



AROUND OUR WORLD

ROANOKE VALLEY SISTER CITIES, INC.

VOLUME 28, ISSUE 2 | AUGUST–DECEMBER 2025



(right) The Roanoke delegation poses in traditional Korean outfits at Gangwon Gamyeong Provincial Office, a beautiful blend of culture, history, and traditional Korean architecture in Wonju. The delegation, led by Roanoke Mayor Joe Cobb, included Roanoke-Wonju chair Cherry Bell Damasco-Farrington, James Matthews, JJ Matthews, Ginny Matthews, Deb DiFrancesco, Elizabeth Allran, and Rama Doucoure.

PARTNERS WITH PURPOSE: Celebrating 60 years of connection

Making kimbap in a Korean cooking class at William Byrd High School.



By Cherry Bell Damasco-Farrington
Roanoke-Wonju chairperson
cherrybell.damasco@gmail.com

The Roanoke Valley Sister Cities International partnership with Wonju experienced a vibrant and impactful fall 2025 marked by international diplomacy, cultural celebration, and growing community engagement. From a milestone delegation visit abroad to expanded local programming, the Roanoke-Wonju chapter continues to deepen connections between our two communities.

DELEGATION GOES TO WONJU (late August-early September)

A cornerstone of fall activities was an official delegation visit to Wonju led by Roanoke Mayor Joe Cobb, accompanied by members of his family, James Matthews, JJ Matthews, and Ginny Matthews. The delegation also included me and RVSCI members Deb DiFrancesco, Elizabeth Allran, and Rama Doucoure.

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

AT 70 YEARS, THE SISTER CITIES MISSION IS NEVER MORE RELEVANT

In 2026, Sister Cities International will celebrate its 70th anniversary. The organization began in 1956 with a mission, based on President Dwight D. Eisenhower's goal of peace through citizen diplomacy. As he envisioned it: "If all people want peace, the challenge is for them to connect – bypassing governments if needed – to discover countless ways to understand one another."

As Roanoke Valley Sister Cities strives to complete the mission of Sister Cities International with our sister cities in Brazil, China, France, Kenya, Poland, South Korea, we are proud to have participated

in many Roanoke community events and exchanges abroad in 2025.

We want to keep these programs going as we move forward, but we are also facing some financial challenges in 2026 as our funding will be drastically cut. We could really use your support for the mission of our organization here in the Roanoke Valley with events such as the spring Young Artists Showcase and fall Ginkgo Festival as well as our adult and student exchanges. If you are not a member of Roanoke Valley Sister Cities, please consider donating or joining as a member at www.rvsci.us. Your membership and

donations go directly into supporting our organization.

Here are just a few of our initiatives from the second half of 2025, illustrating our mission and that of Sister Cities International.

In late August, the Roanoke-Wonju committee sent a delegation to Wonju that included the mayor of Roanoke, Joe Cobb. The Roanokers were received like royalty and visited cultural sites and met with officials from the government, medical and education communities.



In October, the Roanoke-Wonju committee celebrated Hangul at the Taubman Museum of Art.

In the fall, Roanoke-Wonju once again offered free Korean language classes at William Byrd High School on the beginner and intermediate levels. In addition, a one-day Korean cooking class proved very popular.

In October, our Wonju committee, headed by Cherry Bell Damasco-Farrington, celebrated Hangul (Alphabet Day) at the Taubman Museum of Art with wonderful and informative displays, K-Pop dancers and demonstrations of martial arts. The celebration included a televised greeting from the mayor of Wonju and an in-person greeting from Roanoke's mayor. RVSCI board members Kris Slowikowski and Jeff Vick came to help.

The city of Saint-Lô sent a large delegation of students and adults to Roanoke in October, after Roanoke had visited them in June. Students made friends, experienced American high school culture and toured the Roanoke Valley and beyond. This is a long-standing exchange that happens mostly every other year since 1997, only interrupted by COVID. Before his passing, I remember the wise words of Bob Slaughter who told me to make sure that the young people of Roanoke and St-Lô get to know



Dancer Courtney Fox, aka the Ginkgo Festival queen, with Doug Jackson, Roanoke's Arts & Culture Coordinator.



This Blacksburg-based K-Pop dance group provided some of the entertainment at the Ginkgo Festival.

one another and understand the lessons of D-Day and what he and other soldiers fought for.

In November, RVSCI board member John Makay and his friend Jonathan Greene went to Florianópolis, Brazil, with the goal of strengthening ties with this most beautiful city. They had several goals for this trip including meeting with Mayor Topázio Neto and other government officials to discuss how to enhance our relationship. They also spent time with Christian Dobreiner at his nature reserve and helped with tasks at the reserve. Other connections were made with the medical and educational communities as well as with muralist Thiago Valdi who visited Roanoke in 2023 and along with Roanoke artist Jonathan Murrill completed a mural in Northwest Roanoke and one in Florianópolis in December 2024. John and Jonathan's trip culminated with a live virtual party, which allowed us to connect virtually with our friends in Florianópolis.

