ROANOKE VALLEY
FLORIANÓPOLIS • KISUMU • LIJIANG • OPOLE • PSKOV • SAINT-LÔ • WONJU
SISTER CITIES

AROUND OUR WORLD

ROANOKE VALLEY SISTER CITIES, INC.

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A demonstration of Chinese dance during the Lunar New Year celebration at the Taubman Museum of Art



By Mary Jo Fassié
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TOGETHER WE THRIVE:

Why partnerships have long been vital to us

As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of Sister Cities International (1956-2026) and the 250th celebration of our nation, we are reminded that working closely with other nations and groups is not something new for the United States. Our revolution of 1776 was made possible by help from several nations and groups such as

- France, which provided military support, supplies and naval assistance, culminating in a formal alliance in 1778;
- Spain, which offered financial aid and military resources and engaged British forces in the Gulf Coast region;
- The Netherlands, which supplied loans and recognized American independence, which aided in diplomatic efforts;
- Prussia, which contributed military training and expertise through figures like Baron von Steuben;
- Some Native American tribes, who shared valuable knowledge of the terrain, aiding Colonial strategies.
- An estimated 9,000 African Americans, most of whom were enslaved, who became Black Patriots.

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TOGETHER WE THRIVE:

Why partnerships have long been vital to us

(continued from page 1)

In 2026, RVSCI aimed to further diplomatic ties with our sister cities while imparting the mission of RVSCI to the Roanoke Valley with a variety of activities locally.

In January, a Hollins University intern, Madison Freideman, volunteered with RVSCI to do research, write an article for this newsletter and participate at the K-Pop events with Wonju sister city at the Science Museum of Western Virginia, which drew a sold-out crowd for two evenings. Saturday Korean classes at William Byrd High School resumed with Silvia Lee as the instructor. At the end of the month, I participated in a virtual roundtable with French Sister Cities International, gathering ideas from other cities.

During the month of February, RVSCI financially supported the International Film Festival with Roanoke College and Hollins University. On the 21st, our Lijiang and Wonju sister cities participated in the Lunar New Year celebration at the Taubman Museum of Art with information about our cities, the free Korean classes at William Byrd, and demonstrating Chinese dance and calligraphy. On the 26th, the Roanoke-Kisumu committee donated a ceremonial stool from Kisumu to the Harrison Museum of African American Culture.

In March, Linda Harrison and I met with the Roanoke mayor's assistant to discuss visits by foreign sister city delegations to celebrate significant anniversaries. RVSCI also celebrated the Roanoke Arts Pop weekend at the Taubman by sharing sister city information and a red



paper cutting demonstration by the Lijiang committee. French artist Cornelia Marin graced us again with a visit and an exhibit at the Grandin Theatre as well as workshops at the Taubman. Cornelia's sponsor is RVSCI member Brenda Barksdale. The Roanoke Young Artists Showcase received a lot of entries in March with the theme of "Voices of Today, Visions of Tomorrow." The competition was judged by staff at the Taubman.

In April, our board members attended the presentations of the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine students, several of whom did medical rotations in Wonju, South Korea, and Wroclaw, Poland, experiencing health care in our sister cities and daily life in a different culture.

May was busy with several activities. RVSCI walked in the Daisy Art Parade, led by board member Ramona Kirsch and students from Hollins University. Ramona helped to create yellow ginkgo leaves on branches that each participant carried. Board member John Makay and Jonathan Greene ventured again to Florianópolis to help solidify our sister city relationship and encourage local officials to accept the city of Roanoke's invitation later this year to celebrate the 30th twinning anniversary of our cities in Roanoke. Local Colors on May 16 brought together many RVSCI countries, including Brazil, France, Poland, and South Korea to join in the Parade of Nations and to share information about our countries at three RVSCI booths.

In June, we finished our fiscal year with a wonderful gathering at Roanoke College to partake in an international food buffet, hear cellist Susanna Shedd, Miss Roanoke Valley (and 1st runner up at Miss VA), watch a PowerPoint overview of the year and learn more about Vinton World Trekkers and board member Cherry Bell Damasco Farrington's love of and the benefits of travel as well as upcoming travel adventures open to all members of Roanoke Valley Sister Cities.

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 our sister cities on four continents.



Roanoke-Kisumu committee donated a ceremonial stool from Kisumu to Roanoke's Harrison Museum of African American Culture.



RVSCI celebrated the Roanoke Arts Pop weekend at the Taubman Museum of Art.



In May, RVSCI walked in the Daisy Art Parade, led by board member Ramona Kirsch and students from Hollins University.

SisterCities INTERNATIONAL
Connect globally. Thrive locally.

