks to the connections of Sherrie Henshaw's parents, Paul and Diane Langston. It was well attended by the host families, students and members in Roanoke.

In other news, Jeanine Vérove has informed us that a street in Vire, a Norman town about a half-hour's drive southeast from St-Lô, will be

Marsha Taylor (front, left) poses with the French group at Poplar Forest.





Roanoke Mayor Sherman Lea (standing) leads some of the French students through some role playing in city council chambers.



re-named for the late Bob Slaughter. Bob was a D-Day veteran and founder of this sister city committee. He was wounded in Vire during WWII. Bob's family was consulted, and they are very pleased, and some of them may attend the re-naming ceremony in Vire this summer.

Our committee came out for the second annual Ginkgo Festival in downtown Roanoke on Nov. 4. We were represented by Ann and Bill Hackworth, Debra Boule, and Chris and Betsy Bohannon.

We had a nice turnout for our annual holiday gathering, our Dîner de Noël, on Dec. 6 at Anello's. Our thanks to Andy and Penny Muelenaer for their engaging presentation with photos of their summer 2023 visit to Normandy with Marsha Taylor's group. The Muelenaers are long-time, frequent hosts to our French visitors and were able to catch up with several of them on this trip.



Maud Mimoun, an English teacher at L'Institut Saint-Lô, addresses the crowd during the potluck for our French visitors, host families and members at Cave Spring Baptist Church. Next to Maud (from left) are Sherrie Henshaw, Peggy Wells, and Institut teachers Louis Blondeau and Sandra de Pierrepont.



Cameron McDonald (right), now a Roanoke College senior and former RVSC intern, poses with his first host dad, David Guillaume, at the ramparts in Saint-Lô.

## FORMER RVSC INTERN EMBRACES NEW PERSPECTIVE IN NORMANDY

By Cameron McDonald  
camcdonald@mail.roanoke.edu

I had the honor of traveling to Saint-Lô, for five weeks in the summer of 2023. From July 11 to Aug. 18, I completed an internship as a sports educator for children in the area while residing with two families in Saint-Lô. Words cannot begin to describe the appreciation and gratitude I have to those who helped me experience life from a new perspective as a

result of this sister city connection.

To Jeanine Vérove, president of Saint-Lô 44-Roanoke; Mary Jo Fassié, president of Roanoke Valley Sister Cities; Étienne Ygouf, supervisor of my internship in Saint-Lô; the Guillaume family and the Massue family, I

(Continued on page 12)



## FORMER RVSC INTERN EMBRACES NEW PERSPECTIVE IN NORMANDY

*(Continued from page 11)*

thank you deeply for establishing a foundation for exploration and generating the chance for new opportunities in the region of Normandy.

These individuals, as well as every other person I encountered in Saint-Lô, approached me with kindness and respect, even with my poor French skills and American aura. Every child with whom I had the delight of meeting, to play games both within gymnasiums and on the beach, were more than willing to go above and beyond in their effort to teach me their ways of life and how to properly communicate with them, all the while being excited to attempt to learn from me. It was a humbling and rewarding internship when attempting to explain to one individual how to properly play defense in basketball or swing a baseball bat and not be understood -- when another child steps in between us to better enunciate and describe what I could not. The point would always be made and the change in play would be attempted, and the appreciation from my side could not grow larger.



*Exploring the Mont St-Michel with his host sister Lisenn Guillaume, a student in Lille*

From my experience working as an *Éducateur Sportif*, with basketball in Saint-Lô and various activities on the beach and in the sea of Agon-Coutainville as my main priorities, I proudly believe the future of the city of Saint-Lô is in good hands with the youth I contacted there.

This connection between people would not have been possible without the sister city connection between Roanoke and Saint-Lô. Although the history that was necessary to reach this point was



*Cameron with his second host family, the Massues, at the Chausey islands.*



brutal, I believe the inhabitants of both cities have made the most of this relationship in a positive, influential, and impactful manner.