Our 4th annual Ginkgo Festival took place in Century Plaza in November with our sister cities represented as members gave out information about each and answered questions. The Roanoke Tree specialists had information about the ginkgo trees, and a vendor displaying Korean items added to our celebration. Entertainment came from local musicians and a K-Pop dance group from Blacksburg. Roanoke artist Katherine Devine made creations

with participants from the ginkgo leaves at the art tent, and children were able to color images from our RVSCI sculptures in the plaza. Courtney Fox once again served as our Ginkgo Festival queen and entertained us with her beautiful and colorful dancing.

Later that month, I was joined by Jessie Yu, Lijiang chair, and RVSCI board members Jeff Vick and Andreea Mihalache-O'Keef at Roanoke Catholic School as part of its annual culture fair. Jessie made Chinese red paper designs, and Andreea made bracelets representing the colors in the flags of our countries. Our activities and display received lots of attention and participation from students and faculty.

The year ended with Roanoke/St-Lô's annual Dîner de Noël, where everyone enjoyed the cuisine at Montano's while hearing about both 2025 exchanges.

This year, we hope to have a fundraising dinner and silent auction in early December to raise funds to strengthen our budget. Stay tuned for the date and time, and let us know (roanokevalleysistercities@gmail.com) if you can volunteer as we plan a celebration that will allow us to continue the mission of RVSCI.

Roanoke Valley Sister Cities is committed to fostering and encouraging mutual understanding, friendship and peace through cultural, medical, economic, educational and professional exchanges among the people of the Roanoke Valley and the citizens of

PARTNERS WITH PURPOSE: *Celebrating 60 years of connection*

(continued from page 1)

Our delegation was warmly welcomed by Wonju officials, including Mayor Won Gang Soo, Vice Mayor Lee Moon Ki, and Wonju City Council Chairperson Cho Yong-Ki, with coordination and support from Ms. Paek Soo-hyun, Ms. Choi, and Mrs. Baek.

During the visit, the delegation had the distinct honor of attending the 60th anniversary celebration of the Roanoke-Wonju Sister City partnership, as well as the Founding Celebration of Wonju City, a major civic event attended by members of the National Assembly and Gangwon Province leadership all in the same week. Mayor Cobb and I were each presented with the prestigious designation of Honorary Citizens of Wonju.

The visit also included extensive cultural, educational, and economic exchanges. Delegates toured the Samyang Ramyeon Factory, explored Wonju Severance Christian Hospital to learn about the city's medical heritage, and visited Chiak High School to engage with students and educators. Additional site visits included the Wonju Medical Device Industry Promotion Foundation, Soguemsan Valley Park, the Korean Hanji (traditional paper) Theme Park, Gangwon Gamyong, and Wonju's traditional market. The delegation also visited Museum SAN, highlighting Wonju's dedication to art, architecture, and nature, before leaving for Seoul for the second leg of our South Korea visit.

Hangul Korean Festival of Letters

On Oct. 11, RVSCI proudly hosted the second Hangul Korean Festival of Letters at the Taubman Museum of Art, celebrating Korea's unique writing system and cultural heritage. The event welcomed a strong community turnout, with 318 adults and 54 children visiting the museum during the festival.



The 60th Anniversary Celebration Wonju – Roanoke Sister Partnership

원주-로아노크 자매결연 60주년 기념식

2025년 8월 29일 호텔인터불고, 원주시 | August 29, 2025, Wonju City

The Roanoke delegation and Wonju officials gathered to celebrate the 60th anniversary of our two cities' partnership.

Festival highlights included:

- Four Korean pop dance performances
- A Tae Kwon Do demonstration
- A hands-on Hangeul bookmark-making craft table
- A Korean vendor offering mugs, bookmarks, and a Korean calligraphy demonstration

The festival received overwhelmingly positive feedback and served as an engaging introduction to Korean language and culture for attendees of all ages. Plans are underway for the 2026 celebration.

Korean cooking class

Cultural learning continued Oct. 18 with RVSCI's first Korean cooking class, hosted at William Byrd High School. Seventeen participants learned how to prepare kimbap, gaining hands-on culinary experience while learning about Korean food traditions. The class generated strong interest, with many participants expressing enthusiasm for future Korean cooking and cultural programs. Look forward to another cooking class in 2026.

Korean language classes

Korean language classes remained a key component of RVSCI's educational outreach in 2025. The fall session concluded in November, and registration is now open for the spring 2026 classes, which begin on Saturday, Jan. 10, at William Byrd High School.

Community members are invited to register using the following links:

Beginner classes:



Intermediate classes:



Community representation

Roanoke-Wonju also maintained a strong presence at local cultural events. Members Deb DiFrancesco and Jean Broyles represented Wonju at the annual Ginkgo Festival on Nov. 1, helping promote awareness of the Sister City partnership and strengthening community connections.



The Roanokers met students and teachers at Chialk High School.



Dancing at the Hangeul Festival of Letters at the Taubman Museum of Art.

ROANOKE VALLEY SISTER CITIES
**JOIN OUR
KOREAN
LANGUAGE
CLASS!**



**Spring Session 2026
Begins on Saturday,
January 10, 2026**

Participants can join after the start date.