ROANOKE VALLEY SISTER CITIES

2026 Young Artists SHOWCASE WINNERS

1ST PLACE:



"Pink is a Protest," by Jaliannu Chin



"Potential," by Meisha Robinson

2ND PLACE:



"Better Together," by Ellison Fulcher



"Moments of History," by Audrianna Romano

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 **"Voices of Today, Visions of Tomorrow."** Judging was provided by the staff of the Taubman Museum of Art.

The 2026 winners are:

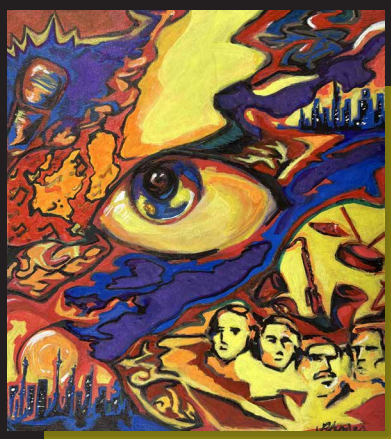
1st place (tie) $300 prize each: Jaliannu Chin ("Pink is a Protest") Roanoke Catholic School, and Meisha Robinson ("Potential") William Byrd High School & Burton Center for Arts and Technology

2nd place (tie) $200 prize each: Ellison Fulcher ("Better Together") Burton Center for Arts and Technology, and Audrianna Romano ("Moments of History") Hidden Valley High School

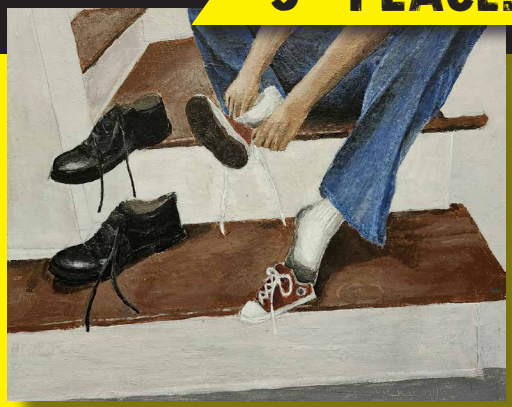
3rd place (tie) $100 prize each: Rhodes Aaron ("Splash of Vision") Roanoke Catholic School, and Reese Kuehl ("Big Shoes") Patrick Henry High School.

The top five pieces in points have been submitted to Sister Cities International Young Artists Showcase for further judging.

3RD PLACE:



"Splash of Vision," by Rhodes Aaron



"Big Shoes," by Reese Kuehl

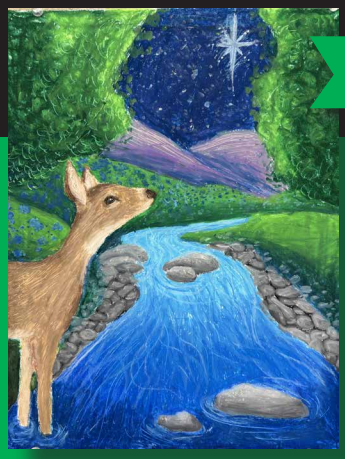
Honorable mentions ($25 each) went to:
Ashlyn Shaban and Edy Gann from Burton Center for Arts and Technology, Madison Grinnell from Patrick Henry High School and Neela Megow of Lord Botetourt High School

Thank you to all the art teachers: Adam Johnson at Roanoke Catholic, Natalie Strum at Burton Center, Jennifer Fowler & Daniel Kuehl at Patrick Henry, Gabrielle Frohock at Hidden Valley, Katherine Devine (Roanoke artist and instructor), Meagan Stump at Lord Botetourt.

First-place winner Jaliannu Chin was honored by her art instructor Adam Johnson at the Roanoke Valley Sister Cities Annual Meeting held at Roanoke College on June 2.

–Mary Jo Fassié

HONORABLE MENTION:



"Light the Way," by Madison Grinnell



"A Spectrum of Support," by Neela Megow



"Our Lights Combined," by Ashlyn Shaban



"Seeds of Connection," by Edy Gann

YAS WINNER PLACES IN SISTER CITIES INTERNATIONAL CATEGORY

Roanoke Valley Sister Cities is pleased to announce that one of our Young Artist Showcase first-place winners, **Meisha Robinson,** has placed 2nd at Sister Cities International in the digital art category. Meisha is a recent graduate of William Byrd High School and the Burton Center for Arts & Technology. She will receive a $500 prize from Sister Cities International. Meisha plans to attend the Savannah College of Art & Design. We wish her all our best for a wonderful career as an artist.

