



2023 - 2024 Annual Report to City Council

Programs and Activities of the Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission

Submitted June 2024



OUR SISTER CITIES

ACTIVE

Poggio a Caiano, Italy: Charlottesville's first Sister City, 1976

Besançon, France: Sister city, 2006

Winneba, Ghana: Sister city, 2010

EXPLORING

Huehuetenango, Guatemala: Friendship city since 2021

EMERITUS

Pleven, Bulgaria: Sister city, 2004, *inactive*



SISTER CITIES COMMISSION MEMBERS (2023/2024)

Alicen Brown (*Vice Chair*)

Claire Denton-Spalding

Casey Eriksen

Nana Ghartey (*Winneba*)

Kimberly Hayes

Edward Herring (*Chair*)

Stella Mattioli (*Poggio a Caiano*)

Salvatore Moschella

Sylvia New Strawn

Elizabeth Smiley (*Besançon*)

Cherry Stewart

Murray Susen (*Youth rep*)

Staff liaison: Maxicelia Robinson



FOREWORD

The City of Charlottesville is an active member of Sister Cities International (SCI), a nonprofit citizen diplomacy network that creates and strengthens partnerships between U.S. and international communities. This network strives to build global cooperation at the municipal level, promote cultural understanding and stimulate economic development.

Appointed by Council, the CSCC as a volunteer-based organization promotes understanding and fosters relationships between citizens and organizations in the Charlottesville area and our sister cities through cultural, economic, educational, and humanitarian activities.

We, as members of the Sister Cities Commission, hold as our mission, the responsibility to bring the benefits of SCI to the citizens of Charlottesville.



YEAR IN REVIEW

The City of Charlottesville welcomed three sister city delegations during this year. The year started with the arrival of the mayor and a contingent from Winneba, Ghana, hosted by the Charlottesville-Winneba Foundation, in summer 2023. This Ghana visit was followed by a mayoral delegation from Huehuetenango, Guatemala, in November 2023.

More recently, in April 2024, we hosted a delegation from our sister city of Besançon, France, and celebrated the 20 years of the signing of the initial Friendship agreement. In addition to the official delegations, the Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission joined Charlottesville High School in welcoming 28 high school students from Besançon to a week at Charlottesville High School in February 2024.



Several public events were planned during each of the visits to provide opportunities for the citizens of Charlottesville to participate.

Together with the events welcoming the delegation from Besançon in April 2024, we informally established our first Sister Cities Week in Charlottesville with presentations and performances by three of our 2023 grant winners.



POGGIO A CAIANO, ITALY

There were no major activities with Poggio during 2023/2024. More recently, the city has reached out to Stella Mattioli, Poggio city representative, to explore sending a new delegation to Charlottesville.

The last Poggio visit was in 2018 during the Charlottesville Film Festival. If that were to happen, it would more than likely occur in the 2025/2026 fiscal year. Stella will travel to Poggio this summer and engage in more discussions and planning regarding an eventful visit.

Poggio a Caiano does not have a local high school; however, Charlottesville City Schools may be able to explore exchanges between middle school aged children.



BESANÇON, FRANCE

With reciprocal biennial student exchanges between Charlottesville High School and the Lycée Pasteur in Besançon, this is our most active relationship focused on the youth of Charlottesville as well as adult members of the community. Charlottesville City Schools, with the support of the Sister Cities Commission, is actively looking at knowledge transfer exchanges and programs which will extend the cross border/ cross cultural learning through elementary and middle school levels.

Two of the five funded CSCC Grant projects in 2023-24 focused on the Charlottesville-Besançon relationship. “Sister Revolutions” grantee Benjamin Bernard traveled to Besançon in the summer of 2023 to conduct interviews and gather audio footage for his podcast series, which he co-produced over the subsequent two academic semesters and officially launched this Spring.



“Les Amities Musicales” grantee Daniel Sender previewed his Besançon-inspired violin and piano concert in Charlottesville in April and traveled to Besançon the following month to complete his musician exchange by offering a community concert and a youth master class there.

Several noteworthy events will happen during the coming year concerning Besançon. On September 8th, the city of Besançon will commemorate the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the City of Besançon by the US Third Infantry Battalion. Further ahead, we are hoping to send an official delegation to Besançon in the fall of 2026 to celebrate the 20th anniversary of our sister city proclamation.