11:00 am Beginner

12:30 pm Intermediate

LOCATION:

William Byrd High School

Enter at Door 22

2902 Washington Ave

Vinton, Va 24179



More info:

vintonworldtrekkers@gmail.com

(540) 521-1168



SIGN UP AT [HTTPS://LINKTR.EE/VINTONWORLDTREKKERS](https://linktr.ee/vintonworldtrekkers)



Roanoke Valley Sister Cities 2026 Young Artists Showcase



2026 Theme: “Voices of Today, Visions of Tomorrow”

Sister Cities International aims to promote peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation – one individual, one community at a time. This year’s theme is “**Voices of Today, Visions of Tomorrow.**” This theme invites young artists and authors to raise their voices during a historic moment as the United States celebrates 250 years since its founding, and Sister Cities International honors 70 years of building global friendships and cultural understanding. It reflects the ongoing journey from the country’s founding ideals toward a more interconnected, peaceful world.

Eligibility:

- Students must be between 12 and 18 years of age at the time of the 2026 international deadline. (April 1, 2026, for the Roanoke top 5 submissions to Sister Cities International)
- The student must be affiliated with a dues-paying member of Sister Cities International. This is Roanoke Valley Sister Cities.

Sister Cities International Awards:

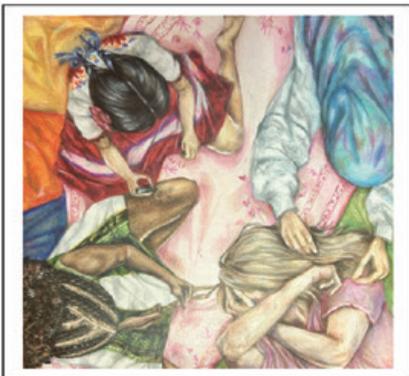
- Below are 3 examples of last year’s international winners.
- One artist will be selected as a Grand Prize Winner, 2nd Place Winner, and 3rd Place Winner.
- The Grand Prize Artist Winner will receive \$1,000, 2nd Place Winner will receive \$250, 3rd Place Winner will receive \$100.
- The winners will be announced at the virtual Youth Leadership Summit tentatively scheduled for August 2026.

Roanoke Valley Sister Cities Awards:

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

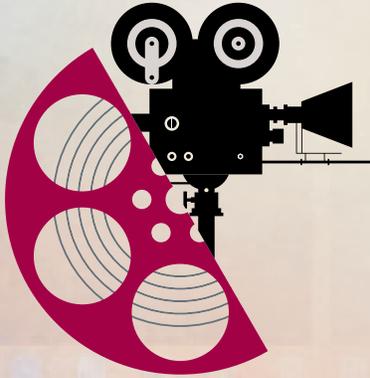
Submission Requirements to RVSC:

- Students may select one (1) piece of original artwork to submit for this showcase.
- **Important note: This year we will not be accepting physical artwork, only photographs of the artwork. To ensure our judges have the best quality view of your artwork, please confirm that photographs are no less than 1350x1080 pixels.**
- "Acceptable media -- submitted only by photograph -- include oil, acrylic, watercolor, charcoal, colored pencil, crayon, ink, marker, etching and collage."
- **Digital medium artwork will be accepted** this year. This is not a photography contest.
- Only two-dimensional (2D), unframed artwork will be accepted.
- A teacher must send the photograph(s) of the student artwork along with the application to roanokevalleysistercities@gmail.com (Applications available upon request or from teachers)
- All photos of artwork must be e-mailed by **March 16, 2026**
- Judges will evaluate submissions based on theme interpretation, originality, and creativity.



INTERNATIONAL FILM SERIES

IN COLLABORATION WITH HOLLINS UNIVERSITY



February 6–20, 2026

The Department of Modern Languages is pleased to present the 8th annual Roanoke College International Film Series, co-presented by Hollins University. This year's theme is *Education*. Each film will be followed by a post-screening, panel-led discussion.

The year's film series is sponsored by Roanoke College, Hollins University, Roanoke Valley Sister Cities, the Grandin Theatre, and the Taubman Museum of Art. Roanoke College sponsors include the Jordan Endowment; Offices of Community Programs, Global Engagement, Marketing and Communications, and Student Engagement; Fintel Library; Center for Studying Structures of Race; programs in Languages, Sociology, Religion Studies; Anthropology, Screen Studies, and Peace & Justice Studies.

**All films are free and open to the public. ** All films subtitled in English **All films followed by a post-screening panel-led discussion

<p>GERMAN</p> <p>Young Törless February 6, 7:00 p.m. Antrim Chapel at Roanoke College</p> <p>Volker Schlöndorff 1966, NR, 87 MIN</p>	<p>HINDI</p> <p>English Vinglish February 8, 2:00 p.m. Taubman Museum of Art</p> <p>Gauri Shinde 2012, NR, 134 MIN</p>	<p>JAPANESE</p> <p>Linda Linda Linda February 11, 7:00 p.m. Grandin Theatre</p> <p>Nobuhiro Yamashita 2005, TV-PG, 114 MIN</p>	<p>SPANISH</p> <p>Bad Education February 12, 7:00 p.m. Visual Arts Center Auditorium (Hollins)</p> <p>Pedro Almodóvar 2004 R, 106 MIN</p>
<p>RUSSIAN</p> <p>The Earth is Blue as an Orange February 13, 7:00 p.m. Wortmann Ballroom at Roanoke College</p> <p>Iryna Tsilyk 2020, NR, 74 MIN</p>	<p>FRENCH</p> <p>Zero de conduite February 15, 2:00 p.m. Taubman Museum of Art</p> <p>Volker Schlöndorff and Margarethe von Trotta 1933, R, 60 MIN</p>	<p>CHINESE</p> <p>Not One Less February 18, 7:00 p.m. Visual Arts Center Auditorium (Hollins)</p> <p>Zhang Yimou 1999, G, 106 MIN</p>	<p>FRENCH</p> <p>Cinema Paradiso February 20, 7:00 p.m. Antrim Chapel at Roanoke College</p> <p>Giuseppe Tornatore 1989, PG, 123 MIN</p>

