



AROUND OUR WORLD

ROANOKE VALLEY SISTER CITIES, INC.

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Roanoke College student Lucas Pace on site at Reserva Araponga in the state of Santa Catarina, Brazil, where he completed a research project in ecotourism this summer.



The hospitality extended to Lucas during his stay was impressive. Here he enjoys pastels and a cold chopp in Florianópolis.

ECOTOURISM, RESEARCH AND CONNECTION: My journey through Brazil

By Lucas Pace
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I am a rising senior at Roanoke College majoring in Environmental Studies with a minor in Biology. This summer, I had the opportunity to conduct a research project in Brazil that continues my academic focus on ecotourism. This experience was made possible through Roanoke Valley Sister Cities, UDESC (Santa Catarina State University, a public state university in Florianópolis), Reserva Araponga, and Roanoke College. It all began after a presentation by Christian Dobereiner and Ann DeLong at Roanoke College. Their talk on the Sister Cities connection between Florianópolis and Roanoke and the work being done at *Reserva Araponga*, which they own and maintain, sparked the idea for this project. The Araponga Reserve is a private conservation area in Santa Catarina state that protects one of the last intact portions of the high-altitude Atlantic forest.

May 22 – Arrival in Florianópolis

After a long and hectic day of travel, I arrived in Florianópolis — but unfortunately, my luggage did not. Despite that, I was welcomed warmly by Professor Francisco

(continued on page 4)

IN THIS ISSUE

- Roanoke-Florianópolis report Pages 1, 4-5
- President’s reportPages 2-3
- Meet our internPage 3
- Young Artist’s showcase winners Page 6
- Roanoke-Wonju reportPage 7
- Roanoke’s Korean mural revealed . Pages 8-9
- Roanoke-Opole report Pages 10-11
- Roanoke/St-Lô report Pages 12-15
- Roanoke-Lijiang report..... Page 16
- Roanoke-Kisumu report Page 17
- RIP Page 18
- Mark your calendars Page 18
- Board/donation/membership info Page 19
- Our donors Page 20





By Mary Jo Fassie
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BUILDING BRIDGES, HERE AND ABROAD, IN THE NAME OF FRIENDSHIP

Friendship: The Heartbeat of Global Peace,” the theme for this year’s Young Artists Showcase, is really the focus of sister cities. We join this organization to create “Bridges to each other,” as Roanoke Catholic School’s Rhodes Aaron titled his first-place entry in the 2025 showcase.

How did Roanoke Valley Sister Cities create these bridges in the second half of this fiscal year?

In January, we connected with Peyton Jones, a Hollins University student who became our intern this semester. She did research for us to find out more about Korean-born artist Woong Kim, whose mural has graced the Berglund Center for the Performing Arts since 1976. Mr. Kim is now in his 80s, continues to create artwork and still lives in New York City. Peyton also helped with our MailChimp account and aided in updating several items.

French artist Cornelia Marin returned to Roanoke in January and subsequently presented exhibits at WBRA Public TV and the Grandin Theatre. Free beginning and intermediate Korean language classes began at William Byrd High School led by Sylvia Lee.

In February, we celebrated Lunar New Year at the Taubman Museum of Art as we connected with the public at our calligraphy and RVSCI display tables. Jessie Yu, Lijiang committee chair, did a

wonderful presentation, informing us about our wonderful friendship city of Lijiang, which she had recently visited. In addition, young dancers gave a beautiful presentation of traditional Chinese dance. February was also the month of the International Film Festival with Roanoke College and Hollins University. Each film featured a discussion afterward. If you missed it, we hope to be a part of it in February 2026.

In March, RVSCI participated in Roanoke Arts Pop at the Taubman as we made connections by supporting the Young Artists Showcase whose local deadline was this month. RVSCI board member-at-large Andreea Mihalache-O’Keef organized our display and with her daughter made origami with participants. Wonju committee chair Cherry Bell Damasco-Farrington connected with our South Korean sister city as we Zoomed to discuss the upcoming visit to Wonju in August.

In April, I was interviewed by the Taubman as part of its 75th anniversary, documenting the organizations that partner with the museum. Later in the

month, we heard the presentations by the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine students who had completed a rotation abroad, one of which was in Wonju.

May proved to be a busy month. In early May, RVSCI sponsored Roanoke City Councilmember Vivian Sanchez-Jones as our Roanoke representative to the 80th anniversary of VE Day celebration in St-Lô, Normandy. Roanoke College hosted a dinner for organizations in Roanoke with whom they partner. It was a great networking event. The annual Daisy Art Parade was held in downtown Roanoke, followed by Local Colors in Elmwood Park the next weekend. For both events, our young dancers presented some beautiful Chinese dances in the parade



At the annual dinner in June, Mary Jo presents Roanoke Catholic Schools student Rhodes Aaron with his award for first place in the 2025 Young Artists Showcase. His entry is on the screen in the background.



The Lijiang Dance Group performed interpretive Chinese dance at the annual dinner. The dancers are (from left): Jenny Wu, Julia Lampkin, Alayna Chen and Armani Wei.

and on stage in Elmwood Park. RVSCI was represented with three displays at Local Colors, and several members were in the



Mary Jo poses with Ann DeLong, the keynote speaker at our annual dinner.

Parade of Nations representing Brazil, China, France, Kenya and South Korea.

Our Annual Dinner took place in June at Roanoke College as our fiscal year came to a close. We were once again entertained by the young dancers interpreting Chinese traditional dance. Our program featured former foreign service officer and EPA scientist, Ann DeLong, who spoke about “Reserva Araponga: A Legacy of Sustainability in Brazil” and her work with partner Christian Dobereiner to create and manage an economically and socially sustainable private nature reserve of native Atlantic forest in southern Brazil.

As third-place Young Artists Showcase winners Edy Gann and Valeria Dancea reminded us this year, Roanoke Valley Sister Cities’ mission is to create “Sisters” relationships because we are “One Planet, One People.”

