



# AROUND OUR WORLD

ROANOKE VALLEY SISTER CITIES, INC.

VOLUME 27, ISSUE 1 | JANUARY – JULY 2024



In May, Mayors Won and Lea and the members of the 60th anniversary delegation form the "W" for Wonju at the iconic Roanoke street sign.

## 60 YEARS STRONG: Celebrating our decades-long cultural, medical relationship

**W**e revived our free Korean language classes for the first time since COVID. Thanks to Silvia Lee, the instructor, and Cherry Bell Damasco-Farrington, who helped to organize the classes at the William Byrd High School library. Classes will begin again in September (see poster, Page 6).

In the spring, Cindy Petersen, executive director of the Taubman Museum of Art and friend of RVSCI, visited South Korea on a holiday and took the time to visit Wonju and connect with the director of Museum SAN in Wonju. She was able to meet the artists who had donated items to Roanoke, and was interviewed by local media.

In May 2024, RVSCI celebrated 60 years of friendship and partnership with Wonju. For six decades, this relationship has stood as a testament to the power of human connection that transcends borders. During my 2022 visit

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By Ramona Kirsch, Ed.D.  
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The Wonju Traditional Dance team performed at the celebratory luncheon and at Local Colors and the Taubman Museum.

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By Mary Jo Fassie  
President, RVSCI  
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## ENHANCED CREATIVITY IS ANOTHER BENEFIT TO JOINING RVSCI

"The more people interact with other cultures, the more creative they are in the workplace." This is the conclusion of a study by researchers Jackson Lu of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Adam Galinsky of the Columbia (University) Business School. For members and friends of Roanoke Valley Sister Cities, this is no surprise. Lu and Galinsky found that the more those visitors who were in the U.S. on a J-1 visa interacted with their American counterparts, the more creative they became when returning to their home countries. A J-1 visa is a non-immigrant visa issued by the United States to research scholars, professors and exchange visitors participating in programs that promote cultural exchange, especially to obtain medical or business training within the U.S.

Roanoke Valley Sister Cities has interacted with many cultures this year. In January and February, French artist Cornelia Marin

returned to Roanoke to share her beautiful art with us in exhibits at The Grandin Theatre and Blue Ridge PBS. RVSCI hosted a dinner in Cornelia's honor at Fortunato restaurant in downtown Roanoke.

In January, RVSCI board members were interviewed by the Roanoker magazine. A wonderful article, "Building Connections Across Countries & Continents," appeared in the May/June edition. The author, Aila Boyd, featured types of connections as well as experiences of members. She wrote, "One of the most valuable ways the valley engages with foreign countries is through the nonprofit Roanoke Valley Sister Cities."

In February, we were present at the Lunar New Year Festival at the Taubman Museum of Art, sharing our cultures and Chinese calligraphy, dances and music. In addition, we supported the Roanoke College International Film Festival, featuring films in



At the RVSCI annual dinner, music was provided by opera singer Grace Renée Pflieger (left), aka Miss Roanoke Valley, and collaborative pianist Anna Preston.

Chinese, French and Russian, just to name a few languages. RVSCI also sponsored free Korean language courses, organized by Cherry Bell Damasco-Farrington and taught by Silvia Lee at William Byrd High School on Saturdays.

In March at the Roanoke Arts Pop festival at the Taubman, the works of our 2023 Young Artists Showcase winners were on display along with information about our sister cities. In April, we featured a large group in the Daisy Art Parade in downtown Roanoke. We were led in Chinese music and dancing by Jessie Yu and her children. In May, these talented children graced the stage at the annual Local Colors festival.

In April, RVSCI also sponsored the 2024 Young Artists Showcase for area high school students. Sister Cities International provided the theme of climate change to encourage the artists to interpret this universal issue. First-place winner, Trinity Monet Powell, was honored at the RVSCI annual meeting in June, attending with her mother, Vinceta Powell-Wise, and Patrick Henry High School art teacher Sue Thomas.



In February, Jimmy Zhang and Vivien Sparks represented RVSCI at the Lunar New Year Festival at the Taubman Museum.



**Mary Jo Fassie** honored Young Artist Showcase first-place winner **Trinity Powell** at the RVSCI annual dinner.



In March, **Jessie Yu** and her children led RVSCI's contingent in Chinese music and dance at the Daisy Art Parade.

In May, we participated in the Local Colors festival with two tables and displays. We featured our cultural connections around the world and drew in some new members. The highlight of the festival was a delegation of 25 from Wonju, South Korea, who shared their art, music and dance at Local Colors and at the Taubman. Art works from our respective countries were exchanged. RVSCI presented "Virginia Views," by Roanoke artist Susan Egbert, to the mayor of Wonju. The gift from Wonju, "Geumgangsang," or "Bongraesan Mountain Drawing," by Song Ki-sung, is now displayed at the Taubman. It is a beautiful and intricate lacquer with mother-of-pearl inlay, a gift to the city of Roanoke and the Taubman Museum from Wonju in honor of the sister cities' 60th anniversary. Not only was there a connection with the arts, but I connected with the young K-Pop dancers when I was having a phone technology problem. One of the girls checked out the solution in Korean on her phone and solved my problem!