VISIT REVEALS COUNTLESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

By Jonathan Green
jongreen9217@gmail.com

This past October, RVSCI board member John Makay and I had the extraordinary opportunity to visit Florianópolis, experiencing firsthand what our exchange participants encounter when they travel to this beautiful coastal city. What we discovered was a community with a vibrant cultural scene and countless opportunities for future collaboration.

From the moment we arrived, Christian Döbereiner served as our invaluable liaison, coordinating many of our meetings. As creator and manager of the Reserva Araponga, his extensive network and deep knowledge of the community made our visit remarkably productive.

A highlight of our visit was meeting with Florianópolis Mayor Topázio Neto. We exchanged letters between our mayors

as well as gifts in the time-honored sister cities tradition. Among other things, we were presented with boi de mamão figurines, based on an ox-like creature from the folklore of this region of Santa Catarina.

At the Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC), we met with Francisco Oliveira, a geography professor, and the talented students in his lab. One of their projects is creating detailed maps for a government agency, and they gifted us with beautifully crafted 3D-printed topography maps. There we also met Arthur Aluno and Luís Eduardo – the same students who worked with Lucas Pace from Roanoke College on his research project last summer. It was great connecting with them and hearing about their continued work.



At the mayor's office (from left): Thiago Valdi, John Makay, Mayor Topázio Neto, Monica Duarte, Christian Döbereiner, Jonathan Green and Sandra Nunes.

It was wonderful to meet artist Thiago Valdi, who visited Roanoke in 2023 and created two stunning murals in our city. We toured his previous work around Florianópolis before visiting his current project: a magnificent mural at the Instituto Estadual de Educação (IEE), the largest public school in Brazil and Latin America. Through Thiago, we met other talented local artists, including Bruno Brasil, who provided the space for the sister cities gathering near the end of our visit.

We had the privilege of meeting with administrators from the Associação Brasileira dos Portadores de Câncer (AMUCC), a cancer foundation that advocates for patients' rights and provides crucial support services. This meeting was particularly meaningful given the cancer center now being developed in Roanoke. We discussed oncology care, patient advocacy, and support services – areas where our cities could learn much from each other and potentially collaborate on best practices in cancer treatment and patient care.

Monica Duarte, president of the Fundação Franklin Cascaes, a cultural foundation in Florianópolis, played a key role in facilitating our meeting with Mayor Neto and organizing the sister cities gathering at the end of our trip. Her foundation works to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of Florianópolis, and we explored opportunities for cultural exchanges.

We visited Christian's Reserva Araçongá, where scientists João Gava Just and Luiz Fernando Rocha Ugioni had planned guided birdwatching and frogwatching tours for us. Unfortunately, bad weather forced us to cancel these excursions, but the reserve showcases the incredible biodiversity of the region and the important conservation work being done there. We did get to visit a local family and had one celebratory meal with workers at the reserve who served us a stew made with a wild boar that they recently hunted.

(continued on page 10)



Jonathan Green (left) and John Makay in front of the mural of Antonieta de Barros, who was elected to the Legislative Assembly of Santa Catarina as Brazil's first black female state deputy. Designed by Thiago Valdi, Tuane Ferreira, and Gugie.

FLORIANÓPOLIS, BRAZIL

(continued from page 9)

The Florianópolis Botanical Garden Park offered another glimpse into the region's rich natural environment. Part of the park showcased the marshland environment, which is typical for that coastline. We were delighted to spot capybaras – the world's largest rodents – roaming freely throughout the park and even around the city. These gentle giants have become beloved symbols of Florianópolis' harmonious relationship with nature.

No visit to Florianópolis would be complete without experiencing its famous natural beauty. We hiked up to Morro da Coroa, which overlooks the stunning Lagoinha do Leste Beach. This is one of the most famous hikes in Florianópolis, and the panoramic views from the summit made every step worthwhile. The pristine beach below, accessible only by trail or boat, remains one of the island's best-preserved natural treasures.



John overlooking Lagoinha do Leste Beach.



Jonathan cautiously approaches a capybara at the Florianópolis Botanical Garden Park.

The culminating event of our trip was a sister cities meeting and celebration hosted at Café Preto, run by Bruno Brasil and João Pellegrini. What made this gathering truly special was our use of technology to bridge the distance between our cities. Using Google Meet, we connected with RVSCI members and supporters in Roanoke, allowing them to participate virtually in this important gathering. Presenters from both cities spoke passionately about culture, science, innovation, and the shared desire to keep our sister cities connection alive and vibrant. Local educator Bianca Brasil served as our translator, expertly facilitating communication between English and Portuguese speakers and ensuring everyone could fully engage in the conversation.