Finally, to highlight more of the activities I completed with my two host families while not participating in the internship, here are a few: a visit to the Mont Saint-Michel, a day trip to Caen, a night at the Art Sonic Festival, a tour of Saint-Lô and its historical centers, a day trip to the D-Day beaches, the Normandy American Cemetery, and other major cities and locations affiliated with WWII, Bayeux Adventure, countless board game nights, Granville, a trip to the Chausey islands, a planetarium and other activities in Cherbourg, a driving trip around the coast of La Manche, bowling, FI simulator, and movie theater nights, multiple nights in Paris, fireworks in the Gardens of Versailles, and too many home-cooked dinners to count.

Needless to say, I would recommend this opportunity to anyone with the time and willingness to step out of their comfort zone and experience life from a new perspective. To Saint-Lô and to the people who call it home, thank you. *Vive la France et vive les États-Unis.*



*Above: Cameron's vertiginous view while rock wall ziplining during his internship as a sports educator.*

*Right: During Saint-Lô liberation ceremonies on July 18, Cameron posed with Saint-Lô Mayor Emmanuelle Lejeune at a plaque dedicated to Major Thomas Howie.*

## **Thank you to our generous supporters!**

Since publication of our July 2023 newsletter, these are our Patron and Benefactor donors who have joined their support of RVSCI and our projects.

### **PATRON**

Anne Devries  
Archie Freeman

### **BENEFACTOR**

Rupert Cutler  
DiFrancesco Family  
Stella Xu





## CARING HOST FAMILIES WERE KEY TO INTERN'S HAPPY EXPERIENCE

By Anaëlle Vérove  
anaelleverove@gmail.com

Hello, I am 17 years old, and I come from Grenoble in France. This summer of 2023, I was lucky enough to be able to spend a month in Roanoke for an internship, thanks to the sister city program between Roanoke and St-Lô. My grandmother, Jeanine Vérove, is the president of the French organization.

After 8 hours of flying, I finally arrived in Roanoke on July 4. I'm so excited! I was very well received by the Thompson family: Jill, Mike, Heidi, Maya, and the cutest dog in the world, Jasper.

The first week, I only worked two days at the Taubman Museum, where I took care of various tasks. This week gave me time to get used to my new environment with a very kind family. The Thompsons were able to show me around Roanoke, starting with the famous Roanoke Star, then the delicious ice cream at Blue Cow. I had a lot of fun, we played cards, went kayaking, climbing, bowling.

The second week, I had the chance to attend a Girl Scout Camp in West Virginia, where I made a lot of friends. We did many activities, such as climbing, rafting in the New River, ziplining, water park. We were also able to visit the visitors center at the New River Gorge Bridge. It was great fun, although a little tiring (we got up at 7a.m!).

I went to visit the Livingston family the third week, during the Roanoke/St-Lô picnic. Lori, Matt, Frances, Bea and their dog, Wishbone, are very nice and made me feel very welcome. I could start my real work week. I had to take care of children during summer art camps. I really enjoyed working at the museum, the children were adorable. It was a lot of fun helping them with their art projects this week, since I also really like art. With the Livingstons, I also had a lot of fun. They took me to restaurants (I could eat the largest slice of pizza of my entire life!), I visited the pinball museum, I went to the cinema to see "Barbie," I even took salsa lessons at the family's church! It was a very busy but exciting week.

Finally, the last week, I changed families once again, with Joe Cobb and James Matthews, and their children, Ginny and JJ. They have a dog, Bear, and two cats, as well as a huge house. Honestly, this was the most tiring week of my stay in Roanoke. I worked at the museum from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., but it was just as good! At the museum, I was able to



Anaëlle Vérove (standing, center) poses with her Thompson host sisters, Heidi and Maya, and other Girl Scout campers near the New River Gorge Bridge.



Anaëlle with Frances, Lori and Beatrice Livingston, from her second host family.



Sailing with host dad Joe Cobb and host sister Ginny.

make clay on a wheel for the first time, which is much more difficult than I thought. My family also took me to do several activities, such as sailing, hiking, going to the mall. Once again, my host family welcomed me very well and was very kind to me.

I really enjoyed my stay in Roanoke. Although it was very tiring, it was an amazing experience and I had so much fun! I was able to meet many wonderful people, it allowed me to discover a new culture and improve my English. I thank my host families for taking such good care of me, as well as the organizers of this program, Ann, Peggy and Mary Jo.