MEET OUR JANUARY INTERN



Peyton Jones

Hollins University student Peyton Jones was RVSCI’s intern for the month of January. Originally from Winchester, Va., she has been studying French on and off since middle school. During her internship,

Peyton was a French major in her junior year at Hollins. She’d spent the Fall 2024 semester in Paris. She served as the vice president of Hollins’ Maison Francophonie, the specialty house for francophone culture. This internship was her first time working with Roanoke Valley Sister Cities, but not her last. She was selected as one of 3 Hollins students to intern in our Norman sister city, St-Lô, in summer 2025.

ECOTOURISM, RESEARCH AND CONNECTION: My journey through Brazil

(continued from page 1)

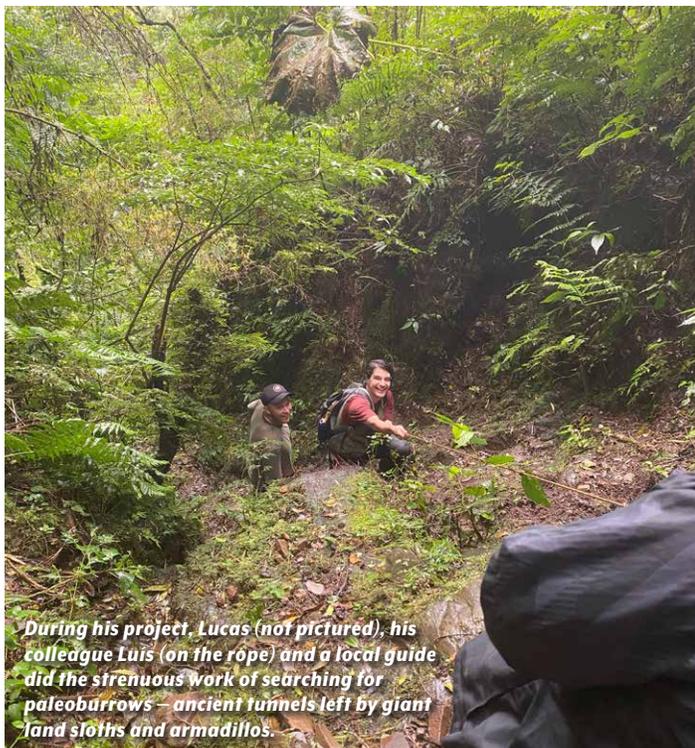
Henrique de Oliveira and his students. I received a tour of UDESC and the GeoLab, where I would be working throughout the trip.

May 23 – Time in Florianópolis

In the morning I visited the Botanical Garden in Florianópolis, spent more time at UDESC, and had lunch with students from the university. Christian kindly drove me back to the airport to retrieve my delayed luggage — a much-appreciated favor.

May 24 – Touring Florianópolis

Christian took me on a full-day tour of the island. We had coffee overlooking the lagoon, explored the sand dunes, visited the eastern beaches, and enjoyed lunch in the charming historic district, Santo Antônio de Lisboa. That evening, we had dinner with Professor Chico and some of his former students and colleagues — an inspiring and insightful group.



During his project, Lucas (not pictured), his colleague Luis (on the rope) and a local guide did the strenuous work of searching for paleoburrows — ancient tunnels left by giant land sloths and armadillos.



Christian Dobreiner (far right), who created and manages Reserva Araponga, shoots a selfie with Lucas (back right) and university colleagues Arthur (far left) and Luis.

May 25 – Exploring the City

I had a more relaxed day and explored the city with Luís, a student and researchmate from UDESC. We ate pastels (similar to empanadas), drank a nice cold chopp (draft beer) and walked across the famous Florianópolis bridge, taking in the scenery and culture of the city.

May 26 – Travel to Reserva Araponga

We left Florianópolis and drove toward *Reserva Araponga*, stopping for snacks and coffee in Anitápolis. In Santa Rosa de Lima (the last city before entering rugged and rural terrain), we spoke with the tourism center about local initiatives and experiences. We ended the day at base camp with groceries, good conversation, snacks and wine shared among Christian, Luís, Arthur and myself.

May 27 – First Full Day at Reserva Araponga

We woke up to a breathtaking sunrise over the distant mountains. The day was spent hiking trails within and around the reserve, including the Trilha da Cachoeira (Waterfall Trail) and Caminho dos Dinossauros (Dinosaur Way), where we observed remnants of past forestry. We had dinner that evening at a local home — Caseirinhos da Marli — where we were welcomed like family.

May 28 – Searching for Paleoburrows

Our team, including Arthur and Luís, set out with a local guide to search for paleoburrows—ancient tunnels left by giant land sloths and armadillos—as part of Arthur’s research. While we didn’t find any, the effort was still valuable. Back at camp, Luís made caipirinhas (Brazil’s national cocktail), and we relaxed while watching clouds roll over the mountains. We returned to Marli’s home for another wonderful dinner.

That night, the temperatures dropped dramatically, and we huddled together in the main cabin against the 80 km/h winds.

May 29 – Trailblazing and Community Engagement

We carved new paths through different parts of the mountains in search of paleoburrows. Though unsuccessful in that goal, we did discover a new waterfall and potentially a high-altitude flower species. Later, we visited local community members to learn about their roles in supporting the reserve and ecotourism initiatives.

May 30 – Connecting with the Local Community

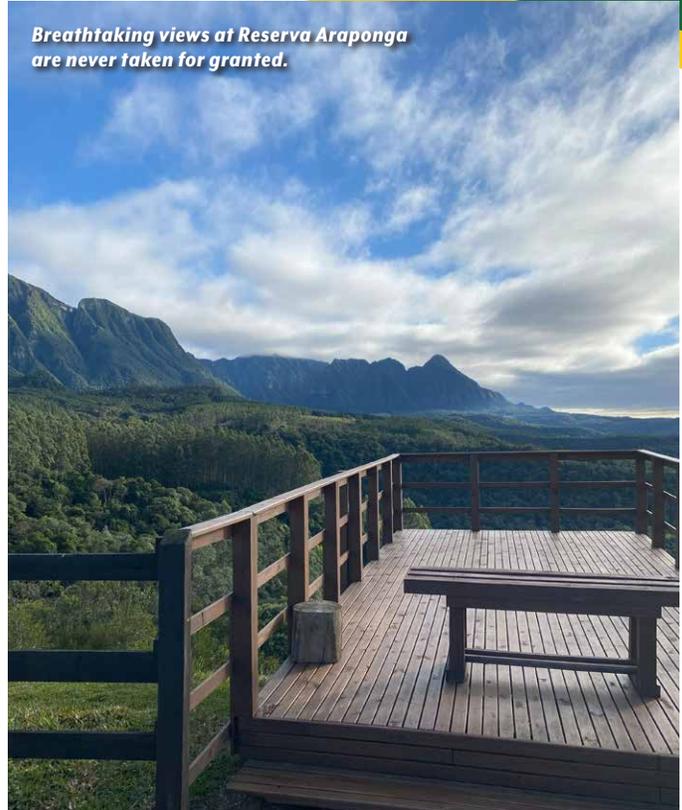
The day was spent continuing our visits with locals. In the afternoon, Luís and I walked more of the reserve grounds, taking in its natural beauty and reflecting on the important relationship between conservation and community.