WINNEBA, GHANA

Winneba city representative, Nana Gharthey, will complete his final term in that capacity and will be replaced by Kimberly Hayes for 2024/2025. We expect that Kimberly will continue working closely with the Charlottesville-Winneba Foundation to ensure that the relationship continues smoothly.

We are thankful to Mr. Gharthey for his many years of dedication to the Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission. The delegations led by the Foundation to Winneba makes this our most active sister city relationship. Once again in 2023, the Commission provided financial assistance to the Charlottesville-Winneba Foundation in helping fund a shipment of medical supplies and other donated items from Charlottesville to Winneba.



HUEHUETENANGO, GUATEMALA

The commission continues to work with the non-profit Ixtatan Foundation in searching for projects of interest and benefit to both cities as we continue as Friendship Cities.

There are no plans at this time to change the status of the city and we will continue to explore our relationship with the help of the Ixtatan Foundation. An official city visit to Huehuetenango has not yet been scheduled and is not expected to take place in 2024/2025.



PLEVEN, BULGARIA

Pleven was placed in emeritus status in 2018 due to a lack of activity or an active support group in either city. More recently, we have received an inquiry through the American Embassy in Bulgaria to determine if we would have interest in renewing our relationship.

We are now starting to investigate this option to determine if or how we should further explore this request.



THE COMING YEAR 2024/2025

The Commission has refocused its Grants program criteria to ensure that our grant awards provide a clear and evident benefit to the citizens of Charlottesville or that they strengthen the relationships we have with our existing sister cities.

Approximately 50% of our allotment from the City has been earmarked for Grants and Scholarships, with the majority of the remaining budget dedicated to public facing programs and events. City representative travel allotments have been reduced for 2024/2025 and there are no official visits planned for this fiscal year.

The Commission will partner with other City organizations to gain wider exposure to the city and community residents, including a presence at arts and cultural festivals, various observances and celebrations, as well as joining and participating in UVA Global Week 2024 activities.



Additionally, we have initiated cooperation with the Charlottesville-Albemarle Visitors Bureau and the Charlottesville Area Chamber of Commerce.

Respectfully submitted,

Edward Herring, Chair

June 10, 2024

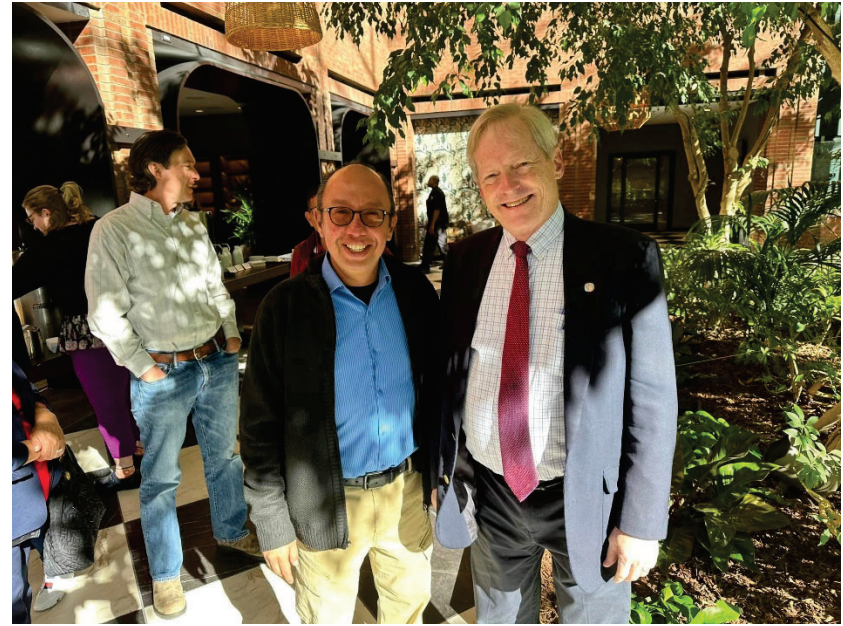


July 2023 - Winneba Delegation Visit





November 2023 - Huehuetenango Delegation Visit





February 2024 – Lycée Pasteur Exchange



April 2024 – Besançon Delegation Visit and Week





Thank you
from the