In June, our annual dinner meeting returned to Roanoke College. The informative program given by Roanoke-Wonju chairwoman Dr. Ramona Kirsch centered around the Korean visit in May with highlights from Taubman Museum Executive Director Cindy Petersen and Roanoke College history professor Dr. Stella Xu, who informed us of a Wonju

Hanji paper-making residency program coming to the college in the fall. Miss Roanoke Valley, Grace Renée Pflieger, shared her beautiful voice with us as she sang our invocation, "Let there be peace on Earth," and later a German operatic piece, finishing the evening with "When you wish upon a star."

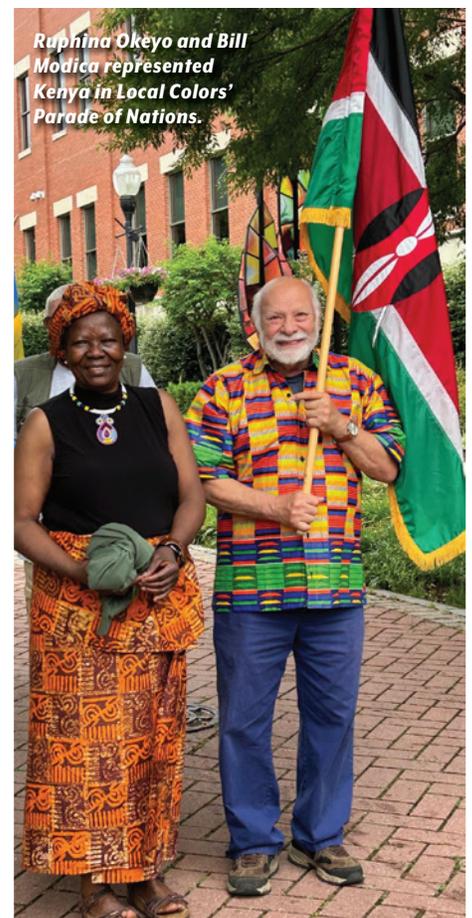
Later in the month, it was announced that Roanoke was named an All-American City for the 8th time! The Star City is earning many accolades, making it a popular destination for tourists, retirees as well as business opportunities.

If you are interested in learning more about the effect of interacting with other cultures, check out Professor Adam Galinsky's podcast on NPR:

<https://www.npr.org/2019/01/29/689731270/radio-replay-creative-differences>

You'll read how Galinsky and "his colleagues tracked business school students during a 10-month MBA program. They tested the students using standard creativity measures at the beginning and end of the school term. They found that students who'd befriended or dated someone from another country during the term became more creative. In another study, Adam found that even the simple act of reflecting on one's relationship with a person from another country caused a temporary boost in creativity."

Having personal experience of making a friend in another country is a wonderful reason to be part of Roanoke Valley Sister Cities. I would say that my teaching creativity was greatly increased by having a close connection to France (and to a certain Frenchman!). *Vive les échanges culturels!*



**Raphina Okeyo** and **Bill Modica** represented Kenya in Local Colors' Parade of Nations.

## 60 YEARS STRONG: *Celebrating our decades-long cultural, medical relationship*

*(continued from page 1)*

to Wonju, the seeds of our forthcoming 60th celebration were sown, sparking discussions to commemorate our partnership. Upon my return to the U.S., in collaboration with Mary Jo Fassié and the sister cities board, we embarked on a two-year journey of planning, culminating in the splendid celebrations we enjoyed this May.

I extend my gratitude to all those who contributed to the organization of our 60th jubilee. Special thanks are owed to Local Colors Executive Director Lisa Spencer, whose early suggestion to coincide Wonju's visit with the Roanoke annual festival prompted the planning committee to invite Wonju to showcase their cultural richness. The Wonju delegation, comprising Mayor Won Gang Soo, city officials, sister city committee members, and two exceptional performance groups – the Wonju Traditional Dance Team and the renowned KPOP ensemble LEAD –

graced us with their talents.

I must also acknowledge the support of the RVSCI board members and supporters, including Mary Jo Fassié, Bill Bestpitch, Jean Broyles, Linda Harrison, Brian Counihan, Silvia Lee, Cherry Bell Damasco-Farrington, and Bill Modica. Your dedication ensured that every detail was meticulously attended to. To Mayor Lea and his indefatigable team – Windsor Nevitt, Susie McCoy, and Carol Corbin, as well as City Council member Stephanie Moon and Parks and Rec director Cindy McFall – your efforts did not go unnoticed. Special thanks for the ground transportation arrangements, the Friday luncheon celebration and media marketing, including innovative drone-assistance.

Our appreciation extends also to Alexa Brieהל of the Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport, whose instrumental role in organizing a

warm reception for the delegation and assisting with PR efforts is deeply valued.

After the delegation's arrival in Roanoke on Thursday, May 16, we had an informal reception at the Harrison Museum of African American Culture.

Friday was full of activities. First, we visited the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine to meet those who host our Wonju medical interns every year. Our gratitude goes to them for providing an enlightening tour, led by Courtney Powell, and also to Dr. Lee Learman and Dr. Cynda Johnson, whose dedication to the medical internship exchange program is a testament to its success.

We then went to visit Roanoke College, where Professor Stella Xu showcased the rich Korean heritage on campus and showed us the new space for the Hanji workshop that will be opening on campus this fall.