May 31 – Hiking the Puma Trail

On our final full day at the reserve, Luís and I woke up early to capture drone footage of the surrounding mountains. Later in the morning, with the help of a guide, we hiked to the top of the Serra Geral Mountain range, enjoying breathtaking views that capped off our time at *Reserva Araponga*.

June 1 – Return to Florianópolis

Before traveling back to the city, Christian organized a small happy hour at a local church. It was a wonderful chance to connect and talk with community members over drinks. That afternoon, we shared lunch at a community center that hosts meals every Sunday — a great example of how strong and supportive this community is. We then made the drive back to Florianópolis.



June 2–5 – Final Days in Florianópolis and Departure

In our final days, Arthur, Luís and I worked on a presentation for UDESC students interested in ecotourism, environmental science, and other similar topics. The GeoLab hosted a celebration of our work, and I spent my last nights enjoying the city and its people. Christian helped me do some last-minute sightseeing and souvenir shopping before I traveled back to Salem.

Final Reflections

This experience deepened my academic interests and gave me a greater appreciation for the ways that ecotourism can support both conservation and local communities. It was an honor to be welcomed so generously by everyone involved. My heartfelt thanks to Christian Dobreiner, Ann DeLong, my researchmates Luís and Arthur, *Reserva Araponga*, UDESC, and Roanoke Valley Sister Cities. Your support made this unforgettable journey and meaningful research possible. *Reserva Araponga* is a truly special place with breathtaking views. Christian's goals with the reserve are nothing short of inspirational for the environment and local communities all over the world. I highly recommend traveling to southern Brazil to experience the culture and to experience *Reserva Araponga* for yourself.



Toward the end of his time in Brazil, Lucas and his colleagues worked on a presentation for UDESC students interested in ecotourism, environmental science and other similar topics.



Young Artists SHOWCASE

Young artists address 'Friendship: The Heartbeat of Global Peace'

1st Place: Rhodes Aaron - Roanoke Catholic HS
"Bridges to each other"



This 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 "Friendship: The Heartbeat of Global Peace." Judging was provided by the staff of the Taubman Museum of Art.

The 2025 winners are:

1st place with \$300 prize: Rhodes Aaron ("Bridges to each other"), Roanoke Catholic School

2nd place with \$200 prize: Richard Cook ("The Love of the Game"), North Cross School

3rd place (tie), with \$100 prize each: Edy Gann ("Sisters"), Roanoke County Burton Center, and Valeria Dancea ("One Planet, One People"), North Cross School

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

Honorable mentions (\$25 each) went to:

Brooke Justus, Eli Fulcher and Bri Spencer from Burton Center for Arts and Technology, and to Rachael Turnbull from Patrick Henry High School.

Thank you to all the art teachers: Adam Johnson at Roanoke Catholic, Amy Jackson at North Cross, Natalie Strum at Burton Center and Sue Thomas at Patrick Henry.

First-place winner Rhodes Aaron was honored at the Roanoke Valley Sister Cities Annual Meeting held at Roanoke College on June 3.

—Mary Jo Fassié

3rd Place tie:

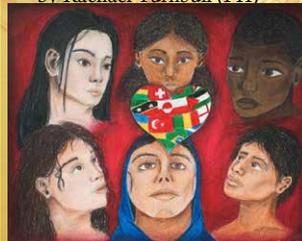
Edy Gann

"Sisters"

Burton Center
for the Arts &
Technology



"Diversified and Monified"
by Rachael Turnbull (PH)

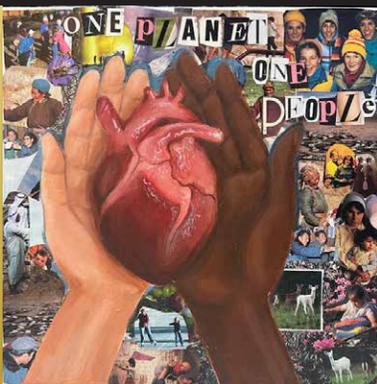


"Friends are
everything" by
Brooke Justus
(Burton Center)

"Amistad" by Bri Spencer (Burton Center)



"Untitled"
Eli
Fulcher
(Burton
Center)



3rd Place tie:
Valeria
Dancea

"One Planet,
One People"

Northcross
HS

A CELEBRATION OF A GLOBAL FRIENDSHIP HERE IN THIS VALLEY

By Cherry Bell Damasco-Farrington
Roanoke-Wonju chairperson
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Over the past year, our Roanoke-Wonju Sister City relationship has blossomed through meaningful educational, cultural, and diplomatic exchanges, deepening mutual understanding and shared celebration between our communities through a variety of initiatives that spotlight Korean language and culture in the Roanoke Valley.

This past fall, Intermediate Korean classes, taught by Sylvia Lee, continued at William Byrd High School, drawing enthusiastic participation from both students and community members. Building on this success, a Beginner Korean class was introduced in January 2025. Held every Saturday, the new class was also well attended, welcoming learners of all ages from across the area and underscoring the growing local interest in Korean language and culture.

