



**Richmond Sister Cities Commission  
RSCC**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**PROGRAM YEAR 2021**

**BY: MY LAN TRAN, RSCC CHAIR**

**Richmond, Virginia**

**December 30, 2021**

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# Richmond Sister Cities Commission

## ANNUAL REPORT 2021

### **Part 1: Program Overview**

The “Sister Cities” concept was initiated in 1956 by U.S President Dwight D. Eisenhower whose vision is to link U.S cities with cities in other countries to exchange people, ideas and cultures. The goal is to involve individuals at all levels of U.S. society in citizen diplomacy in the hope that these people relations would help minimize the chance of future world conflicts.

Founded in 1956, Sister Cities International (SCI) is a nonprofit organization based in Washington DC which serves as the national membership organization for individual sister cities, counties, and states across the U.S. It serves as a center for best practices in the field of citizen diplomacy. Its role is to strengthen the sister cities network through programming and support for its members.

Created in 1983, the Richmond Sister Cities Commission (SCC) is the Richmond City’s official diplomatic liaison to their Twin Cities, to the Sister Cities International, and to all other local Sister Cities around the nation and world.

In Richmond, citizen diplomacy as a municipal commission is overseen and supported by the Richmond City Council. Richmond Sister Cities Commission works collaboratively with the Mayor’s Office, local area community activists, and professional association partners to encourage citizens to develop mutual understanding through cultural, educational, commercial, and humanitarian exchanges.

Thus, individual volunteer citizens (Commissioners and Commissioners at Large) and professional partner associations are the major life source of the program as they selflessly devote their energy and resources to enrich their city, further integrating such concepts of cultural diversity, equity, and inclusion to Richmond City.

Richmond maintains the following active and renewed Sister City relationships:

#### *1. From 1938-Present: Active Relationships:*

- Richmond upon Thames, England (Western Europe), Est. 1938
- Saitama City, Japan (South - East Asia), Est. 1993
- Zhengzhou, China (North - Asia), Est. 1994

- Olsztyn, Poland (Eastern Europe), Est. 1994 \* Renewed 2021
- Windhoek, Namibia (West Africa), Est. 1998
- Segou, Republic of Mali (West Africa), Est. 2009

## **Part 2: Program Priorities & Strategic Plan**

- Organization wise: In 2021 SCC continues to bring on new Commissioners: We conducted a new election, with new leadership, a newly re-elected Chair, a newly elected Vice Chair, a new transitional Secretary Recorder (Mostly vacant throughout 2020 and a large part of 2021 due to the lack of human resources caused by the pandemic), an Executive Committee under the leadership of the SCC Chair, and several new working Operations Committees: (1. Community Outreach, 2. Finances and Budget, 3. Fund Raising, 4. Youth Engagement, 5. Special Project (SCI Annual Youth Art), and 6. Marketing (to include: Promotion \* Newsletter \* Website \* Social Media programming.)
- The SCC Chairperson in PY Year 2021 continues to provide thoughts leadership and organizational leadership in administering the Commission operations and coordinates all strategic directions and monthly meetings.
- Monthly Meeting notes are well - kept and copies are being sent electronically to City Clerk Office within 15 days after the meeting date.
- All meetings (all being virtual meetings except for August 2021) are announced publicly through the City Clerk Office. SCC Executive Committee is made up by the Chair, the Secretary, and a Representative from the Commission.
- The Commission follows its By Law and the Chairperson encourages Commissioners good attendance and serving the citizens well via active project involvement.
- With the appointment of a new Secretary we are committed to be dutiful about reporting timelines.

### **SCC Priorities:**

- A. The main priorities of the Richmond Sister Cities Commission in 2021 and beyond are to continue to stay sustainable and expand our programming and activities.