The group then was whisked away to the Bella Vista Room at the Berglund Center for a luncheon hosted by Mayor Lea. Among the speeches and acknowledgements, Mayor Lea presented Mayor Won with a key to the city, and RVSCI presented the mayor and the city of Wonju with a beautiful original work, "Virginia Views" – an acrylic batik image created on rice paper by Roanoke artist Susan Egbert.

In addition, we were able to honor the family of the late Dr. Robert Roth, co-founder of the Roanoke-Wonju sister city relationship. Two of Dr. Roth's grandsons, Keith and Jason, along with their wives and children



*The grandsons and families of the late Dr. Robert Roth, co-founder of the Roanoke-Wonju committee, were honored at the celebratory luncheon.*

were acknowledged, and they accepted a beautiful memorial plaque of appreciation.

Finally, it was at the luncheon that we got our first taste of the talented dancing teams as the Wonju Traditional Dance Team (WTDT) performed a beautiful fan dance.

After lunch we took the delegation on a brief city tour highlighted by the Wonju Street sign, which the delegation loved, making sure they signed their “W” for Wonju! And they delighted in the Mill Mountain Star and the view of Roanoke Valley.

*(continued on page 6)*



*Mary Jo Fassé and Mayor Lea present “Virginia Views”—an acrylic batik image by Roanoke artist Susan Egbert—to Mayor Won.*



*The city of Wonju donated “Geumgangsan Mountain,” by the artist Song Ki-sung. It will be on display at the Taubman through December.*

## ROANOKE COLLEGE TO HOST KOREAN TRADITIONAL ARTS MASTERS



*A Roanoke College makes Hanji on a visit to Wonju.*

Roanoke College will host two Hanji (Korean paper) masters and one tea ceremony master from Sept. 10-20.

This residency program will introduce students to Korean arts through specialized papermaking techniques, providing hands-on experiences with Hanji, the traditional Korean handmade paper made from mulberry tree bark. Additionally, students will explore the Korean tea ceremony.

A community event at the Taubman Museum of Art, tentatively scheduled for Sept. 14, will invite the Roanoke community to experience these rich cultural traditions.

—Stella Xu

# 60 YEARS STRONG: Celebrating our decades-long cultural, medical relationship

(continued from page 5)



This plaque of appreciation was presented to the Roth family at the luncheon.

Saturday morning began early with preparations for Local Colors. The delegation led the Parade of Nations, and Mayor Lea and Mayor Won opened the festivities with remarks. The WTDT and KPOP group LEAD performed to rousing applause!

During the day, we also went to the Taubman to see additional dance performances and view the artwork, “Geumgangsan Mountain,” which was donated by Wonju. The artist, Song Ki-sung, had come to Roanoke for the day to attend the luncheon and be present at the Taubman for the unveiling of the piece. The piece will be on display at the Taubman through December.

I surprised the delegation with an array of Wonju T-shirts. Everyone donned one, and we went to Century Plaza to see the sister city columns.

Our next steps include working with the Wonju mayor and the sister city committee to plan new collaborations and growth over the next 60 years.

To view the RVTV’s video of the visit, please scan this QR code:



**Family members of one of the first Koreans to study in the United States visited Roanoke College over Commencement weekend in May. Dr. Kim Soo-oak traveled from Seoul, Korea, and Allen Kim traveled from New York City to walk the campus where their grandfather, Kim Kyusik, graduated in 1903. Kim Kyusik went on to be instrumental in the formation of the Provisional Korean Government and as an advocate for Korean independence. The visit to Roanoke College was a once-in-a-lifetime event for Kim Soo-oak, who is the president of the Korean Provisional Government Memorial Foundation. The Kim family was accompanied by Consul Gilhyun Lee, first secretary and consul of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea. He was particularly interested in the history of the relationship between Korea and the United States, and he described Roanoke College’s campus as the cradle where that relationship was born. In this photo, courtesy of Roanoke College, family members pose at the Virginia historic marker for Kim Kyusik on campus.**

**INTERMEDIATE KOREAN  
LANGUAGE CLASS**

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

**Begins Saturday, September 7, 2024  
William Byrd High School Library  
11:00 am- 12:30 pm**

Classes are FREE to all.

For more information email  
roanokevallysistercities@gmail.com  
(540) 521-1168

# Young Artists SHOWCASE

Young artists illustrate 'Resilient Cities for Tomorrow's Climate'



In April, Roanoke Valley Sister Cities held its annual Young Artists Showcase for students age 13-18. Students from Patrick Henry High School, the Burton Center for Arts & Technology, North Cross Upper School and William Fleming High School were among the winners:

**1st place with \$300 prize:** 1 - "Playtime Smog," by Trinity Monet Powell (Patrick Henry)

**2nd place (tie), with \$200 prize each:** 2 - "Collective Resilience," by Mary Clarke (Patrick Henry) and 3 - "Sustainable City," by Alex Dascenzo (Burton Center)

**3rd place (tie), with \$100 prize each:** 4 - "Sister City Postcards," by Ryan Poe (Burton Center) and 5 - "Lupine Takeover," by Lucy Ellett (North Cross)

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

**Honorable mentions** (\$25 each) went to:

6 - "How to Grow a City," by Aidyn Alexander (Burton Center), featured

"Clean City Streets," by Elizabeth Hamed (Burton Center)