Korean language classes are set to resume on Saturday, Sept. 13, 2025, at William Byrd High School. Both Beginner and Intermediate levels will be offered once again, providing opportunities for new and returning learners to continue their journey. Those interested can register online:

- Beginner class registration: <https://forms.gle/vqyST7mtH7VGOvXj8>
- Intermediate class registration: <https://forms.gle/3EBA8w9SHc52rG9WA>

Beyond the classroom, the Wonju committee actively participated in several community cultural celebrations, including the Ginkgo Festival at Century Park, the Chinese Lunar New Year Festival at the



The Intermediate Korean class at William Byrd High School met with instructor Sylvia Lee's mother, who was visiting from Seoul, South Korea.

Roanoke-Wonju chairperson Cherry Bell Damasco-Farrington (right) poses with committee member Deb DiFrancesco, who represented South Korea in the Parade of Nations at Local Colors in May.



Taubman Museum in February, and the vibrant Local Colors Festival and Daisy Arts Parade in May, showcasing the beauty and diversity of Korean heritage alongside other global cultures.

In April, we attended a presentation from two Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine students who completed rotations at Yonsei University Hospital in Wonju. Their experiences highlighted the powerful connections being built between Roanoke and Wonju through educational and medical partnerships.

Looking ahead, we are excited for our upcoming delegation trip in late August and early September 2025. Roanoke Mayor Joseph Cobb, his family and members of Roanoke Valley Sister Cities will travel to Wonju to participate in their Citizens' Day celebration and visit Seoul. This journey represents a continued commitment to citizen diplomacy, cultural exchange, and enduring friendship.

The year of cultural celebration will culminate with the second annual Korean Festival of Letters (Hangul Day) on Saturday, Oct. 11, from noon to 2 p.m. at the Taubman Museum of Art. Sponsored by Roanoke Valley Sister Cities, this event will showcase Korean calligraphy, art, language, and performance. If you or someone you know is interested in presenting, performing, or contributing to the Hangul Day Festival, please complete the participation form by Monday, Sept. 15: <https://forms.gle/rhycHSqUTRkVzRh6>.

Roanoke's ties with Wonju continue to grow stronger each year through education, cultural events, and people-to-people connections, celebrating a truly global friendship right here in our valley. From classrooms to cultural stages, our Sister City bond with Wonju continues to thrive. We look forward to growing these connections for years to come.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON FAMOUS MURAL HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

The large diptych, evoking scenes of traditional Korean music and culture, was dedicated to the memory of Roanoke Mayor Roy L. Webber on July 4, 1976

ROANOKE SISTER CITIES WINS THIRD NATIONAL AWARD

SOURCE: Sister City News (1977) “The Reader’s Digest Foundation has presented Roanoke Sister Cities with a special award for its Bicentennial Project in 1976. This is the third time the Roanoke program has been so honored in recent years. The award was presented August 20, 1977, at the annual meeting of Sister Cities International at Palm Springs, Calif. It was accepted by David K. Lisk of Roanoke, who is regional vice president for SCI. The plaque was given to Roanoke City Council at its September 12 meeting. The Foundation also presented certificates for both Wonju and Kisumu. The project honored was the commissioning of the Korean mural at the Roanoke Civic Center auditorium and its unveiling July 4, 1976, by the Mayor of Wonju.”

ART DISPLAY, DINNER HIGHLIGHT WONJU DAY

SOURCE: Sister City News (1977) “Paintings by the well-known Korean artist Woong Kim were unveiled at a special private showing Saturday evening, September 17 [1977], for those who attended the annual observance of Wonju Day. Mr. Kim, a graduate student and teacher at the Yale University School of Art, executed the Korean

mural in the auditorium of the Roanoke Civic Center last year. The Wonju Day exhibition at the Roanoke Public Library gallery was followed by a reception and dinner in the Venetian Room of the Patrick Henry Hotel. Jack Goodykoontz presented slides taken in Wonju last June of the tour by a Roanoke delegation after a program of Korean music during the dinner. Items brought back from Wonju by the delegates were on display during the dinner. Dr. Robert F. Roth was chairman of the event. The exhibition of Mr. Kim’s paintings opened for members of the Roanoke Fine Arts Center at a reception for the artist Sunday afternoon, September 18. The exhibition for the public will continue at the center’s gallery in the downtown library through October 28. Everyone is urged to visit the downtown gallery in the coming weeks.”

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY AND CAREER HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ARTIST

Woong Kim, born in 1944 in Chungcheongnam-do, South Korea, is a distinguished artist renowned for his inventive abstract paintings. He relocated to New York City in 1970, where he pursued studies at the School of Visual Arts and later earned a degree from Yale University in 1978.



The mural is located at the top of the staircase as you enter the performing arts theater at the Berglund Center.

Artist Woong Kim is seen here in a still from a 2024 interview, now found on Facebook.



Kim's artistic oeuvre is characterized by the application of thick oil paints combined with multi-layered, collaged surfaces, creating a unique visual impact. His works often evoke memories and traditional Korean aesthetics, reflecting his foundational sensibilities intertwined with his experiences in New York.

Throughout his career, Kim has been featured in galleries across S. Korea, New York, and Washington, D.C. Notably, he has had multiple solo exhibitions at the Addison/Ripley Gallery in Washington, D.C., between 1981 and 1997, and at the M-13 Gallery in New York in 1989, 1991, and 1995. He also has public collections at the Korean Chamber of Commerce and the Roanoke Civic Center. Specifically, he was commissioned to paint a mural in 1976 for the Roanoke Civic Center.

His works are part of esteemed collections, including the Yale University Museum and the Museum of Modern Art in Seoul, Korea. Kim's paintings delve into the depths of memory and tradition, often drawing inspiration from his childhood experiences. He reconstructs surfaces imbued with personal and cultural significance, transforming them into abstract compositions that resonate with both historical and contemporary themes.

His first public artwork was done in the Roanoke Civic Center (now the Berglund Center for the Performing Arts) in Roanoke, Va., in 1976. The large mural is located at the top of the staircase as you enter the building. We are honored to have his artwork here in Roanoke.