We also experimented with AI-powered automated translation tools during the meeting, discovering new possibilities for future gatherings when a live translator may not be available. This technological breakthrough could open doors for more frequent and spontaneous exchanges between our communities, making the distance between Roanoke and Florianópolis feel a little smaller.

We arrived in Florianópolis not knowing exactly what to expect, but we departed with lasting friendships and a renewed appreciation for what sister cities partnerships can accomplish. As we approach our 30th anniversary of partnership in 2026, we look forward to celebrating this year the remarkable milestone that has united our two cities for three decades. The warmth, hospitality, and meaningful connections we experienced have energized us for the road ahead.

HAPPY TO RETURN THE HOSPITALITY THIS FALL

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

Roanoke/St-Lô Sister Cities have continued our exchanges. In late July and August, Raven Rockwell, a Roanoke College student, had an internship in St-Lô. Her report follows this article.

Then, in October, we welcomed a delegation of 17 high school students and 3 teachers from the Institut St-Lo. All the guests were housed by families in Roanoke and Blacksburg. The group spent their first full day in downtown Roanoke. They met Mayor Cobb, played at the Roanoke Pinball Museum, and had a guided tour of the Taubman Museum. On another day, they visited the D-Day Memorial in Bedford and Monticello in Charlottesville. The French students had the opportunity to attend classes with their high school hosts on more than one

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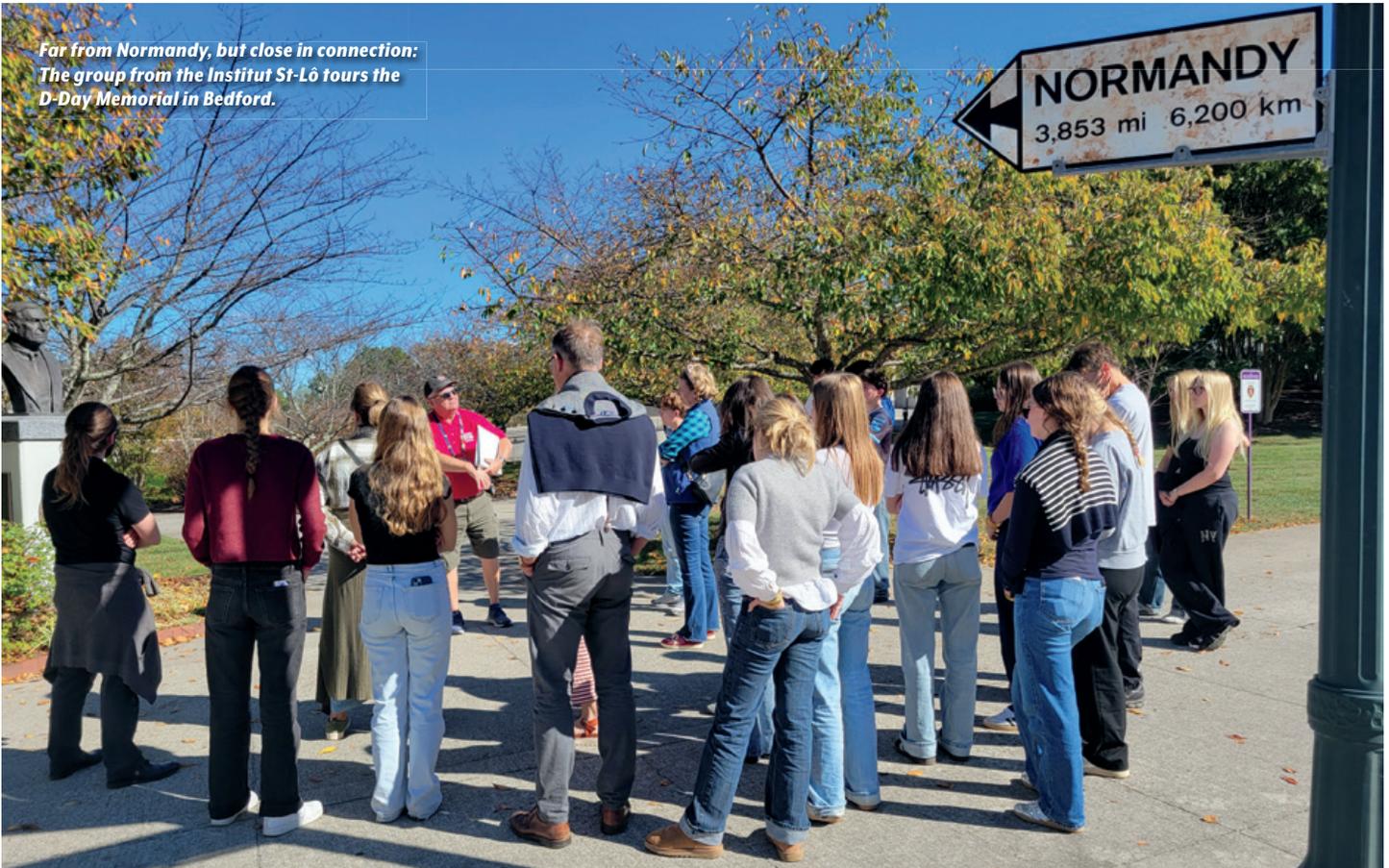
Debra Boule (left) and Peggy Wells staffed the Roanoke/St-Lô table for half the day at the Ginkgo Festival.



