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Hermosa Beach Sister City Association celebrates 50 years at Happy Hour With History

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Hermosa Beach Sister City Association exchange students pictured at a Kiwanis Club lunch on August 2.

photo submitted

Hermosa Beach and Loreto, Mexico adopted each other as sister cities in November of 1967. The Hermosa Beach Sister City Association will be celebrating the milestone with events this year including a talk at Happy Hour With History Thursday, Aug. 10, from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Hermosa Beach Museum.

Hermosa Beach Sister City Association President Deborah Wright, who is organizing Thursday's event, said she became involved 14 years ago when she volunteered for another nonprofit, Optometric Services to Humanity, where she led a team of eye doctors to Loreto.

"It's very enriching to go to another town or another city ... and walk in their shoes and stay in their homes and see what struggles they have and go back and say, 'OK, well we have resources to help with that.' They come up here, they enrich our lives as well. It's a two-way street."

According to Wright, Happy Hour With History will feature 8 millimeter movies of early trips to Loreto from Joe Diaz, an early member of the Sister City Committee. It will also screen a 2006 documentary on the history of the Sister City Committee, and feature a discussion from others involved in the history of the organization.

Learning from other cultures

Sister City Vice President George Barks said Sister City Committee chairman and later councilmember Jack Wise, an avid fisherman, was instrumental in Hermosa Beach choosing Loreto as its sister city. Back then, visitors could only reach Loreto by plane because there was no highway. A new highway the length of Baja is expected to be built in the near future.

"It took a four-wheel drive vehicle and two weeks to get down there," Barks said. "That was a time when a lot of U.S. cities were adopting sister cities. It all started with President Eisenhower in 1956, a world-wide sister city program. People to People, a form of citizen diplomats to complement government diplomats, learning other cultures and how they live. He thought that would be a way to make the world safer."

The two main programs of Sister City include paramedic and fire fighter training, which began in 1999, and the student cultural exchange program, started in 1974. Starting with only Hermosa Beach residents, the exchange program now includes seventh and eighth grade students from Redondo Beach, Manhattan Beach, Torrance and El Segundo, because they were not getting the adequate number of students, 15, for the program.

"We live in their homes for a week to learn their way of life and culture and we have planned activities," said Barks, who has been the exchange program's director for 10 years. "Then our students here host the Loreto students. They stay with them for a week and we do the same thing up here. It's two weeks of bonding."

Upcoming events

The Sister City Association hosts a 50th anniversary celebration Sunday, Sept. 24, at the Pier Plaza stage, beginning at 2 p.m. The event features Mariachi Tesoro musicians, international dance champions and a performance by local pop singer Bella Elysee.

The annual group trip to Loreto takes place Oct. 22 to 27, which also celebrates Loreto's 320th anniversary and Hermosa Beach's 110th birthday.

A plaque from the mayor of Loreto recognizing the 50th anniversary was recently installed at City Hall.

Happy Hour With History takes place from 6 to 8 p.m., at the museum, located at 710 Pier Ave.

For more information, call (310) 318-9421, visit hermosabeachhistoricalsociety.org or hb-sistercity.org.