— Peyton Jones and Mary Jo Fassié

Besides Roanoke, you can view other public artwork by this artist in:

- The National Museum of Contemporary Arts, Seoul, S. Korea
- Yale University Museum, New Haven, Connecticut
- Intermetro Industries, Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania
- Soghigan & Machuga, Washington, D.C.
- Loews, L'Enfant Plaza, Washington, D.C.
- Sung Gok Museum, Seoul, S. Korea
- Kumho Museum of Art, Seoul, S. Korea
- The Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Seoul, S. Korea
- Seoul City Museum, Seoul, S. Korea
- Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, New York

To see and hear a recent interview with the artist, go to this link:
<https://www.facebook.com/reel/8228376630519644>

JOIN US ON A CULINARY TOUR OF POLAND

By Kristina Bulas-Slowikowski, M.D.
Roanoke-Opole chairwoman
krisbulas@gmail.com

We are planning a visit to Poland!

Well, the Opole Committee along with Poland Culinary Vacations are putting our heads together to plan a 10+/- day visit to Poland between June 21-June 30, 2026.

We hope to put a group together max of 12 RVSCI members to enjoy Wroclaw, Lower Silesia (Dolny Slask), Opole and Krakow along with a visit to a winery (Winnica Silesian) plus a day or two in the kitchen to learn to prepare a special Polish dish — possibly at the Culinary institute in Krakow. See the flyer here for details.

Costs are for the land tour only and include lodging, land transportation (Mercedes Sprint van), guided tours and

I think most meals. Details are still being worked out. Estimated cost for the land tour is \$3,500 per person double occupancy.

Participants will arrange all travel to and from Poland on their own and will fly into Wroclaw but may depart from Krakow, Wroclaw or even Warsaw or elsewhere in Europe. The tour begins in Wroclaw and ends in Krakow. A tour of Warsaw through Poland Culinary Vacations is available at an extra cost after the tour ends in Krakow.

Wroclaw, with a 1,000-year history, is the capital of the Lower Silesia Province. Situated on the Oder River, it is an exceptional city of 12 islands and 112 bridges. Wroclaw's Market Square, or Rynek, is the bustling heart of the city



Two of Wroclaw's famed dwarves simultaneously push and pull a granite ball around town. The city has more than 500 of these figures, which began in the 1980s as a symbol of resistance against the Communist regime.

and one of the most beautiful market squares in Europe. The Swidnicka Cellar located in the Market Square is the oldest restaurant in Europe still in operation since 1273.

You can follow the trail of the dwarves. The tradition of the Wrocław dwarves started in the 1980s as a symbol of resistance against the Communist regime, and today they have become beloved mascots of the city. Each dwarf tells a unique story and depicts a variety of professions, hobbies and even political statements. Searching for the more than 500 dwarves has become a popular pastime for locals and tourists alike.

An ongoing partnership between VTCSOM and the Medical University of Wrocław continues, and RVSC has participated in an active 2-way exchange of medical students over the years.

Venturing beyond Wrocław, Dolnośląskie Province (Lower Silesia) boasts an abundance of castles and palaces. Among these is the notable Książ Castle, often hailed as the “Pearl of Lower Silesia.” Its grandeur and scenic location within the Książ Landscape Park make it a genuinely awe-inspiring medieval fortress.

The Dolnośląskie Province boasts a rich cultural heritage. The region is home to the Churches of Peace, unique wooden churches built during the 17th-century peace treaties. The Jawor and Świdnica Churches of Peace, recognized as UNESCO World Heritage sites, are examples of religious tolerance and architectural brilliance. These churches are testaments to the region’s history and cultural diversity. Lower Silesia has rich wine-making traditions dating back to the XIII century. The region’s vineyards (Winnica Silesian among them), nestled in scenic landscapes, produce exceptional wines that reflect the unique terrain and microclimates of the area. Ksiaz, Church of Peace in Swidnica and award-winning winery Winnica Silesian are planned to be included in the itinerary.

Included will be a special visit to Opole to meet our friends from the Opole administration along with a personalized tour of Opole and hopefully a concert at the music school. Opole has agreed to host for 1-2 nights and cover meals during that time.

Kraków, officially the Royal Capital City of Kraków, is the second-largest and one of the oldest cities in Poland. Kraków was the official capital of Poland until 1596 and has traditionally been one of the leading centers of Polish academic, cultural, and artistic life. Cited as one of Europe’s

most beautiful cities, in 1978 its Old Town was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, one of the world’s first sites granted the status.

You will visit the market square and old town, St. Mary’s Basilica with its famous carved altar, St. Florian’s Gate, then following the royal route to Wawel castle, Wieliczka salt mine and possibly Auschwitz/Birkenau. A highlight will be a cooking class, possibly at the Culinary institute in Krakow.

And best of all you will eat wonderful Polish cuisine!

This is a work in progress, so more details will be forthcoming. The itinerary may be tweaked, but the destination sites are Wrocław, Dolny Slask, Opole and Krakow. Please let me know of your interest ASAP as this is sure to be a wonderful experience, and spaces are limited. Krisbulas@gmail.com

Check out Poland Culinary vacations on Facebook or on the web polandculinaryvacations.com.



**ROANOKE VALLEY
SISTER CITIES**



Roanoke Valley Sister Cities Opole Committee in collaboration with Poland Culinary Vacations is proud to tentatively offer a trip to Poland in June 2026. More details to come soon.

Highlights : Wrocław, Opole, Krakow

Estimated cost for guided tours, lodging and ground transportation **\$3500** per person double occupancy

Flight is not included. Group arranges their own travel to Dulles or Charlotte for flight to Wrocław and return

June 21-June 30 9 nights

Tour is limited to 12-14 persons.

Itinerary is tentative but will also include :

Special tour of award winning winery **Winnica Silesian** with wine tasting

Cooking Class in Krakow- pierogis?

Special hosting by our friends in Opole

If interested contact :Kris Slowikowski

Krisbulas@gmail.com

Find poland culinary vacations on facebook or on the web at polandculinaryvacations.com

CROSSING THE POND FURTHERS OUR BONDS OF FRIENDSHIP

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



In May, Glenvar student Maisey Cash (left) and her family hosted Lycée Le Verrier student Marion LeGuen (right). Later in the summer, Maisey traveled to Normandy and was hosted by Marion and her family. Photo courtesy of Jason Cash.