Ramona Kirsch (right) welcomes Ji Yun ("Julia") Park, a student at Yonsei University Wonju College of Medicine, to Roanoke for a month-long rotation.



# WONJU, SOUTH KOREA

## MEDICAL SCHOOLS' INTERN EXCHANGE GOING STRONG

By Ramona Kirsch, Ed.D.  
Roanoke-Wonju chairwoman  
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The international internship exchange between medical students from Roanoke (Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine) and Wonju (Yonsei University Wonju College of Medicine) is happening again this winter. Roanoke medical students Vemmy Metsutan and Samantha Speroni will arrive in Wonju, South Korea, the weekend of Jan. 27 and will return home the weekend of Feb. 24.

Ji Yun (Julia) Park, a medical student from Wonju, arrived in Roanoke on Jan. 5 to begin her internship on Jan. 8 and will return to South Korea on Feb. 2. I met Julia and will be setting a date later in January for a special dinner for her and RVSCI members.



### MEET THE NEW LANGUAGE TEACHER

Silvia Lee was born and raised in Ecuador, lived in South Korea and has started putting roots down here in Roanoke. She graduated with a Spanish and Korean translation interpretation degree from the Hanguk University of Foreign Language, and she has taught English, Spanish and Korean for over 10 years. She is looking forward to meeting all of her new students and to having fun in class. Contact: silvialeelee@gmail.com; @ishilbiknits

# Beginning Korean

with Roanoke Valley Sister Cities, Inc.  
WBHS International Club & Vinton WorldTrekkers

Classes are FREE to all. However, students must purchase their own copies of "Talk to me in Korean - Level 1" textbook

Begins Saturday, February 17, 2024  
William Byrd High School Library  
11:00 am - 12:30 pm

안녕 하세요 | Annyeonghaseyo  
Hello!

축하합니다! | Chukhahamnida  
Congratulations!

Email or call for more information or to sign up:  
roanokevalleysistercities@gmail.com  
cfarrington@rcps.us  
(540) 521-1168

ROANOKE VALLEY SISTER CITIES

Wonju, South Korea, was the first sister city of Roanoke, beginning in 1964. To celebrate 60 years of a vibrant partnership, there will be several opportunities to join in on festivities!

## 60 YEARS WITH WONJU!

### HELP US CELEBRATE 60 YEARS OF SISTER CITY PARTNERSHIP WITH WONJU, SOUTH KOREA!

A delegation from Wonju, including the Mayor of Wonju and a K-Pop group, will be visiting Roanoke

## May 16-18, 2024!

Celebrations are being finalized now, so save the date! Mark your calendars and keep checking the RVSCI events calendar for updates!

Any questions, contact Dr. Ramona Kirsch, Chair, Wonju Sister City Committee, at [kirschrr@hollins.edu](mailto:kirschrr@hollins.edu) or [rkirsch03@gmail.com](mailto:rkirsch03@gmail.com).



## EVENTFUL VISIT UNDERSCORES OUR DEEPENING FRIENDSHIP WITH LIJIANG

By Joe Cobb, D.Min.  
RVSCI board member at large  
joecobbforroanoke@gmail.com



At the Fifth China-U.S. Sister Cities Conference, Joe Cobb poses with members of the Lijiang Foreign Affairs Office, (from left) He Weijian, Yang Chao and Nie Xin.

Within the extraordinary challenges facing our world in these days, there is nothing more inspiring and encouraging than the immutable and irrefutable gift of friendship.

On Nov. 2, 2023, I had the honor of traveling, along with my husband, James Matthews, to Kunshan, China, for the Fifth China-U.S. Sister Cities Conference. This conference brought together cities from around the world to reconnect after the Covid-19 pandemic and re-energize the sister city relationships among our two nations. There we met our Lijiang hosts from the Lijiang Foreign Affairs Office, He Weijian, Yang Chao and Nie Xin. Zhang Liwei, our long-time friend and director, joined us later in Lijiang.

I was honored to share remarks during the Youth and Education panel at the conference, and even made my way onto the local news covering the event.

