

A Brief History of the Hermosa Beach Sister City Association

A “sister city” is a long-term partnership between two cities in different countries promoting peace and cultural understanding through a people-to-people relationship.

April 1966 – Hermosa Beach Mayor Jack Belasco and City Manager Walter Harris met with Robert Curry, Publisher of the South Bay Daily Breeze, to request support in starting a Sister City Program in Hermosa Beach. A Steering Committee was formed. Original members included: Bob Austin, George Ames, Corky Beard, Jack Belasco, John DeGroot, Mrs. John C Dunn, Dr. Dale Dick, Walter Harris, Mrs. Mo Linder, Frank Sasine, Quentin Thelen, Al Valdes, Juan Valencia, and Jack Wise. As news spread, additional members joined in the work.

Over the next 10 months, the Steering Committee researched the structures of the Sister City Movement at the State and National levels. **The Committee felt strongly that they should seek a relationship with a city that had similarities with the Hermosa community.** They studied many communities in Mexico. The “short list” included: **VERACRUZ, MANZANILLO, ALAMO, TUXPAN, ROSARITO, SAN BLAS, and LORETO.**

March 21, 1967 – Jack Wise reported the recommendation of the Steering Committee to reach out to Loreto to propose becoming “Sister Cities.” He further stated that Bob Curry of the South Bay Daily Breeze had offered the support and resources of Copley Press to assist Hermosa Beach in this endeavor. The City Council voted to approve initiating contact with the government officials of Loreto to establish a Sister City Program.

August 25, 1967 – Members of the Steering Committee and City Council visited Loreto (Jack and Evelyn Belasco, Jack and Betty Wise, Al and Naoma Valdes, Don and Sheila Miller, Pat Anderson, and Del Andrews.)

August 26, 1967 – Mayor Ojeda of Loreto appointed a Loreto Sister City Committee and declarations between Loreto and Hermosa Beach were signed.

September 1967 - Evelyn Belasco began the first cultural exchange between 5th graders in her Valley Vista School classroom and students in Loreto. The Hermosa students created art works of Hermosa Beach and sent letters to accompany the pictures.

November 7, 1967 – **Hermosa Beach City council adopted a resolution officially adopting Loreto as a Sister City. (Resolution N.S. 2744)**

1974 – Joe and Marie Diaz began the HBSCA Student Exchange Program for middle school students to visit Loreto and Loreto students to visit Hermosa Beach. This is the longest running student exchange program for this age group. This same year, Loreto Plaza was dedicated on Pier Plaza, largely due to the efforts of former City Council Member Jack Wise.

1997 - Dr. Primo Maraver in Loreto was very impressed with the US paramedic system and thought that it would be a great gift to the people of Loreto. He worked HBSCA to make this idea come to fruition.

October 1999 – Hermosa Beach Fire Department Paramedics Paul Hawkins, Mike Garafano, and Kim Bridges conducted the first Paramedic Training Program for Loreto Firefighters in Loreto. Since then, the HBSCA has been supporting the Paramedic Training Program in Loreto with biannual training and donations of life-saving supplies and equipment.

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2000 - HBSCA hosted the Annual US/Mexico Sister Cities Conference in Hermosa Beach. The theme was "Protecting our Shared Environment" and included the participation of a number of environmental groups such as, "Heal the Bay", "Surfrider Foundation", PROBEA, UCLA Science Dept., etc. Under the leadership of HBSCA President Richard (Dick) McCurdy, we invited educational and governmental representatives from Loreto and La Paz, so they could attend the presentations and various workshops. We hoped they would absorb new ideas they could use in Loreto. One of the immediate benefits derived from the convention was the establishment of a one-mile radius maritime protective area around Loreto in the Sea of Cortez, which has become a Mexican National Marine Park. Jack Belasco called it "the first convention of the new millennium."

2010 - Paul Hawkins, Mike Garafano, and Kim Bridges are awarded the first HBSCA International Humanitarian Award for their dedication to the Paramedic Training Program.

2014 - Joline Blais is honored with the HBSCA International Humanitarian Award for her service and dedication to the Sister City Association.

September 2017 – HBSCA celebrated 50 years of the Sister City Program between Hermosa Beach and Loreto. The Student Exchange and Paramedic Training Programs continue to be the capstones of this relationship. A new monument was re-dedicated on Pier Plaza. The Mayor of Loreto and delegates attended as well as the Hermosa Beach Mayor and CA State Representatives. At the Monument Dedication Ceremony, the HBSCA presented our International Humanitarian Awards to Dr. Fernando Lopez Pineda of Loreto for his work with the Paramedic Training Program, to Bertha Romano and Gerardo Valadez of Loreto for their work with the Loreto Student Exchange Program, and to Dr. Tani Collins of Loreto and George Barks of Hermosa Beach for their decades of work with the Sister City Association.

October 2019 - HBSCA celebrated 20 years of the Paramedic Training Program in Loreto with a dinner and awards at the Oasis Hotel. Dr. Primo Maraver was awarded the HBSCA International Humanitarian Award. He was the original spark of the idea for the Paramedic Training Program in 1997 and provided years of support to the program in its infancy. A plaque honoring the 20 years of volunteerism of our Paramedic Trainers, Paul Hawkins, Mike Garafano, and Kim Bridges, was presented to the Loreto Fire Station.