- B. In 2021, citizen diplomats of the Richmond Sister Cities Commission continue to be successful in establishing and maintaining productive (and symbolic) relationships with our Twin Cities, despite a serious health pandemic.
- C. Collectively Commission members in FY 2022 alone have more than 500 years of experience working with building international relationships with cities across continents. Yet, like most all other cities, given shrinking budgets, the Commission must leverage the already scarce resources to remain sustainable and grow.
- D. And as growth can only occur through extensive outreach, local activism, and shared goal, in 2021 and beyond we have a great opportunity here in Richmond to reflect and identify new means to educate local, regional, and state decision makers about the measurable reciprocities that derive from citizen diplomacy.
- E. Thus the strategic priorities and goals of our Commission in 2022 and beyond is to think outside the box, leverage technology, and identify new solutions to promote the concrete benefits that derive from citizen diplomacy to the Greater Richmond region.
- F. Only when we succeed to effectively communicate this value proposition (that we can help create concrete economic and social growth) to regional leaders from across all the commercial, cultural, educational, and other key sectors of society that we can win their support for citizen diplomacy initiatives.
  
- G. We are currently maximizing our digital innovations by conducting both virtual and on-site global community outreach activities, sharing values with our partners and social media network followers, and growing our local and international partnerships.
  
- H. We continue to see the need for procuring more formal Sister Cities landmark signage throughout the City. We even imagine establishing a physical global figure monument on Monument Avenue for exemple, for a powerful SCC programming impact.

The program can easily be a fully funded program by the City with fully staff office to offer professional assistance to the Commission.

It was suggested in several 2021 monthly SCC Meetings by the SCC Chairman that this function would normally reside from a city's Mayor Office as it encompasses international government and community affairs activities as volunteer citizens' time, resources, connections are limited and global strategic planning, human resources planning, event hosting, public affairs management, political protocols execution, procurement of products and services on behalf of the City, and economic development are all professional functions to be executed by most all municipality, not by volunteer citizens like in Richmond.

### **Part 3: Commission Membership as of December 2021**

Prefix	Last Name	First Name and Status	Position
Ms.	Edwards	Ana, Professional	Commissioner (Ended term: November 2021)
Mr.	Hill	Hwan, Professional	Commissioner & Secretary (Since Oct. 2021)
Atty	Lisk	Thomas, Professional	Commissioner
Miss	Nexsen	Catherine, Professional	Vice Chair & Secretary Jan to Sept 2021
Ms.	Ra-El	Nin Aseeya, Entrepreneur	Commissioner & Treasurer
Mr	Timmons	Ronald, Professional	Commissioner
Ms.	Tran	My Lan, Professional	Chairperson
Ms.	Condrey	Julianne, Entrepreneur	Vice-Chair
Mr.	Reid	Zachary, Entrepreneur	Commissioner (Ended/Resigned April 2021)
Ms.	Shirl	Rhoades, Professional	Commissioner
Dr.	Kejie	Meng, Professional	Commissioner
The Hon.	Ann-Frances	Lambert, City Council Lady	Commissioner
Mr.	Norman	Washington, Entrepreneur	Commissioner
Dr.	Patricia	Cummins, Professional	Commissioner

#### **Part 4: Commission Meeting Dates in 2021**

**Richmond Sister Cities Commission met in person and virtually on the below dates:**

January 2, February 6, March 6, April 3, May 1, June 5, July (Recess-no meeting), August 7, September 4, October 2, November 6, and December 3, 2021.

#### **Part 5: Commission Meeting Minutes in 2021**

All meeting Minutes are sent to the City Clerk Office via Electronic email.

#### **Part 6: Commission By-Law Records in 2021**

Most updated By-Laws is also on file at the Clerk Office.

## **Part 7: Budget and Finances Reporting**

Overall current year Budget: Commission Budget and Expenditures

### **Budget:**

- A. The Sister Cities Commission has received a budget of \$10,000 for 2020-2021.
- B. At the end of FY 2021, Treasurer Aseeya Ra-El reports \$20,461.44 remains in budget. \$9,538.56 was spent in 2021.
- C. 2021 being a pandemic year, we devoted all our spending on products and services to help us rebrand our Commission.
- D. We successfully procured all needed expenditures throughout the year on essential promotional marketing to enhance and promote our community outreach events, marketing services, and other marketing tools such as website development, SCC membership dues to Sister Cities International in the current fiscal year.
- E. At our "Friends of Richmond Sister Cities" funds, the Commission also continues to maintain a Friends of Richmond Sister Cities" Enrichmond account.
- F. At the end of the fiscal year 2020-2021, a total of \$2,187.00 remained in the EnRichmond account.