On Nov. 3, we flew to Lijiang to share in conversations and exploration of our beautiful sister city. Lijiang is very similar to

Roanoke – a teeming city, nestled in stunning mountains, with a growing economy, increased tourism, and incredible hospitality. Our hosts from the Foreign Affairs Office provided a robust schedule of activities and meetings, with delicious meals in and through it all.

We spent a lovely afternoon and evening with our good friends, artists Mr. Mu and Ajun, who gifted us with a painting from their daughter, along with a shared tea and meal to discuss the opportunity of bringing this inspiring family to Roanoke for an artist-in-residency program. Mr. Mu is world-renowned for his artistic work in sculpture incorporating the ancient Naxi language and symbols. Ajun is a gifted photographer, and their daughter is an aspiring design artist.

We had the honor of meeting with the president and representatives of the Lijiang Teacher's College administration and faculty to discuss growing a teacher and student exchange program. President Chen Benhui opened our afternoon symposium on international exchange and cooperation, and we shared in an informative conversation on the possibilities and challenges in growing an exchange program. Language, culture, tourism and education are all keys to growth.

Near the close of our visit to Lijiang, we ate lunch with Vice Mayor Sun Quan and Deputy Secretary General Xiao Jian, sharing encouraging conversation about the renewed friendship of our two cities.

*Joe's long-time friends, the artists Ajun and Mr. Mu, presented Joe and James with a painting from their daughter.*





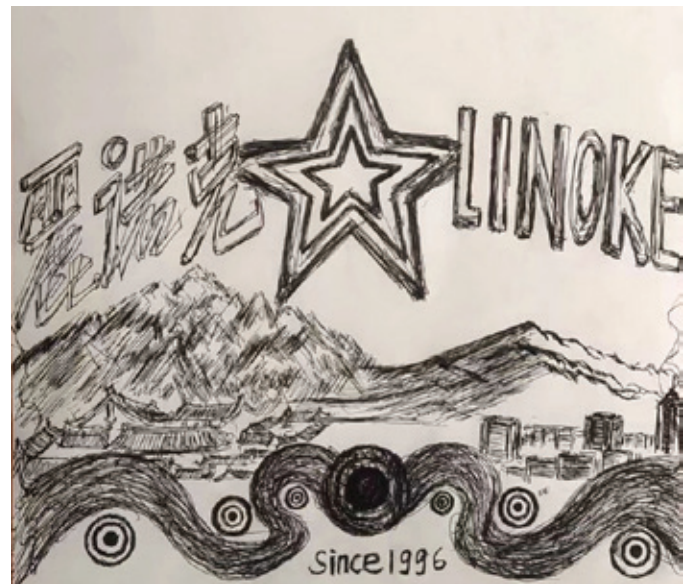


Left: Touring Lijiang are (from left) Ajun, He Weijian, Mr. Mu, Joe, James and Nie Xin.

Below: A detail from a sketch by He Weijian of a label for a prospective fund-raising idea, "Linoke."

One of the fun highlights of our visit to Lijiang included learning each other's languages. James is a lifelong language learner and spent the four weeks prior to our travels immersing himself in a Pimsler course on Mandarin. Our hosts in Lijiang were also eager to hone their English-speaking skills, so we had lively exchanges throughout the visit, learning word meanings, distinctions and pronunciations.

One afternoon, while traveling through the city, He Weijian began a conversation on locally grown apples, and the conversation quickly shifted to apple cider, hard cider and eventually an opportunity to create and sell a locally sourced beverage(s) to raise awareness and funds for our Sister Cities program. Through conversation, we came up with the name "Linoke," and the photo image shared here is from a sketch that He Weijian shared with us near the end of our trip. The message on the sketch label says it all: "Since 1996, The Friendship between Roanoke, Virginia, USA and Lijiang, Yunnan, PRC have been initiated and linked with goodness that will come true through common efforts and sincere cooperation of both parties. The fruits of our friendship will be shared by our people of the two sister-cities."



Thank you, Lijiang, and our friends in the Foreign Affairs Office for an unforgettable visit, renewing and deepening our Sister Cities friendship!