At the Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport in October, the Institut St-Lô delegation of students and teachers is greeted by their American hosts and teachers.

HAPPY TO RETURN THE HOSPITALITY THIS FALL

(continued from page 11)



Far from Normandy, but close in connection: The group from the Institut St-Lô tours the D-Day Memorial in Bedford.



At our annual Dîner de Noël, Jonathan Marye and Marsha Taylor presented a slideshow of highlights from the summer trip to France and the Institut's visit in fall.

occasion, and shared various activities with their host families on the weekend. A large group of guests, host families and Sister Cities members attended a farewell potluck at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Roanoke.

Chris and Betsy Bohannon, Debra Boule and Peggy Wells represented our committee at the Ginkgo Festival on Nov. 1.

We held our annual holiday dinner at Montano's on Dec. 4. Marsha Taylor and Jonathan Marye, both French teachers and delegation leaders, gave a presentation with photos from the summer 2025 trip to St-Lô and the fall visit from the Institut.

We have heard from the artist Cornelia Marin that she will be returning to Roanoke for a March visit. We look forward to seeing her again.



Roanoke College senior Raven Rockwell points out the Roanoke Bridge sign in the heart of St-Lô during her summer internship.

SUMMER INTERNSHIP WAS A 3½ WEEK ADVENTURE

*By Raven Rockwell
Roanoke College class of 2026
rmrockwell@mail.roanoke.edu*

In summer 2025, I was fortunate to have lived and worked in Saint-Lô for three and a half weeks. I was hosted by the Massue family in their home in the center of town. I was so lucky to be welcomed into such a kind and adventurous family. It was an unforgettable experience to learn about French culture in a first-hand experience.

During my time in Saint-Lô, I interned at Sports Vacances, a sports camp for children and teenagers. I would walk to and from work each day, which was a cool experience on its own as I got to walk past businesses, neighborhoods and even a university! At Sports Vacances, I got to play with the children in a variety of activities. In the mornings we played badminton, laser tag, ping pong, and got to rock climb.

After lunch, we would do roller blading and play roller hockey and then practice archery!

My favorite activity was badminton, or watching how well the kids could rock climb, and trying the different levels of difficulty. It was so fun working with the Norman children and practicing my French with them. Even when I would mess up, they would help me figure out how to say what I wanted to say in French.

On the weekends, the Massue family took me on adventures around France. I was able to explore the Normandy beaches and countryside. The dairy products I had from Normandy were the most delicious. My favorite cheese was either Camembert, compté or Roquefort. But they are all

so delicious it is hard to pick! We also visited Mont-Saint-Michel, the tidal island and fortified abbey. The architecture of the little town was so beautiful. We also took a tour of the quicksand that surrounds the town, and we saw a seal swimming in the bay! Another weekend, we went to Paris. Paris is one of the most beautiful cities I have ever been to. We saw all of the iconic sight-seeing spots such as the Eiffel Tower, Moulin Rouge, the Sacré Coeur, Notre Dame, l'Arc de Triomphe, the Louvre, and more. The Eiffel Tower was the first spot on our visit to Paris, and it was so magical.

On the last weekend of my stay, we adventured up to Le Havre, in the northernmost part of Normandy. We traveled the coast and got to look out over the bright blue water, and even visited Port Racine, one of the smallest ports in Europe.

One of my last wishes while I was in France was to try escargot. The Massue family surprised me with this dish on one of my last nights in Saint-Lô. They had an interesting flavor, but it's a dish you must try when in France!

Everyone I met in Saint-Lô was so welcoming, I feel as though I have a new home away from home. I would go back to visit in a heartbeat. I am so grateful I was able to have the experiences I did, and I am so thankful to Roanoke Valley Sister Cities for giving me the opportunity to visit such a beautiful town!

In Lijiang, at the Shoudao Lijiang Folk Handicraft Art Museum, He Xiuchang demonstrates Dongba papermaking.

ANCIENT CHINESE ARTS ARE BOTH BEAUTIFUL AND MEANINGFUL

*By Jessie Yu
Roanoke-Lijiang chairwoman
jessieforever2017@gmail.com*

*and Mary Jo Fassie
President, RVSCI
mjfassie@gmail.com*

Lijiang is known for its diverse population. At about 35 percent of Lijiang's population, the Naxi people are the main ethnic group, alongside Han, Bai, Yi, and several other minorities. This diversity gives Lijiang a rich cultural life, expressed through traditional music, clothing, festivals and customs.

One ancient art, the making of Dongba paper, is practiced in Lijiang. The process dates back over 1,000 years to the Tang Dynasty. It is a tradition of the Naxi people.

In the heart of the old town of Lijiang, at the Shoudao Lijiang Folk Handicraft Art Museum's Dongba Paper Heritage Center, visitors can witness Dongba papermaking demonstrated daily by He Xiuchang, an inheritor of this cultural heritage.

Dongba paper is not only a functional medium for writing and painting but also a versatile material for creating photo albums, bookmarks, foldable fans, lampshades and more. These products are a common sight in Lijiang. Beyond its practical applications, Dongba paper is an artistic masterpiece, embodying the essence of Naxi culture.