### **Funding Benefits:**

Funding has allowed Richmond Sister Cities to implement citizens-run global diplomacy (Including cultural- economic/trade and investment activities generated by relationships developed in six countries: China (Zhengzhou), Japan (Saitama), Namibia (Windhoek), The United Kingdom (Richmond Upon Thames), and Mali (Ségou) from four (4) continents (Asia- Europe- Africa- North America).

As in 2021 we are reviving relationship with our existing diplomatic relationship with our Twin City in Poland (with Olsztyn City) in Central Europe.

Thanks to FY 2022 City funding, the Commission was able to use our newly developed marketing materials and equipment to advance our ambitious plan to strengthen and expand existing global relationships with more than one city in Asia and/or Latin America.

Our outreach activities with various ethnic community members from Africa, Asia, and Latin America has also allowed us to outreach and connect directly with multi-ethnic students attending the Richmond Public Schools.

## **Part 8: Richmond Sister Cities Accomplishments and Community Partnership**

- A. **RICHMOND UPON THAMES (ENGLAND): (Commissioner Thomas Lisk)**

Richmond upon Thames refurbished 15 town twinning signs and unveiled seven new town twinning signs recognizing its sister cities of Richmond, VA, Fontainebleau, France, and Konstanz, Germany.

In addition, Cllr. Geoff Acton, Mayor of Richmond upon Thames, and Cllr. Gareth Roberts, Leader of Richmond upon Thames Council, unveiled a stunning new fingerpost sign outside the Civic Centre in Twickenham on November 5, 2021 (see photo below). The new fingerpost sign is like the wayfaring sign installed by the Richmond Sister Cities Commission in Kanawha Plaza in 2018.

Due to COVID-19, Richmond upon Thames has rescheduled its Twinning 2020 Event to celebrate Richmond upon Thames sister city relationships with its world partners, including Richmond, VA, Fontainebleau, France and Konstanz, Germany, and to reaffirm its relationships with each partner city.

Originally scheduled for June 26-28, 2020, this event is now scheduled for June 6-8, 2025. The Mayor of Richmond, Virginia will be invited to attend this event.

The Richmond Sister Cities Commission has invited Richmond upon Thames to participate in the 2022 Annual Young Artists and Authors Showcase (YAAS), sponsored by Sister Cities International. The 2022 YAAS theme is “Generation Rescue: Sustainable Water for All.”

### **SAITAMA, JAPAN (Commissioner Catherine Nexsen)**

- The exchanges for Junior Baseball, Student, and Teachers between Saitama, Japan, and Richmond, Virginia, continued to be suspended in 2021.
- The Committee will restart these programs, increasing our outreach, and reestablishing connections with some of our partners2022 RSSC Activities
- The exchanges for Junior Baseball, Student, and Teachers between Saitama, Japan, and Richmond, Virginia, were all suspended.
- The Committee look forward to adding new members, volunteers in order to restart these programs, increasing our outreach, and reestablishing connections with some of our partners.
- One proposed future project is to collect recipes of favorite local delights from all our Sister Cities partners and publish a cookbook. This could lead to a possible exchange based on culinary interests between our cities, and in doing so build community.

### **B. ZHENGZHOU, CHINA ( Commissioner My Lan Tran)**



## **Project Background:**

- Zhengzhou, one of the oldest Twin Cities of Richmond, Virginia is the capital and the largest city of Henan Province in the central part of the People's Republic of China.<sup>[2]</sup> It serves as the political, economic, technological, and educational center of the province.
- Like Richmond, Zhengzhou is a major hub of China's national transportation network, with railways connecting Zhengzhou to Europe and an international airport.

