



## **2024 - 2025 Annual Report to City Council**

**Programs and Activities of the Charlottesville Sister Cities Commission**

**Submitted July 2025**



# OUR SISTER CITIES:

- Poggio a Caino, Italy, Charlottesville's first sister city in 1976.
- Besançon, France, Sister Cities since 2006
- Winneba, Ghana, Sister cities since 2010
- Huehuetenango, Guatemala, Friendship city since 2021, in exploratory phase.

# COMMISSIONERS:

Alicen Brown, K-12 Education

Kimberly Hayes, Winneba

S. Lisa Herndon, At-large

Edward Herring, At-large

John Mason, At-large

Stella Mattioli, Poggio a Caiano

Salvatore Moschella, Higher Education

Bonita Patton, At-large

Kristen Petros de Guex, Business

Elizabeth Smiley, Besançon

Cherry Stewart, At-large

Youth Commissioner - vacant

Maxicelia Robinson, Staff Liaison

# BESANÇON, FRANCE:

The year began with Mayor Wade's visit to Besançon upon the invitation of the Mayor, Madame Anne Vignot, to join in the September 8th celebrations of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Besançon by the American troops.

The highlight of the year was a trip by 30 Theater students of Charlottesville High School to Besançon this past April. The students performed the Broadway show "A Chorus Line" to packed audiences at two performances.

Spring 2025 was dedicated to planning for the visit of the United Gospel Choir of Besançon to make a return visit to Virginia in July. They will sing in several concerts with the University Baptist Church and the Mt. Zion First African Baptist Church.

Early discussions are starting between the commission and the International Affairs office in Besançon concerning the 20th anniversary of our becoming sister cities in September 2006.

# POGGIO A CAIANO, ITALY:

Poggio representative Stella Mattioli is working with the current Mayor of Poggio to organize a visit by the Mayor and a delegation to Charlottesville in 2026. The last official visit by a delegation from Italy was in 2017.

After the Poggio elections on May 15, 2024, Ms. Mattioli worked to establish new contacts with the elected mayor and city to assure the continuance of a strong relationship between the cities.

# WINNEBA, GHANA:

The Sister City relationship between Charlottesville and Winneba continued to grow and strengthen this fiscal year. In May of 2024, the Charlottesville-Winneba Foundation continued with its latest trip to Winneba, once again allowing Charlottesville-area residents to experience our sister city.

Mayor Wade, as a private citizen, joined in on this trip.

Our new Winneba representative, Kimberly Hayes is currently working with the Mayor of Winneba to plan the next official Commission visit.

# HUEHUETENANGO, GUATEMALA:

The relationship between Charlottesville and Friendship City Huehuetenango continued to be in the exploratory phase.

There are two major developments in place with Huehue. Former Commissioner Sylvia New-Strawn spearheaded a book drive to collect 10 cartons of new and used books in both Spanish and English as a donation to a new library in Huehuetenango.

We are currently working with the American Embassy in Guatemala to facilitate the shipment. We expect that they will be delivered by early fall.

The second event under way is a visit to Huehuetenango by a delegation headed by Mayor Wade in October of this year. The GuateMaya (formerly Ixtatan) Foundation is assisting with the planning and travel organization.

# Additional Activities:

In addition to activities and exchanges with our cities, the commission has worked with the local community during the year.

- Tom Tom Festival - As part of the 2024 Grants Program, the Commission sponsored a program with the Lewis and Clark Exploratory Center at Darden Park entitled “Mapping the World”. This program was a “hands on” activity where residents used their skills to create maps of the locations of our sister city. This was an outstanding success with more than 80 local participants.
- Jefferson Founders Day - For the second time, the commission was asked to join other area civic leaders and take part in the “Laying of the Wreaths” at Thomas Jefferson’s grave site on the anniversary of his birth.
- Monticello Naturalization Event - The Commission hosted an information table at the event along with 20 other community and civic organizations.
- IX Farmers Market - The Commission takes seriously its mission to bring the work and focus of Sister Cities to the area residents. We will host and staff a table at various times each year to



be available to answer questions from our citizens as well as give them opportunities to get involved.

- Virginia Festival of the Book - The Commission participated in PVCC's Literacy program "Voices of Adult Learners. Meaningful stories from adult learners of English as a second language about family and work. The Commission was able to have stories from English learners in our sister city of Besancon included in the event.
- Relaunching the Grants Program - The Commission's Grant Program was suspended during the first half of the Fiscal Year and relaunched earlier this year with the awarding of a Grant entitled "Disrupting the Single Story: African Stories as Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Doors". This Grant project will work to strengthen the ties between Charlottesville and our sister city of Winneba in Ghana.

CHARLOTTESVILLE

SISTER



CITIES

COMMISSION