Another traditional art in China is paper cutting, which dates to the Han Dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE), after the invention of paper by

Cai Lun. Initially reserved for religious rituals and royal court decorations, the art later became widespread among the common people. It has served as a medium for storytelling and symbolic expression.

This fall, Jessie participated in the Ginkgo Festival and Roanoke Catholic School's annual cultural fair. At both festivals, she did traditional paper cutting demonstrations with red paper, which symbolizes good luck, happiness and prosperity. Using red paper enhances the meaning of the image and represents wishes for a prosperous future. The color red also stands out more, making it visible on windows and at celebrations. The tradition reflects deep cultural roots, celebrating life, family and hope through art.



In November, Jessie Yu (right), with her daughter, Armani, demonstrated Chinese paper cutting at the Ginkgo Festival in downtown Roanoke.

The Smithsonian National Museum of Art has an interesting video about the process and significance of this art as well as the fear that this ancient tradition may someday be lost.



Chinese artist visiting Roanoke

Accompanying Jessie to the festival at Roanoke Catholic School was an artist from China, Liu Baoyun, who was visiting the Roanoke Valley. Her work drew a lot of attention from students as they watched her create her art before their eyes. Several of her scrolls were displayed as well as smaller works.

Liu Baoyun is an artist deeply rooted in the tradition of Chinese bird-and-flower painting while being profoundly influenced by the modern art academy system. Focusing on auspicious and splendid motifs such as peacocks and flowers, she skillfully integrates Western realistic concepts of form and structure into the brush-and-ink language of Chinese painting, developing a distinctive personal style that combines meticulous detail with expressive freedom, balancing rigor and spontaneity. Her works reflect keen observation of nature and precise depiction of physical forms, while preserving the unique charm of brushwork and poetic atmosphere inherent in Chinese painting, achieving an artistic appeal that resonates with both refined and popular tastes.

See more of Liu Baoyun's work:



Liu Baoyun, an artist from China, accompanied Jessie Yu and other RVSCI board members to Roanoke Catholic School's culture fair in November. The artist's work is rooted in the tradition of Chinese bird-and-flower painting.



Several of Liu Baoyun's painted scrolls were on display at Roanoke Catholic School during its culture fair.



ROANOKE'S HARRISON MUSEUM ENTERS A NEW ERA

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

In 2025, the Harrison Museum of African American Culture relocated to Melrose Plaza in Northwest Roanoke. Its new, 7,000 square-foot space includes a gallery space, a movie theater, a meeting room, a genealogy lab and a gift shop.

After 13 years at Center in the Square in downtown Roanoke, the community organization not only has a new home but a new purpose. Its leaders want it to continue to highlight the history of the Black community in Roanoke but shift the focus from the past to the future. Long-time Executive Director Charles Price has passed the torch to E.B. Smith, who wants to focus more on the arts and culture that African Americans have contributed to Roanoke. Smith told me that the new space was created to preserve the stories of those who came before us and the journeys that shaped Roanoke's African American history long before the headlines ever caught up. "We are building a cultural homeplace -- a keeper of memories, a bridge between generations," said Smith.

The new entrance to the Harrison Museum of African American Culture in Melrose Plaza.



E.B. Smith

Charles Price remains involved as President Emeritus, but Smith has taken over day-to-day operations. He has taught at Hollins University, where he met his wife. As an executive with the consulting agency HC Smith Ltd., he visited the museum 1½ years ago to work on strategic planning and found his calling was to take on this new role.

He emphasized that the focus of the museum should be to look into the future, not just at the past. “Culture is always evolving, it is a living thing,” he said, citing how traditional African music has contributed to the rhythms of modern American music. He wants to encourage young people to participate in the growth of that culture as well as to learn about past accomplishments.

A current exhibit, “Healing Hands Legacy,” features the roles of Black medical professionals in our area, such as Dr. John Claytor Sr., who founded Claytor Memorial Clinic, now Blue Ridge Behavioral Healthcare. These professionals served their community during and after segregation. Another exhibit, previously on display at the Taubman Museum of Art in downtown Roanoke, featured the folk art of David Ramey, who captured the life of the Gainsboro neighborhood and Henry Street area. Future programs will highlight African American musicians and filmmakers such as Oscar Micheaux, whose

films showcase the experience of Black Americans. A festival of those films is scheduled for the Grandin Theatre starting Jan. 29. African American educators such as Frederick Douglass and Lucy Addison are also going to get attention. Check out the museum’s website at harrisonmuseum.com for more information on upcoming programs. You can also find them on Facebook.