## **Activities Summary:**

- In 2021, due to the pandemic, diplomatic exchanges between and Richmond continue to grow mostly virtually with virtual planning meetings between the two Cities project chairs where representatives from both cities discussed regional research efforts, a need for a Chinese American diasporic community involvement in the project, and planning efforts to develop direct cross promotion (short and long-term) activities about both cities in respective countries.
- Both Twin Cities committee leaders and local Richmond's Chinese community members met quarterly throughout the year discussing strategies for a post Covid 19 program development. This includes:
  1. Both made plan to attend one another annual major events toward late 2022 or in 2023 after the pandemic subsides.
  2. Both cities will continue to connect its Richmond and Zhengzhou regional leaders representing the arts, commerce, education to connect both virtually and through planned major event once they reopen once the pandemic subsides.
  3. The government of Zhengzhou in 2021 continues to be supportive of the City of Richmond during the pandemic and both cities stay in touch throughout 2021. Mrs. Pan Xinhong, the director of our Foreign Affairs Office has sent several governmental support letters to Richmond City Mayor Stoney, and she received mutual support letters from Mayor Stoney in return. Mayor Stoney wrote letters of condolence to the peoples of Zhengzhou after the devastating flood ht Zhengzhou City in the summer of 2021.
  4. Both cities collected promotion videos and web pages about features of each City to be shared on social media and newsletters by in respective cities regarding Fast Facts about cities' economic/business industry facts which will be distributed to various government and regional government agencies and partners.
  5. Zhengzhou students continued to actively participate in SCI Youth Arts program in 2021 and one student was a finalist winner.
  6. Although the Zhengzhou - Richmond Committee has enlisted the Foreign Affairs Office Zhengzhou Municipal People's Government City of Zhengzhou to be an official partner of the planned March 2021 Youth Soccer/football tournament hosted by the Richmond Kicker, the project was delayed due to the pandemic.
  7. With a newly formed government, the Foreign Affair Office is now giving more focus to Sister city relationship. Both the Zhengzhou and Richmond – Zhengzhou

Committees are actively exploring more opportunity to restart our exchanges and cooperation in the near future with enhanced collaborative activities, events, and projects.

8. In October 2021, Richmond City SCC Committee hosted an event with more than 100 guests to include the local Richmond Chinese community, business members from the Virginia Asian Chamber of Commerce (VACC).
9. VACC, being a longtime Partner of SCC in particular to four countries: Zhengzhou (via Country Economic Development Interest and Engagement to Virginia), Saitama (via Country Donation), and Namibia (via co-partnership of a Namibia Trade Mission), and Mali (Country Donation, the Asian Chamber donated its list of VIP Guests to include top state, local, Richmond City, regional guests to a Friendship Forum event where food, stories, and history about this relationship were highlighted to leaders representing state government, safety, health, education, state industries, international commerce, and other sectors.
  - During this event, we were successful in outreaching to a robust team of volunteers and the event was truly a team effort.
  - During the event, the Committee honored Councilor Ann Frances Lambert a plaque of Appreciation for her strong support for the Commission overall.
  - We also honored the US-China Friendship Association (USCFA) Richmond Chapter through Ms Diana Greer, its national-Richmond President with a plaque to honor this organization being the earlier Champion and creator of this relationship.
  - Volunteers are appreciated for their time and commitment to support the dynamic peoples to peoples relationship despite the difficult relationship between the two nations, which represent a challenge for our vision of international economic exchanges.

**Planning for 2022:**

1. Library books exchanges dating since 1998
2. University exchanges through local university partnerships
3. Chinese-English language education exchanges through local Chinese schools and Richmond public schools
4. International commerce (Trade and investment activities at EXPOs or Trade Missions) engaging local businesses and Zhengzhou-local Chinese communities).

5. Re-Engagement to the original International Youth Soccer Exchanges program-post-pandemic.

### **C. OLSZTYN, POLAND (Commissioner Julianne Condrey)**

In August 2020, the new elected SCC Chair My Lan Tran at her first Commission meeting has made a motion for Richmond Sister Cities Commission to renew the Twin Sister City relationship between Richmond, Virginia and Olsztyn, Poland. SCC Commissioner Julianne Condrey, of Polish heritage, was nominated by the Commission to take on the responsibility and became Chair of Olsztyn-Richmond Committee.