–Mary Jo Fassié



Meisha Robinson

Meet our JANUARY 2026 INTERN



MADISON FREIDEMAN

Hollins University student Madison Freideman was RVSCI's intern for the month of January. Madison is a Marketing major, then in her sophomore year at Hollins. During her internship, she worked on researching fundraising ideas, ways to increase membership, and possible sponsorships. She reached out to a muralist and wrote an article about her artwork in downtown Roanoke. She also spent time with the Wonju chairwoman at the science museum, sharing information about Wonju and our organization. In the fall, she plans to study in London and travel around Europe. She is a student-athlete representative for the Hollins track and cross-country team and a student development ambassador, spreading student philanthropy awareness. This internship was her first time working with Roanoke Valley Sister Cities.

— Mary Jo Fassié



"Bloom Bright" can be found at the side entrance to the Hampton Inn & Suites on Church Ave. in downtown Roanoke.

Fancy flora are blo

By Madison Freideman

In September 2025, Chinese-American artist Christina Wing Chow colored Pearl Fu Plaza in downtown Roanoke with her mural, "Bloom Bright."

Wingchow (her artist's name) has always been in love with art, finding herself drawing or doodling whenever she could. After high school she continued her artistic journey at Virginia Commonwealth University, pursuing a degree in painting and printmaking. The Virginia Beach-based artist was introduced to the Star City by the Roanoke muralist Jon Murrill.

The mural is funded through an Art in Place partnership, with support from Downtown Roanoke Inc., Hampton Inn & Suites Downtown-Roanoke, the Roanoke Arts Commission, and Debra B. Kaplan. It is located at 27 Church Avenue Southeast, at the side entrance to the Hampton Inn & Suites.

"Bloom Bright" is dedicated to the late Karen Shreeman, a Philadelphia native who became a longtime Roanoke resident. She died in late 2024 at 82. "Karen was a lifelong lover of art and color," said Kaplan. "She creatively inspired many to share that love of art, and she mentored her talents within so many individuals within the Roanoke Valley ... and beyond."

The mural sits across the street from the boutique La De Da, which was a store Shreeman loved to visit. Roanoke Arts & Culture Coordinator Doug Jackson said the mural has the "feeling like something you could buy at La De Da."



oming in Pearl Fu Plaza



Christina Wing Chow

Wingchow has always been influenced by nature in her work, and this mural was shaped by what she calls “fancy flora,” the idea that flowers are already very wild and could easily become abstracted. She also believed that the space “felt like the right place for a garden bed.” The mural took about a week to produce using mostly acrylic spray paint and wall paint.

“I had a great time in Roanoke," said Wingchow. "The project had the most positive feedback during the course of the week painting.” She said she was very happy to have painted in Roanoke and would love to come back.

“Murals have the power to add color and light and artistic calm to our community,” said Kaplan. “These projects matter."

For more information about the artist, see https://www.wingchowart.com/about

–Madison Freideman was RVSCI’s intern for the month of January.

Mark your calendars!

July 28:	RVSCI fundraiser planning meeting, 10 a.m., Shenandoah Club
Aug. 25:	RVSCI fundraiser planning meeting, 5 p.m., CITS boardroom
Sept. 3:	RVSCI board meeting, 5 p.m., CITS boardroom
Sept. 29:	RVSCI fundraiser planning meeting – 5 p.m., CITS boardroom
Oct. 3:	Alphabet Day, noon-2 p.m., Taubman Museum of Art
Oct. 27:	RVSCI fundraiser planning meeting, 5 p.m., CITS boardroom
Nov. 7:	Gingko Festival, 11 a.m.-3 p.m., Century Plaza
Nov. 17:	RVSCI fundraiser planning meeting, 4 p.m. Followed by RVSCI board meeting, CITS boardroom, 5 p.m.
Dec. 1:	RVSCI holiday fundraiser dinner, 6 p.m., Shenandoah Club

HAPPY 250TH BIRTHDAY, AMERICA

By Kristina Bulas-Slowikowski, M.D.
Roanoke-Opole chairwoman
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Poland has been with you from the beginning. Poland's contributions to America's birth must be recognized and their importance remembered.

Poles were among the first settlers in Jamestown, brought over to the New World in 1608 as much-needed skilled laborers. They established a glassmaking industry and staged the first labor strike in the Colonies to secure their right to vote.

The American struggle for freedom from the British Crown appealed to the Polish spirit, which preached freedom, justice and civil liberty. This moment drew military tacticians **Thaddeus Kościuszko** and **Casimir Pulaski** to fight with the American revolutionaries during our war for independence.

Benjamin Franklin personally recommended Pulaski to George Washington, noting that he was known in Europe for defending the liberties of Poland against the invading powers of Russia, Austria and Prussia. Pulaski arrived in Marblehead, Mass., in 1777 and organized a cavalry unit in the Continental Army (the "Pulaski Legion"). He is credited with saving Washington's life at the Battle of Brandywine where he prevented the British from encircling Washington's forces, thus allowing him to escape. Pulaski succumbed to battle wounds received during the siege of Savannah in October 1779. Pulaski's invaluable contribution to American freedom and America's birth, along with his role in shaping the young nation's military, earned him the title "Father of the American Cavalry."