Models in Japanese-inspired costumes walk the hallway/runway at the Grandin Theatre during Cornelia Marin's show and reception in February. Cornelia is second from the left.

Our members and friends made a lot of transatlantic crossings in the first half of 2025.

First, we welcomed back longtime friend Cornelia Marin, who held a fashion show and artist's reception at the Grandin Theatre in February. Cornelia, a multi-media artist, also held an exhibit of her Japanese-inspired wearable art at WBRA-Public TV. Our thanks, as ever, to member Brenda Barksdale for hosting Cornelia and for organizing the celebratory events.

In April, two students from the Lycée Le Verrier in St-Lô arrived in the valley. Marion Le Guen and Diane Lecampion were hosted, respectively, by the families of Glenvar High School students Maisey Cash and Carson Weeks and attended classes at Glenvar. Several of us met Marion, Maisey and her father, Jason, when they came by our Roanoke/ St-Lô booth at the Local Colors festival in May. Soon thereafter, the Glenvar students traveled to St-Lô with their Norman friends and were hosted in kind by their families. St-Lô 44-Roanoke president Jeanine Vérove reports that the Le Verrier officials are very enthusiastic about continuing this exchange. Our thanks to Glenvar French teacher Rebecca Wright for facilitating the program and finding host families.



Roanoke City Councilmember Vivian Sanchez-Jones (right) returned to St-Lô in May for the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day. She is pictured with Jeanine Vérove (left), president of Saint-Lô 44-Roanoke.



We were a small but mighty group at our annual Bastille Day pique-nique on July 13.

Roanoke City Councilmember Vivian Sanchez-Jones returned to St-Lô in May to represent Roanoke and RVSCI for the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day. VE Day commemorates the end of World War II in Europe on May 8, 1945, when Nazi Germany formally surrendered to the Allies.

Later in May, three Hollins University students traveled to St-Lô for their 3-week internships. This is the second year of an exchange between Hollins and St-Lô 44-Roanoke. You can read the brief accounts of Anna Woods, Corabeth Pierce and Peyton Jones on Page 15. We are grateful to Professor Jeanne Jégoussou for her partnership in this exchange. On July 13, two students from the Institut St-Lô arrived on the Hollins campus to attend Hollinsummer, the 2-week, pre-college program for rising 9th-12th grade girls with interests in creative writing, STEM, theater and riding. The students spent their third week in the homes of local host families.

In early June, Marsha Taylor led her second successful student-adult delegation to St-Lô, followed by a tour through Strasbourg, Paris and Lyon. In a note to RVSCI and the Roanoke/ St-Lô committee, Marsha expressed thanks for the moral and financial support she received for this trip. She wrote: "Jonathan Marye and his 12 travelers from Blacksburg joined Lisa Decrozant, my husband, Kurt Gingrich, six students and me for a beautiful, one-week stay in Saint- Lô in our friends' homes." Jonathan, a French teacher in Blacksburg, wrote his account of the D-Day portion of the trip, which you can read on Page 14. This fall, an adult-student delegation from the Institut will be in Roanoke and Blacksburg from Oct. 8-15.



Representing our committee in the Parade of Nations at Local Colors were (from left): Raven Rockwell, Gergana and Romain Picard and their children, and Dionne Nichols.

Finally, Raven Rockwell, a Roanoke College rising senior, will be spending the month of August in St-Lô. Her internship will be as a sports educator for young children. We will see her account in the next issue of AOW.

Our annual Bastille Day pique-nique was held July 13 at Longwood Park in Salem. We had 22 in attendance. Corabeth Pierce attended and spoke to the group about her stage this summer. I read aloud a thank you note from summer delegation leader Marsha Taylor, thanking RVSCI and our membership for the moral and financial support that helped make this trip so successful.

The second ceremony on D-Day was dedicated to the civilian victims of the bombardment.

VISITING VA. STUDENTS INCLUDED IN EMOTIONAL D-DAY CEREMONIES

By Jonathan Marye
marye.bonvoyage@gmail.com

What a delight it has been to have such an amazing welcome by Jeanine Vérove and Saint-Lô 44-Roanoke committee members as well as the Institut Saint-Lô Agneau Catholic School.

Our day on June 6 started with a personal tour of the chapel at the Institut Saint-Lô by Jeanine and a school employee. Then Jeanine took us down to the medieval ramparts and led us into the tunnels below, built by the Germans.

Later that afternoon, we regrouped at the Place de la Mairie to get on buses and go to 3 memorial sites / ceremonies. We

were also invited to be part of the distinguished guests at the 3 memorial ceremonies. At each one, one of our students participated in the laying of ceremonial wreaths.

The 3 monuments were:

1) *Le monument des fusillés*. (The monument to those who were shot – executed -- by the Nazis.) Officials read aloud the names of the 33 members of the French Resistance and civilians who refused to obey Nazi orders. Mason Fenn from Blacksburg High School, where I teach, participated in laying a wreath alongside the grandson and great-great-granddaughter of one of those martyrs.

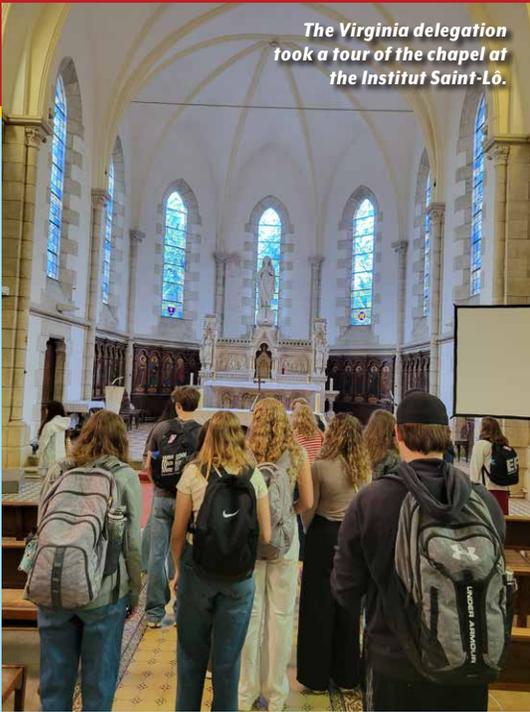
2) In the center of town, at the base of the medieval ramparts, *le monument des victimes civiles* stands in memory of the 352 civilians who perished in the Allied bombardment/destruction of the city. Kayden Creel, a William Byrd High School student, participated in that ceremony. Both “The Star-Spangled Banner” and “La Marseillaise” were sung.