#### **Background:**

- Richmond has had a Sister City relationship with Olsztyn, Poland, since 1994, with a City Council Resolution No. 94-R75-85, dated March 14, 1994. Although this relationship is still recognized by Olsztyn, it has not been developed and maintained. Richmond Sister Cities Commission has begun the process to re-establish this relationship. Per the direction of the City Council, we contacted the Mayor of Richmond's office to request formal letters of renewal sent to the Mayor of Olsztyn, as well as a formal agreement. That letter was sent by the Mayor of Richmond on December 2, 2020. A response was received with a positive desire to renew the relationship.
- Poles were among the first Europeans to settle in Virginia and have been an integral part of the fabric of the Commonwealth ever since. Thaddeus Kosciuszko and Casimir Pulaski were instrumental in the American War of Independence, and Virginia has recently established annual days honoring each of them.
- Richmond Sister Cities believes a relationship with Olsztyn continues to meet the criteria for a sister city, and re-establishing this relationship has been mutually beneficial. With economic, cultural, and academic similarities and capacities, there is opportunity for youth and adult engagement for residents and business owners of both cities. Like Richmond, Olsztyn has universities in the city, as well as centers for the arts. Also, like Richmond, Olsztyn is known for water sports and cycling, as well as festivals and breweries. Additionally, Richmond does not currently have an active sister city relationship on the European continent, and thus, this relationship will increase the reach and impact of Richmond Sister Cities and Richmonders as a whole.
- We hosted an event to celebrate the Olsztyn-Richmond relationship as well as Kosciuszko, Pulaski, and Agrippa Hull in October of 2021 in Richmond. We have been working with the Honorary Consul of Poland in Virginia and others who are excited about this Sister City relationship.

- We are laying the groundwork for a strong foundational relationship with the business, education, and cultural communities. We are also working toward assembling a delegation to visit Olsztyn in fall of 2022 to focus on economic interests between the cities.

**Tentative Activities and Events for this Committee include:**

- a. Exchange displays about our cities for display at our city hall buildings
- b. Doctor or med student exchange program - Olsztyn has a medical school
- c. Trade Highlights - have Olsztyn highlight Richmond products, Richmond highlight Olsztyn products (i.e. beer, wine, clothing shops, industries, medical)
- d. Assemble an international trade/professional delegation from Richmond area to go to Olsztyn
- e. Library exchanges - also good place for displays about our cities
- h. Nicolaus Copernicus from Olsztyn. Have activity related to that in libraries or schools, or in conjunction with the Science museum
- i. VCU basketball exchange with men's basketball team in Olsztyn
- j. Polish Heritage Month - October (national recognition)
- k. October 11th - Casimir Pulaski Day in Virginia.

**D. WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA (Commissioner Aseeva Ra-El)**

- In 2021: Richmond-Windhoek Committee Chair Commissioner, Nin Aseeva Ra-El attended a multi-sectoral USA trade mission to Namibia with Ambassador Monica Nashandi and local business leaders from the Greater Richmond Area. This mission was coordinated by the Embassy of Namibia to Washington, DC.
- The Richmond-Windhoek Committee has had a longtime goal of exploring a possible beer exchange with Windhoek as the two cities share a deep love and passion for their lagers.
- One of our Country Partner's major employers, the Namibia Brewery, is highly interested in partnering with Legend Brewery in Richmond and various exchanges are being held throughout 2021 in regard to events and activities that could happen such as a wine tasting -recipes exchange event in the Fall. With pandemic restrictions, plans for these initiatives are being considered for next year.
- The most positive news for the Richmond-Windhoek Committee and Richmond Sister Cities Commotion is Ms Aseeva Ra-El, SC Commission was appointed as official Consul

of Namibia to Virginia during this year. With her new diplomatic post, she is eager to connect parties on both cities to explore interest in trade relations on both a micro and macro level in 2021 and years to come.

- Meanwhile, the Namibian Ambassador and her consulate of Trade and Investment are fully committed to how the Richmond-Windhoek global partnership is necessary to help develop the small to medium size community both in Windhoek and Richmond, the Virginia economy, Namibia economy, and to also the important role Namibia has in the world and for Virginia. Commissioner Spotlight! Richmond Sister Cities Commissioners are a unique brand of citizens in our community. We volunteer our time and energy for the betterment of our local community and our world.