Pulaski's legacy speaks for itself. Seven counties, several hundred streets and roads, and around 20 schools across America are named after Pulaski. According to a recent National Monument Audit, more monuments are dedicated





The Roanoke Valley's Polish-American community turned out for the 2026 Local Colors festival.

to his memory than to some of the nation's most important founding fathers.

In 1929, Congress passed a resolution designating Oct. 11 — the day of his death — General Pulaski Memorial Day in the U.S. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan recognized October as national Polish American Heritage Month.

In 2009 President Barack Obama made Pulaski an honorary citizen of the United States of America— one of only eight distinguished foreigners to be given the honor.

Thaddeus Kościuszko was a highly skilled engineer who helped design the fortifications at West Point and was instrumental in military victories at the Battle of Saratoga.

In 1783, in recognition of his services, the Continental Congress promoted him to brigadier general.

He was a great friend of Thomas Jefferson. Kosciuszko's commitment to universal freedom extended beyond national boundaries. He called for the emancipation and education of enslaved persons. In his will, he stated that his entire American estate was to be sold to buy the freedom of enslaved persons, which specifically included Thomas Jefferson's enslaved workers. The mandate was never carried out.

He has been proclaimed a national hero of Poland, the United States of America, Belarus and Lithuania.

Virginia honors our Polish heroes who fought in the American Revolutionary War. **General Casimir Pulaski Day** is celebrated on **Oct. 11** annually since 2018 by Virginia House Resolution 42.

General Thaddeus Kosciuszko Day is celebrated on **Oct. 15** annually since 2018 by Virginia House Resolution 64.

Since the birth of our nation, generations of Polish immigrants have filled assembly lines and worked in steel mills and coal mines playing a role in building America's industrial strength and in the labor movement. The largest concentrations of persons of Polish heritage are found in Chicago, Detroit, Wisconsin, New York state and New Jersey. As of 2025 approximately 8.6 million individuals of Polish heritage live in the United States. Contributions by Polish Americans are visible in all occupational sectors including the arts, film, literature, science, technology and medicine.

Polish-American sister cities foster cultural, educational and economic exchanges between like communities in the U.S. and Poland. There are approximately 60 ongoing city partnerships in varying active status between the U.S. and Poland.

In 2024 Roanoke County and Roanoke Valley Sister Cities celebrated their 30th anniversary of partnership with Opole, Poland. Our partnership has focused primarily on music and the arts. Our Polish-American community is proud of their roots and eagerly participates at the annual Local Colors festival.

This past February, three fourth-year medical students from VTCSoM spent a monthlong rotation at the Medical University of Wroclaw. All stated that they would eagerly return for a repeat experience.

Thank you, America, for being a guiding light, a welcoming presence and offering opportunities for those who wish and work for freedom, justice and equality.

Happy 250th birthday from Poland and the Polish-American community.



In February, three fourth-year students from the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine participated in rotations at the Medical University of Wroclaw, Poland. In this photo, back in Roanoke, the students presented a report on their experiences.

TRANSATLANTIC VISITS ARE THRIVING, WITH MORE ON THE WAY

By Ann Hackworth
Roanoke/St-Lô co-chairwoman
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In February, we welcomed artist Cornelia Marin, formerly of St-Lô, back to Roanoke. Cornelia has been here several times since the early 2000s and typically combines work with community outreach. This visit was no exception. On March 5, she held an opening of her colorful textile-art exhibit, "French Lady Dresses," along with a reception, at the Grandin Theatre. Roanoker Brenda Barksdale, Cornelia's longtime host and friend, generously managed the details of the reception and invitations. The event drew around 50 people. During the reception, Cornelia reconnected with Taubman Museum of Art Executive Director Cindy Petersen. Through interpreter Cammie Williams, Cornelia described to Cindy her ideas for workshops she'd hoped to offer museum members and the public at the Taubman. The ideas were well received. In April, Cornelia taught "Ink and Collage," and in May she taught "Embroidered Collage." Roanoke/St-Lô Sister Cities provided $300 for class supplies.



At her exhibit opening and reception, artist Cornelia Marin (right) reconnected with Taubman Museum of Art Executive Director Cindy Petersen (seated). Cindy's daughter, Sabrina Borneff, is at left.

In May, Bob Slaughter Jr., a son of our committee's founder, visited Vire, a Norman town his father helped liberate in August 1944. (The late Bob Slaughter Sr. also was the founding president of the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford.) Accompanied by a delegation of Vire citizens, three former mayors and the current mayor, Bob Jr. and his wife, Judy, visited the spot where his father was seriously wounded on Aug. 8, 1944. The group also paid their respects at the monument to the 1st Battalion of the 116th Infantry Regiment and the 29th Infantry Division "Blue and Gray." The delegation also visited Bob Slaughter Square, which was inaugurated in 2024 to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the town's liberation. At a reception, Mayor Pascal Martin presented Bob Jr. with the City Medal declaring that his father's name lives on in Vire. "We had a terrific time," reported Bob Jr. "We were surprised and honored by the mayor's reception and appreciated it very much."