"Resilient City," by Mya DelVecchio (Burton Center)

"Floating City," by Sophia Camp (North Cross)

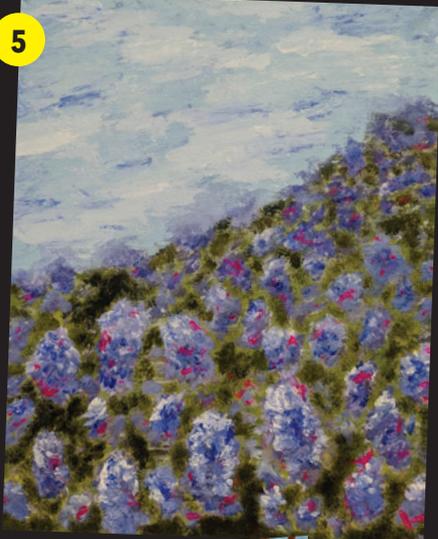
"Grand Prismatic Spring," by Alexander Carper (William Fleming)

Judges for the showcase were from the Taubman Museum of Art staff.

The theme set by Sister Cities International was "Climatescape: Resilient Cities for Tomorrow's Climate"

Artwork by the 1st-, 2nd- and 3rd-place winners as well as one honorable mention ("How to Grow a City") have been sent to Sister Cities International for further judging.

Congratulations to all the students and their teachers: Sue Thomas (Patrick Henry), Natalie Strum (Burton Center), Amy Jackson (North Cross) and Melissa Fernatt (William Fleming).



—Mary Jo Fassé



# FROM ROANOKE TO RUSSIA, NATASHA PETERSEN HAS BEEN DEVOTED TO TEACHING AND PUBLIC SERVICE

By Christina Koomen  
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From her living space at Brandon Oaks, 98-year-old Natasha Petersen can see a line of Blue Ridge Mountains such as area residents have enjoyed for generations. The view might not have changed, but the world most certainly has. And that makes the work of the Sister Cities organization – of which she is a cherished member – all the more important.

Natasha Somova Petersen has lived an international life, so getting involved with Sister Cities must have been a natural fit. That involvement crystalized in 1991, when she became chair of the Pskov Sister City Committee and pitched to Roanoke City Council the idea of adding this western Russia locality as the first new relationship for Roanoke in 16 years.

Although Natasha never lived in Russia herself, her heritage is rooted there. Her Russian parents – Aleksandra and Aleksei, a Russian army officer – fled the Bolshevik Revolution for China. Natasha was born in Tientsin (now Tianjin) in 1926. She later attended a British school there. As World War II roiled the continent, she and her father wound up spending more than two years in a Japanese internment camp. One of her most vivid memories is of being liberated by U.S. paratroopers.

“One morning we looked up, it was summer, August – we saw planes overhead,” Natasha writes in her memoirs. “We ran toward the gates. The Japanese soldiers did not try to stop us. ... We saw parachutes from the planes landing onto the fields. ... Women ran to the paratroopers, hugging and

kissing them. The poor Americans were armed to the teeth and of course were worried that the Japanese would be fighting. The Japanese did not resist. They surrendered.”

After returning to Tientsin, Natasha met and married U.S. Marine Andy Petersen. The Petersens later moved to Roanoke, where Andy was a producer and on-air personality on WSL. (Andy died of cancer in 1996 at the age of 74.) Son Don lives in Roanoke where he has been a well-known news photographer with The Roanoke Times and Associated Press, and a local business owner. Their other son, Kent, and his wife, Cecilia, raised the Petersens’ grandsons, Erik and Nicholas, in Knoxville. Natasha also has two great-grandchildren: 5-month-old Connor, son of Nick and his wife Emily; and 15-year-old Avery, daughter of Erik and his wife Jamie.

Natasha made her career in teaching, spending more than three decades in the Roanoke City Public School system, first at Jefferson High School and later Patrick Henry, where she taught English, Spanish and Russian. She is thought to be the first teacher of Russian in this part of the state. (Don, who took Russian from

his mother for several years, says native-born Russians have been amazed at how well Natasha speaks the language.) She is also considered instrumental in establishing the foreign language studies program in the city schools.



This is a 1996 clipping from the front page of Pskov's local newspaper. Natasha is photographed with two City of Pskov officials in a story about sister cities cooperation and the medical supplies donated by the people of Roanoke. Photo courtesy of Don Petersen.

"I loved teaching – that was really a calling," Natasha said in a 2006 article in Prime Living by the late Margie Fisher.

After the Sister Cities agreement with Pskov was signed in 1992, Natasha made several trips to Russia, leading delegations to help nurture the new relationship. The stateside visitors went to orphanages, taking medical supplies and other provisions, and cultivated longstanding scholarly ties between Ferrum College and Pskov Pedagogical Institute (now Pskov State University), among other projects.

"It was amazing because we were so welcomed over there. They treated us like royalty," said Don, who accompanied his mother on some of her trips. "We made a lot of good friends over there."

In the wake of Russian President Vladimir Putin's war against Ukraine, Roanoke officials, in discussion with the Sister Cities organization, believed it prudent to "pause" the connection with Pskov. Don reports that Natasha was saddened to learn that Roanoke's ties with Pskov had been compromised by war, but understood that there has been longstanding strife between the two nations.