**E. SEGOU, MALI (Commissioner Ana Edwards (until November 2021) \*  
Commissioner Pat Cummins)**

- The Ségou-Richmond relationship received an award from SCI for its Youth and Education Initiatives in the category for cities of 100,000 to 300,000. It was a nice follow-up to Virginia Friends of Mali having received the Foreign Language Association of Virginia award in 2019-20 for contributions to the promotion of French in colleges and universities in Virginia.
- The Richmond Chiwara newsletter continued in both French and English. It covered sister cities events and brought historical events and cultural presentations in both directions to residents of Mali and of Virginia.
- We increased YAAS participation in Ségou and our Ségou students obtained three SCI international prizes in the YAAS competition.
- We continue to participate in the Mali Interest Group with Ambassador Nimaga of the Malian Embassy in D.C. Set up by USAID officials originally, it no longer requires physical participation in Washington because the Search for Common Ground group holds meetings on Zoom.
- The SISTER CITIES book about the Richmond-Ségou relationship continues to be read and represents a major outreach tool for RSCC.
- The SISTER RADIO continues as a project to promote women's voices in Ségou and Richmond, with a documentary available on this project: activity and fund-raising continued during 2021—Cameron Robinson and Andee Arches benefitted from the \$10 K grant to VFOM from the Virginia Humanities Foundation (WRIR 97.3 & Radio Sikoro in Ségou).
- Richmond continued to be seen and admired in the Mali diaspora, in the Malian Embassy and with the Mali government and Ségou municipality.

- Sister Cities International Africa Conference held several meetings this year in which VFOM participated. Anna Edwards, Patricia Cummins, and Robin Poulton were invited to present examples of social entrepreneurship in Mali. Subsequently Polly Yu, an SCI honorary board member, invited Patricia Cummins to deliver a module on social entrepreneurship in an online global citizen course in which Ségou was the focus.
- The Sister Cities International Africa group is planning to hold an in-person conference in February 2023 at the African Center for the Study of the United States at Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg, and Patricia Cummins is part of the academic planning group that is going to develop university partnerships between Africa and the United States. The expectation is that both Ségou and Windhoek will be part of a consortium of universities that will have virtual collaborations as well as in-person collaborations for teaching, research, and community engagement.
- Richmond (VFoM) was pleased to receive several Malians during the year, but these were personal visits: the Segou large delegation visits stopped as of 2020 due to the pandemic; and the same was true in the other direction: certain members of VFoM visited Ségou but on a personal visit basis.
- Erica Pomerance reports that the Dogon Centre Indigo is working with members of the Malian contingent of Virginia Friends of Mali at a campus of the U. of Bamako and has received USAID funding to work with Prof. Kristin Caskey VCU's fashion design program in 2022. French professor and Commissioner Patricia Cummins is facilitating connections with the assistance of her students in French.
- In October 2021 Commissioner Ana Edwards coordinated the visit of Mamy SISSOKO with participation of VFOM members and two VCU French faculty.
- In November 2021 Commissioner Patricia Cummins hosted a visit of a small delegation consisting of former Ségou Mayor Brema THIERO, Voice of America executive Cheick THIERO, and USAID consultant Mariama KEITA.

**Plans for 2022:**

- We shall continue to publish the Richmond Chiwara each month, as our main outreach and education organ (especially with pandemic restrictions)
- We shall launch a project to support girls in high schools, partnering with a local CSO, both to improve girls' academic results and to highlight risks to young women (protection of girls)
- We have signed a long-term agreement with Centre Culturel Koré (CCK) to develop the YAAS activity each year in Ségou, with an annual budget we shall fund privately
- Commissioner Patricia Cummins will spend part of Spring 2022 preparing to build a consortium of universities and has planned for her Fall 2022 research leave to include travel to Bamako and Ségou in order to build university partnerships. The focus of these partnerships is an English program with online courses on American language and civilization as well as online options for U.S. students to learn from Malian faculty about the languages and civilizations of modern Mali and other West African states.

- In February 2022 Dr. Patricia Cummins will be part of a 7-member SCI Africa delegation that will go to Johannesburg and prepare the February 2023 conference that will promote US- African partnerships.
- Progress will be made on the Dogon Indigo Project funded by USAID. It involves training of Dogon designers, marketing of Dogon crafts with the help of business faculty in Bamako, further collaboration with fashion designers in Paris and New York that had begun with EU funding previously, and new collaboration with the VCU Fashion Design Department.
- The SISTER RADIO project will continue with Radio Sikoro and WRIR in RVA, and we hope that the Documentary Film will be completed during 2022.