The 35th annual Local Colors festival was held May 16 in Elmwood Park. Staffing the Roanoke/St-Lô booth



In Vire, a town about 20 miles south of St-Lô, Bob Slaughter Jr. and his wife, Judy, visited Bob Slaughter Square, which was inaugurated in 2024. From left: Vire former Mayor Jean-Yves Cousin, Vire citizens Jacqueline and Claude Poupion, Bob Slaughter Jr. and Judy Slaughter.

were Hugh and Peggy Wells, Alice Davis and Christine Jordan, Chris Bohannon, Tim Henshaw and Bill Modica. Our thanks to Teresa Wimmer, Alex Ferrate, Ted and Rachel Barham, and Romain Picard for marching in the Parade of Nations.

We are pleased to announce that Hollins Professor Jeanne Jégousso joined our committee's executive committee this spring. Jeanne proposed and designed the Hollins/St-Lô summer exchange, now in its third year, and is responsible for identifying promising students for the program. Read about one of this summer's interns, Dquori Horsley, and her teaching experience on Page 12. The second half of the exchange involves two students from the Institut St-Lô attending Hollins University's Hollinsummer, a pre-college on-campus experience for teens. In their second week, the girls stay with a host family. This summer, Hilda and Claire will be hosted by the Livingston family of Roanoke.

Members Penny and Andy Muelenaer visited Normandy in June. The trip was made in memory of the wartime service and sacrifice of William George Benavitz Jr., Penny's father, in Normandy. He jumped into France near Sainte-Mère-Église as a Pathfinder with the 82nd Airborne 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment on June 5, 1944. His job was

(continued on page 12)





Top: *Representing France in Local Colors' Parade of Nations were members and friends of our committee, (from left) Teresa Wimmer, Alex Ferrate, Ted and Rachel Barham, and Romain Picard.*

Bottom: *In St-Lô for the commemoration of D-Day (June 6), members Penny and Andy Muelenaer were asked to represent the United States in the wreath-laying ceremonies.*

GRATEFUL AND INSPIRED BY SUMMER INTERNSHIP



Dquori Horsley snaps a selfie in the common area in the boarding school dormitory at the Institut St-Lô, where she interned over the summer.

Spending time in Normandy was an experience I am really grateful to have had. Teaching the [Institut St-Lô] students was so much fun. They were welcoming, curious, and always kept us on our toes, and they even made me see teaching in a whole new way. The staff were incredibly kind and supportive throughout the program, and my hosts, the Duchemin family, welcomed me into their home with such warmth that I felt like part of the family.

When we weren't in the classroom, I loved getting to experience everything Normandy had to offer. Walking through the Dior Gardens, visiting the beautiful beaches, and seeing Mont-Saint-Michel in person were all incredible experiences. I came home with so many great memories, and I'm thankful to everyone who helped make the trip so special.

—Dquori Horsley, Hollins class of 2028

TRANSATLANTIC VISITS ARE THRIVING, WITH MORE ON THE WAY

(continued from page 11)

to protect the Allied troops who were to land the next day, D-Day.In St-Lô, the Muelenaers were asked to participate in the commemorative wreath-laying ceremonies to honor wartime Resistance members who were executed by the Nazis as well as the citizens of St-Lô who were killed in the Allied bombing. During the rest of their visit, Andy and Penny reconnected with two former interns whom they had hosted over the years in Roanoke.

Plans are still in the works for a trip to St-Lô, Paris and Provence from May 31-June 15, 2027. For more information, please contact the group leader, Marsha Taylor, at taylor.bonvoyageroanoke@gmail com, (804) 651-0862.

Despite rainy skies, 21 hardy souls turned out for the annual Bastille Day picnic at Longwood Park in Salem. New Roanoke/St-Lô executive committee member Jeanne Jegousso talked to the group about the 3-year-old Hollins/St-Lô exchange only a few minutes before dashing to the airport to pick up the two students from the Institut St-Lô. Hollins rising junior Dquori Horsley talked about her 3-week teaching internship at the Institut in May and June. And Andy and Penny Muelenaer spoke about the highlights, many of them emotional, of their 10-day stay in Normandy in June.



We were 21 in attendance at this year's rainy – but festive – Bastille Day picnic.

ARTISTS DELIGHT ROANOKERS WITH DEMONSTRATIONS OF TRADITIONAL WORKS

By Jessie Yu
Roanoke-Lijiang chairwoman
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Artist Baoyun Liu demonstrates traditional Chinese painting during the Lunar New Year celebration at the Taubman Museum of Art.