3) A monument to those killed in the prison (mostly members of the Resistance) during the bombardment. This is at the main town square, opposite the town hall. Only the doorway of the prison remains from the bombardment, preserved as a memorial to those whom the Germans locked inside



Blacksburg student Mason Fenn (right) helps lay a wreath at le monument des fusillés.

The Virginia delegation took a tour of the chapel at the Institut Saint-Lô.



HOLLINS U. STUDENTS REVEL IN WORK AND PLAY À LA FRANÇAISE



Art History and French double major Anna Woods interned at St-Lô's history and art museum.

I had the amazing opportunity to spend three weeks as an intern at the Museum of History and Art in Saint-Lô. I got to see the behind-the-scenes of the museum and spend my days practicing my French by translating various texts for the museum! I will be forever grateful for the chance to learn and contribute to such an interesting museum. My time in Saint-Lô was made extraordinary thanks to my three host families, who welcomed me and showed me how beautiful Normandy

is! I got to explore more than just Saint-Lô and create unforgettable memories. *Anna Woods is a rising senior from Chester, Va.*

(and thus perished) before the Nazis fled the town. Blacksburg High School student Walker Grant assisted in the ceremony alongside the descendants of one of the victims. Again, both the American and French national anthems were sung. The ceremony concluded with speeches by St-Lô Mayor Emmanuelle Lejeune and a representative of the regional prefect.

Jonathan Marye is a French teacher at Blacksburg High School.



Waving hello from St-Lô's medieval ramparts.



When I reflect on my time as a teaching assistant at the Institut Saint-Lô, one of the first things that comes to mind is the people. From teachers to students to host families, I met so many people over those three weeks. And I did not just meet them; I learned from them. I discovered the differences between American and French schools. I realized that French students dress up for school. And I observed the differences between Normande culture and Parisian culture. Throughout my time in Saint-Lô, one thing is certain: I was learning just as much as the students were. *Corabeth Pierce is a rising senior from Roanoke.*

Corabeth Pierce, pictured here at the Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Bayeux, studies International Studies and French.



Peyton Jones (second from right) is pictured with her first host family (from left): Marilynne Hamdan-Challe, Chloé Hamdan and Pauline Hamdan. Peyton is a French and Gender & Women's Studies major with a minor in Communications.

During my internship as an English teaching assistant at the Institut St-Lô, I worked supporting teachers and helping students improve their spoken and written English. I led small conversation groups, designed lesson materials, and introduced students to American traditions. Teaching English was a challenge that helped me improve my language skills and develop greater confidence in cross-cultural communication. In addition, I was able to explore

Normandy, visit beautiful places (such as Honfleur, Deauville, etc.), and develop bonds with the wonderful people there. Overall, the experience was deeply rewarding and has had a lasting impact on both my personal growth and professional aspirations. *Peyton Jones, a former RVSCI intern, is a rising senior from Winchester, Va.*

A SPIRITED SUMMER OF CULTURE AND CONNECTION IN ROANOKE

By Jessie Yu
Roanoke-Lijiang chairwoman
Jessieforever2017@gmail.com

As summer arrived once again in Roanoke, casting its golden glow over the Blue Ridge Mountains, the region turned into a vibrant hub of life, color, and celebration. It's truly the most beautiful season here when outdoor festivals come alive, communities gather, and the spirit of togetherness thrives.

This year, the Roanoke-Lijiang sister city committee joined in with great enthusiasm, adding a rich layer of Chinese tradition to the festivities.

At the Daisy Art Parade on May 10, the streets were filled with joy and wonder. Girls representing Roanoke-Lijiang sister cities and dressed in flowing white costumes danced with an almost dreamlike grace, as if



they had stepped out of a fairytale. Among the highlights were musical performances by Julia and Armani on the violin, alongside Alayna, who played the Hulusi — a traditional wind instrument from Lijiang. The hauntingly beautiful tones of the Hulusi gave the parade a distinctly cultural flair and drew warm applause from the crowd.

Shortly thereafter, the city of Roanoke celebrated its biggest multicultural event of the year, the Local Colors Festival. This open-air celebration is a beloved Roanoke tradition, and this year, the Lijiang performers once again dazzled the audience with three distinctive Chinese dances.

The first was the Round Fan Dance, inspired by the delicate round fans once favored by women of the Song Dynasty — a period in Chinese history that mirrors the Western Middle Ages. The dance evoked scenes of spring and summer, when elegant ladies wandered through flower-filled gardens, gently waving their silk fans as a symbol of grace and poise.

The second was the Long Fan Dance, a performance that combined softness with strength. Drawing from China's martial arts heritage, the dancers used long fans and bamboo sticks not just as props but as symbols of artistry and resilience. It was a poetic reminder of the days when even a fan could carry the spirit of a warrior.

Finally, the performance closed with the audience favorite—the Umbrella Dance. These were no ordinary umbrellas: handmade oil-paper parasols crafted with bamboo frames, painted by hand, and sealed with wax and natural oils. Originating from the Jiangnan region—south of the Yangtze River—these parasols were an everyday essential for women, offering shade from the sun and shelter from the rain. The dance paid tribute to that heritage, with umbrellas spinning and gliding like blossoms in the summer breeze.

Through dance, music, and traditional craftsmanship, the Lijiang delegation brought a touch of southern China to the heart of Roanoke. Their performances reminded us that even across oceans and cultures, joy, beauty, and human connection are shared languages. In a season already full of warmth, they brought something even more special: the spirit of friendship.



Playing and dancing with the RVSCI committee during the Daisy Art Parade are (from left) Julia Lampkin (violin), Armani Wei (violin), Alayna Chen (Hulusi) and Jenny Wu (silk fan).