## **Part 9: Special Project**

### **THE LATIN SISTER CITY FEASIBILITY RESEARCH PROJECT (Commissioner Shirl Rhoades)**

- As initiated by Commission Chair My Lan Tran in 2020, the Sister City Commission (SCC) launched a “Latin Sister City Feasibility Project” as a possible Twin City relationship between a Latin City and Richmond City.
  - SCC Commissioner Shirl Rhoades, a Public Schools educator with more than twenty years of experience working with Latino students and parents was nominated by the Commission to take on the responsibility and became Research Chair.
  - Her research activity began with a focus on the Latin cities that make up the largest percent of our Richmond City Public Schools population.
  - As a result of the data at the time, there were three countries that ranked at the top of this list of immigrant community members. Those countries were Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.
- Research continued with a prominent city in Spain by the name of San Miguel de Allende. Recent research has moved to Bogota, Colombia. This is a new city that is being researched and I have very little to report at this time.
  - Unfortunately, communication is sometimes hampered due to unusual work schedules due to the pandemic. This research continues and advanced country research will focus on Bogota, Columbia. The goal is to narrow down our research and choose a sister city to attempt a relationship with in 2022.

## **Part 10: Program Operations**

### **A. SCC NEWSLETTER**

- During the year of 2021, the Commission officially launched our first Newsletter, the “RSCC Quarterly”.



- The Commission nominated Ms. Shirl Rhoades of Richmond Public Schools as Newsletter Editor in Chief.
- Our quarterly Newsletters cover stories about Commission project Commission ‘s events highlights, various Commissioner’s biography with photos, and reporting on future activities.
- The publication is widely shared with our public social media platforms as well as a select group of Richmond City Officials.

## **B. SCC MARKETING ACTIVITIES**

- The Marketing Committee of Richmond Sister Cities has been strategizing how to refresh our website and other point of contact systems. We revisited our purpose, with a goal of increasing engagement from the community.
- One new facet we planned in 2020 was to include is a place for the community to respond with ideas for events, community partners, and events in which RSCC should participate.
- Our goal was to create a newsletter that highlights our activities, recommends events in the community and through RSCC for the upcoming quarter, has contact information for RSCC, and provides ways for the community to engage, including financial donations and volunteer opportunities.
- In the short-term, we planned to post the newsletter on Facebook and add an email list signup button to the website.
- Our long-term goal is to partner with Richmond Public Schools and the Universities in the city to distribute it network wide, as well as a partner organization email list to be developed.
- Meanwhile, while our momentum is strong, our inadequate communication between monthly meetings could stifle the sharing of ideas. However, the shift to zoom meetings has increased attendance and idea sharing.
- In summary: The SCC has brought stronger accountability measures which in return has produced more output by commissioners. With great team work, we have done so much more in promoting the assets of the commission. Thanks to good ideas, the SCC Team has concluded 2021 with a robust marketing program. This includes a four-prong approach to marketing: We accomplished all our 2021 promotion goals via:

**One: A Robust Social Media Presence:** In 2021, the Commission officially re-launched our social media presence and our Face Book pages are now active with weekly posting and report updates at both our official “Richmond Sister City Commission “main Face Book site and its “Friends of Sister Cities Commission” group page, which as a result, have attracted new followers each week.

**Two: Functional and Relevant Promotional Products:** Certain specific City relationship (such as Mali) has innovative marketing initiatives such as a Mali radio programming and a



book publication to promote the Mali-Richmond relationship, the Zhengzhou, China, and Olsztyn, Poland, Sister Cities both conduct successful on-site community engagement events to promote its programs and activities in 2021.

However; In regard to promoting the Richmond Sister Cities Commission program as an overall entity, the Commission, thanks to a new board leadership and more substantial funding support from City Council, has successfully produced a rich arrays of first- class marketing materials (Brochures, Sister City Country pins, business cards for Commissioners, a new enhanced SCC logo, SCC program pamphlets, SCC signage, banners, various branded SCC marketing materials, posters, and all needed international marketing materials and diplomatic gifts for foreign visitors.