Natasha retired from teaching in 1993. In addition to her work on behalf of Sister Cities, she volunteered at the Bradley Free Clinic and served on then-Mayor Nelson Harris' Committee on Multicultural Affairs.

"Natasha was very much engaged with that and quite helpful in facilitating those relationships and connections, so that immigrants could feel comfortable in obtaining

government assistance and accessing our programs," Harris wrote in an email, calling her participation "invaluable."

She also volunteered with Roanoke's Refugee and Immigration Services to help new arrivals build language skills, and helped out with an AARP-sponsored tax assistance program for low-income clients. She remained chair of the Pskov committee until 2009, when the torch was passed to Sasha Saari, one of Natasha's former students at PH, who later started the Russian department at Ferrum.

Today, Natasha enjoys daily visits at Brandon Oaks from son Don. Sometimes the two will even try to speak a little Russian to each other.

**Christina Koomen** is a writer living in Roanoke.



**“The poor Americans were armed to the teeth and of course were worried that the Japanese would be fighting.”**

—Natasha Petersen

Natasha Petersen, sporting a Patrick Henry High School sweatshirt, at home at Brandon Oaks. Photo courtesy of Don Petersen.

## ANTICIPATING OUR DELEGATION'S ARRIVAL TO CELEBRATE 30 YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP

By Dr. Kristinia Bulas-Slowikowski  
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Preparations are in full swing for the arrival of the Opole delegation coming the week of Oct. 6-12. Kaelyn Spickler from Roanoke County Administration has been working diligently with the Opole committee to develop a program that will showcase the Roanoke Valley to our Opole guests. Specific tracks being developed include business, music and the arts, tourism, public safety and education. Events celebrating our 30th anniversary of partnership that will be open to RVSCI members will be shared closer to the delegation's arrival. We are expecting that the president (mayor) of Opole, Arkadiusz Wisniewski, will be the leader of the delegation. We welcome our new Opole committee members and hope that they will participate in the festivities.

October is Polish Heritage Month. In Virginia, we celebrate Gen. Thaddeus Kosciuszko Day on Oct. 15 and Gen. Casimir Pulaski Day on Oct. 11. An exhibit commemorating these two great Polish-born Revolutionary War heroes is planned for display at the Roanoke South County Library in October.

Jacek and I welcomed several Polish students working in Roanoke this summer at a meet-and-greet at our home. They are enjoying the valley and were grateful for an additional contact to reach out to during their Roanoke stay. Welcome to Karolina and Zosia!!



Gen. Thaddeus Kosciuszko



Gen. Casimir Pulaski



Chico Harkrader (right), who was an artist in residence for RVSCI in Opole several years ago, has donated his painting "Triad" to RVSCI. The painting was recently installed in the South County Library. Opole has been twinned with Roanoke County since 1996. Pictured (from left): Jim Blanton, director of the South County Library; Dr. Kris Slowikowski, Roanoke-Opole chair; and Roanoke Valley artist Chico Harkrader.

## A LETTER FROM FLORIANÓPOLIS ARTIST THIAGO VALDI

*Florianópolis muralist Thiago Valdi was artist-in-residence in Roanoke in fall 2023. During his stay, he gifted Roanoke with a mural on the wall of the Wilson Hughes gallery and another at 11th Street and Moorman Avenue. In this letter to RVSCI, he updates us on his recent projects and extends a plea for help for his countrymen affected by devastating flooding in the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina.*

I hope this message finds you well in Roanoke!

I am thrilled to be a part of your newsletter and share some of my latest work and experiences.

Here is a brief description:

**Blue Canvas Portrait:** The energy of Marcelo Falcão: This is a portrait I painted and presented to one of Brazil's most famous musicians, Falcão, from the band O Rappa. Their music, known for its poetic and powerful lyrics, reflects the reality of our country. It was a privilege to meet Falcão in person and hand him this tribute during one of his shows in Florianópolis. <https://www.instagram.com/marcelofalcao/>

**Gray Tone Paintings:** The pearl of the emerald coast, Canvas Residence: These works were part of an innovative project by the construction company Zah. Ricardo Zanella, a high-end real estate entrepreneur from the Costa Esmeralda region and an art

*Thiago Valdi (right) poses with "Blue Canvas Portrait: The energy of Marcelo Falcão" and the musician himself (left). Image from <https://www.instagram.com/thiagovaldi/>*



*An interior from "Gray Tone Paintings: The pearl of the emerald coast, Canvas Residence." Image from <https://www.instagram.com/thiagovaldi/>*

enthusiast, invited me and another artist to sign and paint the facade of his development, Canvas. This project seamlessly integrated contemporary art into living spaces, creating a dialogue with the city. It was a groundbreaking initiative that left a significant mark. More details about the project can be found on their website: Zah Empreendimentos - Canvas.

Talking about art is about sincerely speaking about our society. Alongside the positive stories, there are also moments of sadness when artists must set aside their brushes. In recent months, the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, where Florianópolis is located, have suffered from unprecedented flooding. The images are devastating, and the losses are irreparable. This tragedy has mobilized both our country and the world in a wave of help and solidarity.