-- Joe Cobb is vice mayor of Roanoke



## DEDICATING A WATER TREATMENT SYSTEM FUNDED BY ROANOKERS

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

Our sister city committee raised funds in 2022 and 2023 to pay for a water treatment system for the Magunga Primary School in Kisumu County, Kenya. After the system was installed and began operating, I decided to pay the site a visit. In November, I began the arduous task of obtaining a visa to visit there. I asked Ruphina Okeyo, a member who is from Kisumu, to join me.

To make the trip more meaningful, I sent a letter to the governor of Kisumu County inviting him to attend a dedication ceremony at the school. In December, Ruphina and I traveled to Nairobi, Kenya, changed planes and went on directly to Kisumu.

At the school we were welcomed warmly by the entire local water committee, the school headmaster and other local leaders. We toured the project site, saw the completed system and even tasted the purified water. There were smiles all around, and it was obvious that our donation was much appreciated. The plan is to not only to provide water to the school but also to the whole local village community. The day was mostly hot, and the fresh clean water added comfort to the proceedings. The local committee will manage the system from now on.

Because the governor was not available to join us, we made a trip to his office and met with his chief of staff to talk about the project and outline plans for similar installations. It gave me



*This is the water treatment system recently installed at the primary school.*



*Bill Modica and Ruphina Okeyo pose at the sister cities plaque in Kisumu.*

a chance to explain the purpose of sister cities and establish a direct contact with the local government officials there.

Afterward, Ruphina and I took a side trip to visit the village where President Obama's family came from, stopped at his late father's home and then went on to see a site where our group had helped plant fruit and nut trees as a source of income for two widows.

The trip could not be counted as complete until I made a stop to meet with Samba Nixon of the City of Kisumu Urban Area Association, of which we are members. Over lunch we discussed ideas for future ventures such as support for educational exchanges and sustainable farming practices. He is a liaison to the City Council for the development of recreation and fishing interests on Lake Victoria. Then I told him that I wanted to create a program for tourist travel to Kisumu and Lake Victoria as a way for our citizens to better understand the needs of his city.

Overall, I consider the trip a great success and look forward to continuing our engagement with the City and County of Kisumu in the coming years.

*The local water committee is shown at the dedication ceremony for the water treatment system at Magunga Primary School.*





## RVSCI Corporate Board Members

### RVSCI Corporate Board Members

**President:** Mary Jo Fassié

**Recording Secretary:** Bill Modica

**Corresponding Secretary:** Jessie Coffman

**Treasurer:** Bill Bestpitch

#### Members at large:

Joe Cobb, D.Min.

Sara Epperly, Ph.D.

Archie Freeman

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

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Andreea Mihalache-O'Keef, Ph.D.

### Sister City committee chairmen and chairwomen:

**Florianópolis, Brazil:** Linda Harrison

**Kisumu, Kenya:** Bill Modica

**Lijiang, China:** Vivien Sparks

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

**Pskov, Russia:** Relationship paused

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

**Wonju, S. Korea:** 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*

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P.O. Box 136  
Roanoke, VA 24002

**ROANOKE VALLEY**



*Mark your calendars!*

<b>Jan. 25</b>	Cornelia Marin reception, 4-7 p.m. Blue Ridge PBS
<b>Feb. 6:</b>	RVSCI virtual board meeting, 5 p.m. via Zoom
<b>Feb. 7-25:</b>	Roanoke College International Film Festival
<b>Feb. 10:</b>	Lunar New Year, noon-2 p.m., Taubman Museum of Art
<b>March 2:</b>	Roanoke Arts Pop, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Taubman
<b>April 2:</b>	RVSCI board meeting, 5 p.m., CITS board room
<b>April 12:</b>	Deadline for RVSCI Young Artists Showcase entries
<b>April 13:</b>	Daisy Art Parade, 11 a.m. downtown Roanoke
<b>May 16-19:</b>	Wonju delegation in Roanoke for 60th anniversary of twinning
<b>May 18:</b>	Local Colors, 11 a.m-5 p.m., Elmwood Park
<b>June 4:</b>	RVSCI Annual Dinner Meeting, Roanoke College
<b>July 21:</b>	Bastille Day potluck picnic, 5:30 p.m., Longwood Park, Salem