NEARING 50 YEARS, A LOOK BACK AT THE ROANOKE-KISUMU TIE

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

Roanoke established its second sister city, Kisumu, Kenya, in 1976, while Noel Taylor was Roanoke's mayor. Kisumu was selected because it was, like Roanoke, a rail center and is located near mountains, albeit in the famous Rift Valley of East Africa.

The inaugural chairperson of the Roanoke-Kisumu committee was Greta Evans, who was community service director at WSLs (Channel 10). Later chairpersons were Marylen Harmon, a Roanoke County teacher, and veterinarian Dr. Diane D'Orazio, both who focused mostly on health and welfare connections. During that time, projects supported in Kisumu included the Agape Girls Home, the Green Life Widows and Orphans Fund and the Kisumu Hospice. But because of difficulties in working abroad, the committee was paused in December 2012. It was re-activated in June 2013 by a vote of the Sister City board, and I was appointed the new chairperson. At that time, the committee had about 21 local members. I set about re-establishing contacts and adding to the group's programs. In 2014, I reached out to Dr. Andy Muelenaer of Roanoke who was working with CitiHope International providing medical equipment to hospitals in Kenya. I established contacts with the governor of Kisumu, Jack Ranguma, in 2014.

In January 2015, I engaged Professor James Brown of VCU to talk about Kenyan art at the Harrison Museum of African-American Culture. In 2016, I supported a visit to Kisumu by Doug Brainard of Virginia Tech, who spent 6 weeks helping install water wells there.

In 2016, the Taubman Museum of Art hosted a display of Kenyan art. In 2017, I joined the City of Kisumu Urban Area Association, a civic organization promoting peace and better business relations in Kisumu. In 2018, Roanoke-Kisumu member Ruphina Okeyo established a project to plant fruit and nut trees in Kisumu. Meanwhile, the Kisumu committee began participating in the Roanoke's annual Local Colors festival.

In 2018, a meeting was held at the Williamson Road Library to showcase a program about the Gods Little Angels School in Kisumu and raise

funds for Support Aid Ministry. That resulted in a photo project that was exhibited in the Noel C. Taylor Municipal Building, where RVSCI had set up display cases.

In 2019, I traveled to Kisumu to meet local government and civic leaders, including the governor of Kisumu County. I also visited Lake Victoria.

While there I also met with Dr. Makori Moronge, an old friend, and toured Nairobi National Park. This inspired a desire to create a program to take Roanokers to visit Kenya and Kisumu city.

In 2020, the Roanoke group sent money to help with Covid relief programs. By that time, the Kisumu committee had reached 24 members and raised \$1,350 in donations. In 2020, I attended a Kenya Regional Conference where it was decided to pursue a water purification project in Kisumu the following year.

In 2021, we began planning for that project in the Kisumu area. By 2022, we had raised 50% of the money needed. We then created a local committee partnership to manage and run the water system when it was done. We selected contractors and signed construction agreements. The project was completed in November 2023, and in December of that year, I traveled there to meet with community leaders who would run the project. The project was featured at the Sister Cities African Regional Summit held in Cape Town, South Africa. In 2024, a visit to meet local Kenyans in Roanoke helped raise membership and establish local relationships. Our committee membership remains at 24.

I still hope to lead a group of sister city members to visit Kenya, perhaps in 2025 or 2026. I've asked Roanoke County to join in the Kisumu relationship. I have attended the Celebration of African Cultures programs in Roanoke put on by Local Colors and worked to expand interest in our activities. I invite you to learn more about Kisumu and to join our sister city committee by becoming a dues paying member.



Greta Evans was the inaugural chairperson of the Roanoke-Kisumu sister cities committee. Detail from photo from The Roanoke Times.



Marylen Harmon succeeded Evans as chairwoman. Detail from photo from The Roanoke Tribune.



The late Diane D'Orazio succeeded Harmon as chairwoman. Detail from photo from Southwest Virginia Wildlife Center of Roanoke.

Marking the Passing of three once-active members



Natasha Somova Petersen
Sept. 6, 1926 - June 9, 2025

Natasha was the inaugural chairwoman of the Roanoke-Pskov (Russia) sister city committee, beginning in 1992. The delegations she led to Pskov carried medical supplies, and later, money and supplies to help establish an after-school program. She was instrumental in creating a foreign language program for Roanoke city public schools and is believed to be the first Russian language teacher in Virginia during the Soviet Cold War. She also taught Spanish and English until retiring in 1993 after 34 years in the school system.



Dr. Jong Oh Ra
Aug. 23, 1938 - Oct. 12, 2024

A longtime member of the Roanoke-Wonju (S. Korea) sister city committee, Jong had been Professor and Chair of the Department of Global Politics and Societies at Hollins University, whose faculty he joined in 1969. He earned his M.A., M.S.L.S. and Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Illinois.



James "Jack" Robert Tompkins
March 2, 1946 - Jan. 21, 2025

An advocate for diversity and cultural exchange, Jack spent many years as executive director of RVSCI. His love for travel and learning was evident in his studies at the University of Geneva and his visits to several countries. In 2001, he joined the RVSCI group trip to St-Lô, Paris and London and kept the students laughing with his stories and contagious smile. Jack loved teaching and connecting with other travelers and Sister Cities International board members. He received a BA from the College of William & Mary and completed advanced studies at UVa and Va Tech. In the 1980s, Jack was active in Showtimers Community Theatre and was a lay speaker at South Roanoke UMC.

Mark your calendars!

- Aug. 27-Sept. 6** Roanoke delegation to Wonju
- Sept. 4:** RVSCI board meeting – CITS boardroom
- Oct. 2:** Roanoke College Fall Internship Fair
- Oct. 11:** Korean Festival of Letters (Hangul Day), Taubman Museum of Art
- Nov. 1:** Annual Ginkgo Tree Festival, Century Plaza
- Nov. 18:** RVSCI board meeting – - CITS boardroom
- Date TBA:** Rke/St-Lô's annual Dîner de Noël
- June 21-30, 2026:** Poland Culinary Vacation Trip



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Contact us at: roanokevalleysistercities@gmail.com



Annual Membership - Roanoke Valley Sister Cities New Renewal July 1, 20 _____ - June 30, 20 _____

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

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