My friends in Roanoke, if you can extend your hearts to our brothers and sisters in Rio Grande do Sul, I would be eternally grateful. The great star of Roanoke, with your donations, will shine for the victims in Rio Grande do Sul. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!

Warm regards, Thiago

*Roanoke Valley Sister Cities and the Florianópolis committee sent a donation of \$1,000 to Global Giving, which is collecting funds for flood relief in the south of Brazil. Here is the website if you would like to personally contribute: [www.globalgiving.org/projects/brazil-flood-relief-fund/](https://www.globalgiving.org/projects/brazil-flood-relief-fund/). This is the most severe flooding in Brazil in 80 years. 150,000 people have been displaced from the homes. Help is still needed as these families try to rebuild their lives.*

## LOTS OF TRANSATLANTIC ACTIVITY, AND MORE STILL TO COME

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

Exchange visits, which are at the heart of our sister city program, have been in full swing thus far in 2024. Also in this edition of AOW, you can read a report by Dr. Cynda Johnson about her and her husband's trip to Normandy as well as reports by three Hollins University students who completed 3-week internships in St-Lô this summer.

In January, artist Cornelia Marin returned to Roanoke to exhibit her work at The Grandin Theatre and at Blue Ridge PBS. Both venues held well-attended artist's receptions. As always, she was hosted by her friend Brenda Barksdale. In March, Bill Bestpitch organized a dinner in Cornelia's honor at Fortunato downtown. Cornelia expects to return to Roanoke later this year.

Institut St-Lô student Lisa Beaufile arrived in the Roanoke Valley in May and was hosted by the Aaron Smith family of Salem. She briefly attended Glenvar High School. Rachael Brown, a newly minted Glenvar High School graduate, was selected as our summer intern to St-Lô. In June, Lisa and Rachael traveled to France together, and Lisa's family hosted Rachael during her internship. Rachael's report will appear in the next edition of AOW.

Roanoke City Council member Vivian Sanchez-Jones was selected by Mayor Lea to represent the city of Roanoke at the celebration of the 80th anniversary of D-Day in Normandy in June. Vivian and her husband, Tom Jones, were hosted by Jeanine Vérove.



On June 6 in Normandy, Roanoke City Council member Vivian Sanchez-Jones (second from right) and representatives of St-Lô's other sister cities listen as St-Lô Mayor Emmanuelle Lejeune speaks about the 80th anniversary of D-Day.

*Joe Cobb sent this photo of himself, his family and Camille Timerie (right), an Institut St-Lô graduate who lived with Joe's family two years ago. Joe and his family spent a few days in Paris this summer and caught up with Camille over dinner at a café near Notre Dame. Joe reports that Camille "just finished his first year at university and is doing well!"*



In St-Lô, anniversary commemorations focused on the civilian victims of the Allies' liberation efforts. Our sister city twinning group, Saint-Lô 44 Roanoke, launched a project to plant 80 trees in tribute to the civilian lives lost during the bombings. Vivian represented Roanoke at a tree-planting ceremony as well as at numerous meals and events, including one in which she shook the hand of French President Emmanuel Macron.

We had about 37 in attendance at our annual Bastille Day picnic on July 21. Rachael Brown spoke briefly about her internship. Tom Jones gave a lively account of his and Vivian's successful trip to Normandy. Hollins Professor Jeanne Jégouso brought Camille Fautrad and Eglantine Cavey, students from the Institut St-Lô, to speak to the group about their experiences in the Hollinsummer pre-college program. (The Institut students inaugurated the exchange with Hollins stateside, at the same time the three Hollins students interned in St-Lô.) Jonathan Marye, a new member and French teacher at Blacksburg High School, talked about the trip to France next year. He has lined up 12 of his students and two parents to take the trip to St-Lô, Paris, Strasbourg and Lyon. For more information on the trip, contact lead organizer Marsha Taylor at [taylor.bonvoyageroanoke@gmail.com](mailto:taylor.bonvoyageroanoke@gmail.com).

We hope to see you at our annual Dîner de Noël on December 3 at Anello's.



*We had around 37 at our annual Bastille Day potluck on July 21.*



*We were represented in the Parade of Nations at Local Colors by (from left) Cherry Bell Damasco-Farrington, Jeanne Jégouso and Dionne Nichols.*

## MEMBERS WITNESS 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF D-DAY IN NORMANDY

By Dr. Cynda Johnson  
cyndaannjohnson@gmail.com

**A**round the world in 80 days? Not really, but around Normandy in 8 days ... and for the 80th anniversary of D-Day. My husband, Bruce, and I have tried to get to Normandy on a number of occasions but for various reasons it hasn't been possible.

We saw this opportunity to travel with National Geographic and to be there for the big event—we heard many times that this would likely be the last 10-year celebration including veterans who fought that day or during the remainder of the Normandy invasion. They were an amazing group of men. We talked to several, each with his own story. The British gentleman whose hotel room was across from ours was only 16 on D-Day. His daughter told us how badly he wanted to join the army, but only the Royal Marines would take a 16-year old. He was perhaps the youngest to be celebrated at only 96 years young. His job: traveling back and forth daily on a small ship carrying flammables and putting out small fires with heavily gloved hands.



A Royal Marines veteran – pictured with his daughter – was among the youngest to be celebrated at the D-Day anniversary at only 96 years old.