Half a year has passed in the blink of an eye. From the cold days of winter, we have stepped into the warmth of summer. Yet no matter how the seasons change, the connection between our Sister Cities never fades.

During our Lunar New Year celebration at the Taubman Museum of Art in February, artist Liu Baoyun delighted visitors with traditional Chinese painting. Her artwork came to life with graceful peacocks, clusters of luscious grapes, and cheerful cardinals that seemed ready to sing. If you were interested, she would even paint your favorite flower on a bookmark for you to take home as a special gift.

Through her mastery of traditional Chinese painting, Liu Baoyun won the admiration of friends from all around. Chinese painting is created with a brush and ink on xuan paper. Rather than focusing only on realistic detail, it emphasizes spirit, emotion and imagination, inviting viewers to complete the picture in their own minds. The brush is held upright while painting, making the technique quite different from Western watercolor painting.

Her husband, Xiaoming Zhang, demonstrated another treasured Chinese art form — calligraphy. He wrote traditional Lunar New Year couplets by hand for visitors. The upper line read, "A fine horse gallops on the spring breeze," and the lower line read, "New plum blossoms usher in a season of prosperity." Because this is the Year of the Horse in the Chinese zodiac, the horse represents strength and progress, while blooming plum blossoms symbolize the arrival of good fortune.

At the Arts Pop event in March, children experienced the joy of Chinese paper cutting. Their colorful creations were filled with laughter and creativity. In Chinese tradition, if you place your paper-cut designs on a window, the sunlight shining through them is believed to bring good luck and help your wishes come true.



Artists Xiaoming Zhang (left) and Jimmy Zhang demonstrate Chinese calligraphy during the Lunar New Year festival.



Roanoke Valley children try their hand at Chinese paper cutting at the Arts Pop event in March.

KEEPING KOREAN CULTURE POSITIVELY GROWING IN THE VALLEY

By Cherry Bell Damasco-Farrington
Roanoke-Wonju chairperson
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Through educational programs, cultural events, artistic collaborations and community festivals, the Wonju committee continues to fulfill its mission of building lasting relationships between Roanoke and our South Korean sister city.

The committee kicked off the year by participating in the Science Museum of Western Virginia's K-pop Glow Party in January. Committee members hosted an information table where attendees learned about the Roanoke-Wonju Sister City partnership, upcoming cultural programs, and opportunities to get involved with RVSCI. Before the festivities began, the committee was invited to address the audience, sharing the mission of the Wonju committee. The event provided an excellent opportunity to connect with K-pop enthusiasts and community members while introducing new audiences to Korean culture and the work of RVSCI.



RVSCI members and friends of the Wonju committee participated in the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Kim Kyu-sik Korean Learning Center at Roanoke College.

The following month Wonju committee members joined in a joyful celebration of the Lunar New Year at the Taubman Museum of Art. Families from across the region gathered to learn about traditions and customs through hands-on cultural activities. Visitors enjoyed making traditional crafts, learning about the significance of the Lunar New Year, and experiencing the warmth and hospitality that define not just the Korean but all Asian cultures.

Education remained a cornerstone of the Wonju committee's mission throughout the spring. Free Korean language classes continued to welcome both new and returning students who were eager to learn the language and gain a deeper appreciation for Korean culture. Participants represented a wide range of ages and backgrounds, creating a learning environment where friendships flourished alongside language skills.



The ceremony celebrated the establishment of a dedicated space for Korean language and cultural studies on the Roanoke College campus.

Looking ahead, the Wonju committee is excited to welcome both new and returning students to its Fall 2026 Korean Language and Culture Classes, which I host at William Byrd High School in partnership with the school's International Club. The first class will be held on **Saturday, Sept. 12, at 11 a.m.** in the library and is open to participants of all levels. This session will assess each participant's proficiency to determine the most appropriate class placement. Those interested in the introductory course may join through **Saturday, Sept. 19**, when the Introduction to Korean class will meet at **11 a.m.**, followed by the Beginner Korean class at **12:30 p.m.** Classes are free and open to the community.

One of the committee's projects took place during preparations for the Daisy Art Parade in May. Under the leadership of committee member Ramona Kirsch, volunteers designed and constructed beautiful ginkgo tree branches inspired by the iconic trees that line the streets of Wonju. Hollins University students generously volunteered their time and artistic talents to help create the installation. The finished artwork celebrated the natural beauty of Wonju while showcasing the creativity and dedication of volunteers who brought the vision to life.

One of the highlights of the year was my invitation to speak at the inaugural Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine Global Health Colloquium. I shared the history and impact of the Roanoke-Wonju Sister City partnership, with special emphasis on the longstanding collaboration that provides medical students with the opportunity to complete month-long clinical rotations at hospitals in both cities. The program offers students invaluable international healthcare experience while strengthening professional relationships between medical institutions and advancing the global mission of both communities.