**Three: A Calculated Rebranding Strategy:** We launched our official independent brand-new website which was designed by a professional marketing company. The website name is widely shared with our various public social media platforms as well as the Richmond City Government through our Quarterly Newsletter, “The RSCC Quarterly”. This Newsletter reports regularly on the Commission ‘s events, its diverse leadership and individual contributions to the growing project. The publication is widely shared with our public social media platforms as well as the Richmond City Government.

**Four: Continuous Community Engagement:** Through a stronger social media presence, promotional products, branding re design, the smart use of digital technology, and an interactive web presence, we successfully reached out to more followers, communities, organizations, and local, state, regional government than ever since 2003 in order to promote the Commission accomplishments and achieved results.

### **C. ANNUAL SISTER CITIES YOUTH ART COMPETITION**

- The Young Artists and Authors Showcase (YAAS) is an annual contest that encourages youth worldwide to express the mission of Sister Cities International through original artwork, literature, photography, and music for both original and reinterpreted pieces.
- The Youth Art program theme thiS year is United in Hope.
- International entries this year were received from Richmond, Virginia; Saitama, Japan; and Zhengzhou, China, Mali, and Namibia.
- Submissions are centered around an annual theme and judged based on originality, composition, and theme interpretation.
- Selected Grand Prize Winners in each category (art, articles, poetry, photography, original music, and reinterpreted music) win a \$1000 prize.

## **Part 11: Community Partnership and Collaboration**

The Commission continued to outreach to the below organizations:

1. En Richmond
2. Richmond Schools System (Multicultural, Hispanic PTA, ESL Program and beyond)
3. Richmond Public Library
4. US China Friendship Association
5. Virginia Friends of Mali
6. Virginia Asian Chamber of Commerce
7. Virginia Asian Foundation
8. Japan Virginia Society
9. Selected Embassies from Asia-Europe-Africa-Latin America
10. Organization of Chinese Americans
11. Richmond Chinese School
12. United Chinese
13. Virginia Economic Development Partnership
14. Greater Richmond Partnership
15. Virginia Commonwealth University (Various departments)
16. Richmond Korean American Society
17. Local African residents and community
18. Local Polish community civic group

## **Part 12: Conclusion: Challenges and Opportunities & Proposed Suggestions to Council**

### **CHALLENGES-OPPORTUNITIES:**

- Despite our many successes, the bigger picture as we envision is the issue of program's long-term sustainability.
- As most regions focus on studying growth for their region using data research on the regional level, less research attention has been given to evaluating the benefits of the sister city partnerships model so they can better appreciate how cities with diverse capabilities and needs can jointly enhance the maximum potential for economic growth.
- In addition, given the ever-shrinking budgets most cities must leverage existing scarce resources to remain sustainable. Yet sustainable development and opportunities lay on a need to have full time / dedicated staffing coming from the government as volunteers' energy will max out at some point.

## **PROPOSED SUGGESTIONS TO COUNCIL:**

- Still, the year of 2021 represents an immense opportunity for the Richmond Sister Cities Commission and to the City government to prove that with the right organizational leadership, a clear vision and direction, and intentional strategic planning, Richmond city can promote with confidence to the world that Richmond city is a city “in- the-move” a global competitive city with promising future, and a friendly place to visit, play, raise a family, and do business.
- With our beginning 2021 immediate SCC success story and thinking out of the box and beyond the original “People to People” friendship idea promoted by Sister Cities International: More than ever the City of Richmond government needs to offer its resident tax payers (represented symbolically by its Richmond Sister Cities Commission) and current and prospective domestic and global investors the adequate full time staffing resources and funding (such as creating more SIGNAGE posts about SCC Program throughout the city, massive global marketing campaigns etc... ) allowing it to implement a full time – professional international relations program if it wishes to transform Richmond City from a Tier 2 City to a Tier 1 City that’s ready to compete comfortably with other cities with similar industries and cultural advantages such as Austin, Forth Worth, Texas, or San Francisco, Northern California, among a dozen other cities, which have brought international recognition to its community through a full time-professional international diplomacy implementation.

**End of report**