The setting at the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial above Omaha Beach was beautiful, serene; nearly 10,000 American servicemen dying in the extended battle are buried here. To look around at the 10,000 chairs occupied during the ceremony put that number of military dead into stark reality.

The ceremony itself was powerful. Each veteran was introduced personally. Speakers included French President Macron and U.S. President Biden, each with



Drs. Bruce and Cynda Johnson at the Normandy American Cemetery, where nearly 10,000 American military dead are buried.

powerful, yet touching words, and expressing hope for the future. Awards were given, for those D-Day veterans had gone above and beyond what one would believe to be possible. The closing bugle calls—"Aux Morts" and "Taps"—were so touching that anyone who had not yet shed a few tears did so. The respect shown by the guests was unsurpassed.

I would encourage anyone who has not experienced the Normandy beaches and heard the stories of the two years of planning leading up to the landing to consider traveling to the site, preceded by visiting several of the relevant locations in England that were part of what was to come. In London, we visited Churchill's war rooms and the Imperial War Museum. In Portsmouth, we went to Bletchley Park and the D-Day Story Museum and crossed the channel to Normandy.

There is so much more, but hopefully this has given you a snapshot of the battle that firmly turned WWII in favor of the Allies. Today, 80 years later, we—all of us—not just those who lived through the war—must thank those brave soldiers who accomplished the near-impossible and made this world safer.



This museum is built in the site of the remains of a German bunker at Utah Beach, one of the two American amphibious landings. Inside you will find a reference to the importance of Saint-Lô in the first acts of resistance in the region.

## THREE HOLLINS WOMEN KICK OFF NEW EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Two Hollins University students and one new graduate inaugurated our newest exchange program with St-Lô. Under the guidance of Hollins Professor Jeanne Jégouso and our friend Jeanine Vérove, president of Saint-Lô Roanoke 44, these young women enjoyed 3-week internships in our sister city at a thrilling and momentous time this summer. In their own words:

### **Vivian Urda**

*Hollins University Class of 2024*

I will never forget my time in Saint-Lô for three reasons: the people, culture, and the food. Everyone was welcoming and engaging throughout my stay, and eager to talk with me at the Institut St-Lô. I met so many people very quickly, and yet I feel as though I truly formed lasting connections. I hope that I can visit them again. The culture of the region was also unforgettable; truly, I became part of the festivities for the celebration. From the celebration of the jumelage, where I met incredible people from across the program, to the 80th anniversary of the débarquement, where I was swept back in time during the celebrations, to the excitement of the Olympic Torch passing through the town, I experienced modern history in the making. And of course, how could one not go to France and have nothing to say about the food? I was delighted to indulge in such regional specialties as the galettes (buckwheat savory crepes) and cider.

### **Ella Strickland**

*Hollins University Class of 2025*

I truly enjoyed getting to spend time with students and assist in teaching English at the Institut St-Lô. I was thankful for their eagerness to learn, and though I was in the teacher's position, I felt that I perhaps learned more from them. In our Franglais conversations, we found ourselves having a great cultural exchange, getting to understand the United States and France better. The teachers opened their homes to us, and the host families were the kindest, most wonderful people.

Normandy is beautiful and the experience I had matched its beauty.

### **Ava Kegler**

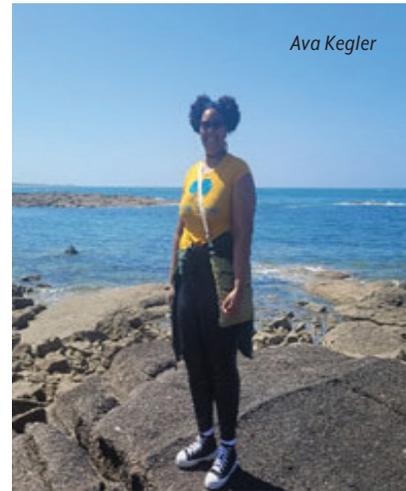
*Hollins University  
Class of 2025*

I had the opportunity to intern at Ouest-France, a daily newspaper, in Saint-Lô. As an international studies major, this internship allowed me to have first-hand experience in understanding the process of journalism in France. The fast-paced environment challenged my understanding of the French language but forced me to trust myself and my previous study- abroad experiences. While this internship was one of the most challenging experiences I have ever done, the journalists at Ouest-France were extremely patient, helpful, and encouraging. I was surrounded by people who were passionate about their jobs and had an abundance of experience working in their fields. That encouraged me to ask questions, be open to tasks outside of my comfort zone, and be open to every opportunity that was available to me.

*Ella Strickland  
(left) and  
Vivian Urda*



*Ava Kegler*





Bill Modica at the Kisumu airport.

## LIKE TO TRAVEL? *Join me on a trip to Kisumu.*

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

As chairman of the Roanoke-Kisumu sister city committee I have had the pleasure of traveling to Kenya a number of times. There was always a warm welcome, lots to learn and do and new projects to consider. Now I am considering whether some others might like to follow in my footsteps and travel there too.