The committee was also honored to participate in the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Kim Kyu-sik Korean Learning Center at Roanoke College. Organized by committee member Stella Xu, the event celebrated the establishment of a dedicated space for Korean language and cultural studies on campus. Committee members joined Roanoke College faculty, students, and community leaders in recognizing this milestone, which reflects the growing interest in Korean language and culture throughout the Roanoke Valley.

The committee's spring activities culminated with participation in Roanoke's annual Local Colors festival, one of the region's premier celebrations of international cultures. The Wonju committee proudly represented South Korea by sharing its rich traditions, culture, and heritage with festival attendees. I also had the honor of serving as co-host of the Procession of Nations, helping lead the colorful parade that symbolizes the diversity and unity of the Roanoke Valley.

The Wonju committee extends its sincere appreciation to the many volunteers, partners, instructors, students, community organizations, and supporters whose enthusiasm and dedication made each of these programs possible. Together, they continue to build bridges of friendship, promote cultural understanding, and celebrate the unique relationship between Roanoke and Wonju.

The committee looks forward to an exciting second half of 2026.



RVSCI MEMBERS LAY GROUNDWORK FOR 30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

By Jonathan Green
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and John Makay
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Jonathan and John hiking with Luís Eduardo Araújo de Souza, Lucas do Antônio Silva dos Santos, and Larissa dos Santos.

For 30 years, Roanoke and Florianópolis have shared a bond that spans continents and cultures. This spring, that friendship deepened as Sister Cities members John Makay and Jonathan Green spent 15 days exploring Florianópolis, Brazil — known locally as **Ilha da Magia,** or Magic Island — beginning on May 7. Beyond its famous beaches, they discovered ancient rock carvings, waterfalls, conservation science, and a historic bridge reopening, while laying the groundwork for an October 2026 delegation marking the partnership's 30th anniversary.

One of the first destinations was **Praia Mole**, one of Florianópolis' best-known beaches. The beach is famous for its soft sand — its name means "Soft Beach" — and for the powerful Atlantic waves that have made it one of southern Brazil's premier surfing destinations.

John and Jonathan walked the length of the beach, watching surfers ride the rolling waves that regularly attract both local and international competitors. At one end of the beach they climbed onto the large granite rock formations, where they were rewarded with sweeping views of the coastline, the Atlantic Ocean, and the surrounding cliffs.

On another excursion, Jonathan and John were accompanied by Luis Eduardo, his girlfriend, and another friend; they hiked to the **Piscinas Naturais do Gravatá** (Gravatá Natural Pools). The trail follows one of the island's scenic coastal ridges before reaching naturally formed ocean pools carved into the granite shoreline. Along the way, they visited a traditional fishing hut, a reminder that artisanal fishing remains an important part of life on the island.

They also climbed among the massive coastal boulders and observed one of the area's most fascinating archaeological features — the **polidores**, shallow grooves worn into the rock by Indigenous people centuries ago. Archaeologists believe these grooves were created by repeatedly sharpening and polishing stone axes, spear points and other tools. These marks provide tangible evidence of the Indigenous peoples who occupied Santa Catarina's coast long before European settlement.

The group also hiked to the **CASAN Reservoir and spillway**, a location where locals often cool off by swimming below the flowing water. Although no swimmers were present during their visit, the setting illustrated how natural and engineered water systems have become part of everyday recreation on the island. One unexpected highlight came at the nearby pump house, where John faced a personal challenge after encountering several **golden silk orb-weaver spiders**. These impressive spiders construct some of the strongest natural silk found in the animal kingdom. Their webs can span several feet across and are exceptionally durable. While the spiders primarily feed on insects, researchers have documented rare instances in which birds become entangled in larger webs. It took John about 10 minutes to get the goo out of his hair and clothes, and he was grateful to Jonathan for seeing the spider before he encountered it, even though the species isn't harmful to humans.

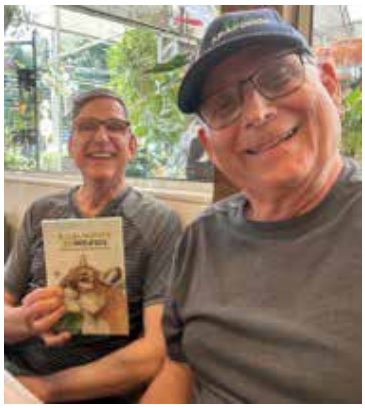
John and Jonathan's exploration continued at **Parque Municipal Córrego Grande,** a 53-acre urban nature preserve that balances recreation with environmental education.

One of the most memorable experiences came through conversations with scientists from the **Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC)**. The researchers explained their experiments using algae to help improve water quality by naturally filtering pollutants from the park's lake.