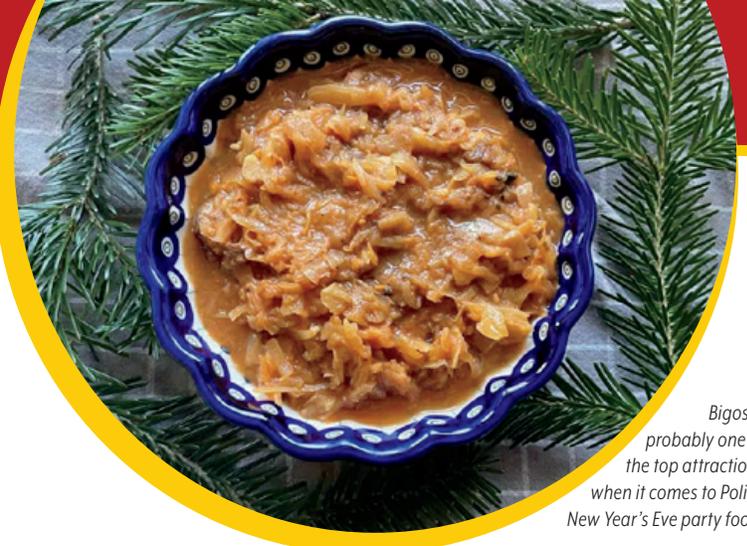
Culture is always evolving; it is a living thing.

—E.B. Smith, Executive Director

Celebrations of African American culture have recently been held with the support of Local Colors and CommUNITY ARTS Reach at Countryside Park and featured crafts, arts, music, and food. Our Kisumu committee has joined in as we reached out to the Kenyan community members who reside in the Roanoke Valley as a way to expand our base of support. The annual Henry Street Festival also provides a venue for the Roanoke Valley to learn about and participate in the African American experience. While we continue to work with our Kisumu counterparts on projects and activities, we also want to be part of our local area’s heritage.



A recent gathering at the new space to celebrate Kwanzaa.



Bigos is probably one of the top attractions when it comes to Polish New Year's Eve party food.

CELEBRATING THE NEW YEAR IN POLAND

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

Polish legend has it that Pope Sylvester I imprisoned a dragon that was supposed to escape on the first day of the New Year 1000 AD and terrorize the land, devour people and set fire to the heavens. On New Year's Day, when these events did not come to pass and the world did not end, the people rejoiced and celebrated their good fortune and escape from doom.

From that time on New Year's Eve is called St. Sylvester's eve. (Sylwester in Polish).

Every day on the Polish calendar is devoted to a saint. St. Sylvester is the patron saint of December 31, thus the name Sylwester for New Year's Eve.

New Year's Eve is a time for dancing, eating and partying with friends and family. Parties are generally held in private homes or in restaurants. In contemporary times, formal balls are held with the event lasting all night long and ending with

a sumptuous breakfast in the morning. Students often spend Sylwester in the mountains – skiing, hiking to mountain hostels and enjoying horse-drawn sleighs or kuligs.

A New Year's banquet will include champagne at midnight with other assorted alcohols. Foods include borscht, bigos – a hunter's stew made with sauerkraut and assorted meats – assorted kielbasas and cold cuts, cold salads, numerous pastries and delectable desserts.

It is customary to attend New Year's Day Mass and ask for blessings for the New Year.

New Year's Day is generally spent quietly – resting from the festivities of the night before and/or visitations to friends and relatives to extend New Year's greetings.

In this 2026 new year, three VTCSOM fourth-year students will travel to Wroclaw to spend February in Poland.



Pope Sylvester I

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Contact us at: roanokevalleysistercities@gmail.com



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A big thank you to our Patron and Benefactor donors and to the All-Cities members whose donations and dues we received from Aug. 1 through Dec. 31, 2025.

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The Honorable Joe Cobb
and Dr. James Matthews
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Music Club

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Patricia Kelly
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Jeff Vick

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Mark your calendars!

- Jan. 16-17:** K-Pop Glow Party, Science Museum of Western Va., 6 p.m.
- Feb. 3:** RVSCI board meeting, Center in the Square, 5 p.m.
- Feb. 6:** Opening reception for "Timelessness," paintings by Suzun Hughes, 6-9 p.m., Alexander/Heath Contemporary, downtown Roanoke. Closing reception, Feb. 27, 6-9 p.m.
- Feb. 21:** Lunar New Year, Taubman Museum of Art, 12-2 p.m.
- Feb. 6-20:** International Film Festival (with Roanoke College & Hollins University):
 - Feb. 6: "Young Törless," German, Roanoke College, 7 p.m.
 - Feb. 8: "English Vinglish," Hindi, Taubman, 2 p.m.
 - Feb. 11: "Linda Linda Linda," Japanese, Grandin Theatre, 7 p.m.
 - Feb. 12: "Bad Education," Spanish, Hollins University, 7 p.m.
 - Feb. 13: "The Earth Is Blue as an Orange," Russian/Ukrainian, Roanoke College, 7 p.m.
 - Feb. 15: "Zéro de Conduite" French, Taubman, 2 p.m.
 - Feb. 18: "Not One Less," Chinese, Hollins University, 7 p.m.
 - Feb. 20: "Cinema Paradiso," Italian, Roanoke College, 7 p.m.
- March 7:** Roanoke Arts Pop, Taubman Museum, 10-4 p.m.
- March 16:** RVSCI Young Artists Showcase deadline
- April 7:** RVSCI board meeting, CITS boardroom, 5 p.m.
- April 29:** Medical students' presentations of abroad rotations, VTCSOM
- May 9:** Daisy Art Parade, 12 p.m.
- May 16:** Local Colors, 10-4 p.m., Elmwood Park
- June 2:** RVSCI annual dinner, Roanoke College, 5:30 p.m.
- July 12:** Rke/St-Lô potluck picnic, Longwood Park, Salem, 5:30 p.m.