In the next year, I would like to host a small group of visitors to travel to Kisumu. So, I am putting together plans for a visit, perhaps as soon as this year but certainly by early next year. The trip will include airfare from Roanoke to Nairobi, Kenya, and then on to Kisumu city. It will include lodging in Nairobi and Kisumu and visits to Kisumu locations such as Lake Victoria, downtown Kisumu, an orphanage and a local shopping center and perhaps to the Magunga Primary School to see the completed water system we established. And the real highlight of the trip will be a 3-night safari to the Maasi Mara game reserve with a professional guide to see the wild animals. Meals during the safari, a tented camp stay and transportation are being arranged. The whole trip should be 8 to 10 days, including air travel.

I am getting together prices and travel dates. The total cost will include local transportation, lodging and international airfare. Guests must meet certain requirements to be eligible to go. First, they must be members of our Roanoke Valley Sister City organization. Then they must obtain a travel visa for Kenya on their own. They must be willing to endure some inconveniences as this is not a luxury trip. And they must be fit enough to walk and ride in open vehicles when needed. They also may need vaccinations that are required by the Kenyan authorities. More details will be provided to you as we get further along.

Would you like to go with us? If so, I am asking you to respond to me by email (modicabill2@aol.com) and tell me when you might be free to travel — perhaps early next year or next fall. Once I have some prices and possible dates, I will get back to you. At that point you should be prepared to put up a deposit (maybe \$1,000) to secure a spot. I propose a small group of about 5 plus myself so we can use one vehicle and not need a big bus. If I get more than that interested, I will set up a second trip. I hope to keep the price low enough to ensure everyone can afford to go. You do not have to make a firm commitment now, just let me know if you want to be on the list. If this works, we can do more trips later, but each will be limited to a small group.

There will be direct communication when I have more details in place and a chance for you to ask questions and get more information. I hope some of you will respond quickly. Thanks.

*The trip to Kenya likely will include a visit to the Maasi Mara game reserve.*



By Jessie Yu  
Jessieforever2017@gmail.com

## A WARM WELCOME FROM THE NEW COMMITTEE CHAIR

Hello, everyone. I am very pleased to be the new chair of the Lijiang Sister City committee. I used to be a program host and a teacher before moving to Roanoke in 2013. Now, I am a full-time mother raising three children. I enjoy traveling, hiking, and participating in various cultural activities, relishing the beauty that comes from cultural exchanges.

Lijiang Sister City showcased its charm in the first half of 2024. First, the Lunar New Year celebration at the Taubman Museum of Art was filled with joy, thanks to the Lijiang Sister City's dance performance, "Happy New Year," in February. During the event, the lovely children also introduced how to show numbers in Chinese sign language.

By April, Lijiang's sister city's violin performance added a vibrant touch to the Daisy Art Parade. Dressed in traditional Tang Dynasty attire and holding Oriental traditional oil-paper umbrellas, the musicians played beautiful melodies on a traditional Western instrument – the violin. This was a marvelous blend and fusion of cultures!

In the blooming month of May, we welcomed Roanoke's grandest cultural festival, Local Colors. During the celebration, Lijiang Sister City performed two dances. One was a Dai dance, which is a traditional dance from the ethnic minority regions of Southwest China. Through its movements and music, it narrated a story of peacocks frolicking in the forest, enjoying the beautiful planet created by the Creator. The second dance was called "Jiangnan," which told a poignant love story set in southeastern China. The performers included Julia and Hannah from Hidden Valley High School, Armani from Penn Forest Elementary, Alayna from Cloverdale Elementary, and Jenny, who had just graduated from Garden City Elementary.

Lijiang is a place of diverse ethnicities, cultures, and cities. It boasts beautiful snowy mountains, picturesque lakes, and friendly people. Roanoke-Lijiang sister cities frequently organizes Chinese language workshops, dance practices, and food gatherings. We welcome everyone to join our various activities.



Children perform at the Lunar New Year celebration at the Taubman Museum in February.



Violinists play during the Daisy Art Parade in April.



Dancers perform on stage in the amphitheater during Local Colors.



## FREEMAN ACCEPTS RCPS PROMOTION



Archie Freeman

**R**VSCI corporate board member at large Archie Freeman has accepted the position of Chief Instructional and Administrative Officer for Roanoke City Public Schools. He was most recently RCPS's Chief Academic Officer, where he was responsible for eight curricular offices, student services, and athletics, and for overseeing the general operations of 29 schools, centers and programs.

Freeman has previously served as principal of William Fleming High School and Woodrow Wilson Middle School. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Education from Virginia Tech, a Master of Science in Career and Technical Education from Virginia Tech, and a Master of Science in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from Radford University.

# Mark your calendars!

- Sept. 3:** RVSCI board meeting – CITS boardroom, 5 p.m.
- Sept. 9-22:** Wonju Hanji paper-making residency program at Roanoke College
- Sept. 30:** Roanoke College Fall Internship Fair
- Oct. 6-12:** Delegation from Opole, Poland, in Roanoke celebrating 30th anniversary
- Nov. 2:** Ginkgo Festival in Century Plaza
- November:** China International Sister City Conference
- Nov. 19:** RVSCI board meeting - CITS boardroom 5 p.m.
- Dec. 3:** Rke/St-Lô's Dîner de Noël, Anello's 6 p.m.



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### RVSCI Corporate Board Members

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### Sister City committee chairmen and chairwomen:

**Florianópolis, Brazil:** Linda Harrison

**Kisumu, Kenya:** Bill Modica

**Lijiang, China:** Jessie Yu

**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

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