An important part of the visit extended beyond exploring Florianópolis' natural and cultural attractions. Christian Döbereiner also met us for lunch and gifted us his new book for the student curriculum, titled **"A vida secreta da Natureza."** After a long international career in the energy and environmental sectors, he dedicated himself to protecting the Atlantic Forest through conservation, environmental education, and sustainable ecotourism. He has been working with Roanoke Valley Sister Cities to provide tours and information to all Roanoke visitors as well as work with students at UDESC, the local university in Florianópolis, to help them come to the United States for exchanges.

On May 13, Christian accompanied us to the reopening of the iconic 100-year-old Hercílio Luz Bridge to pedestrians and community events, symbolizing both the city's rich history and its vibrant future. Thousands of residents and visitors gathered to cross the restored bridge, taking part in festivities that honored one of Santa Catarina's most treasured landmarks. The celebration reached its peak with a large outdoor rock concert, where Grammy Award-winning British soul and R&B singer Joss Stone performed before an enthusiastic crowd.

At the end of the trip, John Makay met with **Monica Duarte,** President of the **Fundação Cultural de Florianópolis Franklin Cascaes (Franklin Cascaes Cultural Foundation),** the municipal organization responsible for preserving and promoting the city's arts, history, and cultural heritage



John Makay (left) receives Christian Döbereiner's latest book for his environmental studies curriculum.

During the meeting with Monica Duarte, discussions focused on plans for a delegation from Florianópolis to visit Roanoke. The delegation would include political leaders and members of Florianópolis' cultural community. The visit is being planned for **October 2026** to commemorate the **30th anniversary** of the Sister Cities partnership between Roanoke and Florianópolis.

The meeting underscored the enduring friendship between the two communities and the shared commitment to strengthening international ties through cultural exchange, civic engagement, and the celebration of a partnership that has connected the two cities for three decades.

Together, these experiences demonstrated that the "Magic Island" offers far more than beautiful scenery — it is also a place where nature, science, history, and culture intersect in remarkable ways.







Top Left: *A Golden Orb spider can spin a web thick enough to entangle birds.*
Top Right: *An example of the polidores, shallow grooves worn into the rock by indigenous inhabitants centuries ago.*
Bottom: *The 100-year-old Hercílio Luz Bridge reopening and concert were organized by Cultural de Florianópolis Franklin Cascaes.*

STAY TUNED FOR NEWS ABOUT

a trip to Maasai Mara GAME PRESERVE

By Ruphina Okeyo
Roanoke-Kisumu member
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Roanoke-Kisumu Sister Cities, the Roanoke Valley's second such collaboration, was established in 1976 and has always had development projects as one of its major objectives.

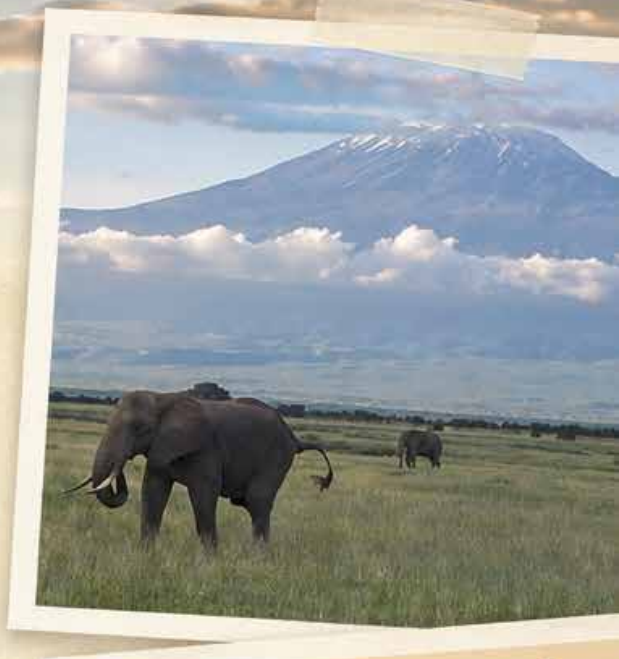
On my recent visit to Kisumu in April, I was able to establish that the water project completed two years prior is working and continues to provide clean water for two area schools: a primary and a secondary school. In addition, the project sells clean water to the surrounding community at a subsidized rate.

Other income-generating projects previously discussed with Kisumu development personnel include potential fish farming in Lake Victoria. This would increase income and help with tuition for the schoolchildren. It is my hope that this project comes to fruition in the near future.

Kisumu Sister Cities is planning a trip to the Maasai Mara game preserve! This is dual-purpose: a visit to see our projects in Kenya and an opportunity to see the wildlife as they roam the plains, their natural habitat.



Come visit Kenya!







Maasai Mara game preserve is about 98 miles from Kisumu.

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