

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Christina Despoteris OAM President Sister Cities Australia with Mr Junji Shimada Consul General of Japan in Melbourne and Mrs Kaoru Shimada

I was both honored and delighted to attend the Japanese Emperor's Birthday Celebration Reception which was held on 15 February 2024 at the Consul-General's residence. The event was attended by approximately 300 people, including state and local government officials, state and federal politicians, members of the Victorian Consular Corps, Japanese cultural and educational organisations, and business representatives of Australian and Japanese businesses.



After Kyudo ceremonial shooting rituals and the singing of the Australian and Japanese national anthems, Consul-General Shimada delivered a speech, which was followed by congratulatory remarks by Mr Nick Staikos MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier and Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs (representing the Premier and Guest of Honour), and Mr David Southwick MP, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, respectively.



The residence was decorated with welcoming flowers by Ikebana International and samurai armour from the Edo period, while guests enjoyed traditional Japanese culture, including live performance of koto and taiko drums and a hands-on demonstration of tea ceremony by Urasenke. Japanese companies provided beer, green tea slushies, probiotic drinks, as well as cheesecakes from Otaru, strawberries and char-grilled Hida beef from Gifu Prefecture, and Aomori Prefecture and Narita Market offered sake and specialities. There were also displays of a hydrogen bus, hydrogen fuel cell vehicles, and plug-in hybrids electric vehicles from Japanese car manufacturers, as well as the distribution of samples of healthcare-related products. In addition, Melbourne's sister city, Osaka, promoted the Osaka-Kansai Expo 2025, while Victoria's sister state, Aichi Prefecture, promoted its sister state relationship.

Source: https://www.melbourne.au.emb-japan.go.jp/itprtop_en/index.html

Happy 40th Anniversary Melbourne and Thessaloniki

This year marks the 40th Anniversary of the Melbourne/Thessaloniki Sister City Relationship. It was on 19 March 1984 when the Mayor of Thessaloniki Mr Theocharis Manavis, visited the City of Melbourne Offices and signed the MOU officially declaring the sister city relationship. Mr Manavis was accompanied by his wife, the Deputy Mayor and four other Councillors from the City of Thessaloniki, and a representative of both the Thessaloniki International Fair as well as the Chamber of Commerce. The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of Melbourne at the time was Cr Kevin Chamberlin.

The MOU read in part, "The relationship was created in pursuit of the mutual goals of strengthening international friendship and understanding. The two cities have much in common in terms of population and geopolitical importance and share the same aspirations and hopes for the future."

"Further, the citizens of Australia and Greece who have shared so much in times of war and peace, are already bonded together in friendship, co-operation and understanding."

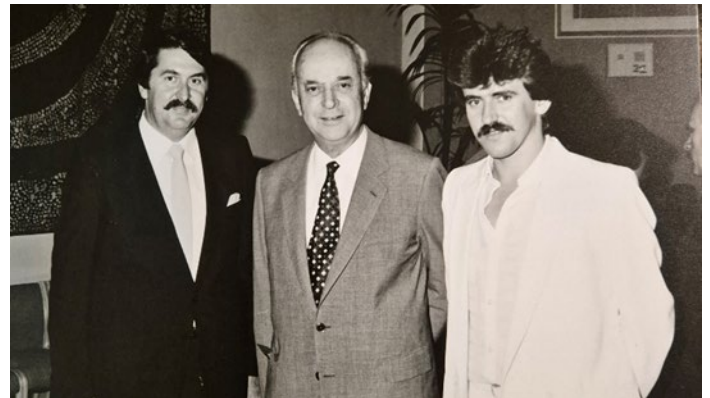
Sister City relationships traditionally are about fostering these bonds between the two cities and encouraging and striving to develop mutual exchanges and co-operation in various forms in such fields as commerce, industry, education and culture.

This relationship was initiated and supported by the City of Melbourne, the State Government of Victoria and the local Greek Community. A Citizens' Committee was formed chaired by The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor Cr Kevin Chamberlin and comprising of Mr I Georgiadis -Acting Consul General of Greece, Cr E J Beacham - City of Melbourne, Mr D Dollis - Ministry of Ethnic Affairs, Mr C Kosmidis - Thessaloniki Association, Mr M Mangonis - Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria, Ms V Morris - Community, Mr G Sheppard -Ethnic Affairs Commission, Mr T Sidiropoulos MP - State Government, Mr T Sioumis - Pan-Macedonian Association of Melbourne and Victoria, Mr A Vella -

Victorian Trades Hall Council, Cr N P Zervos - City of Melbourne and Mr M Drew - City of Melbourne.

The role of this Committee was to assist in the establishment of the relationship, to arrange for the City of Thessaloniki delegation to visit Melbourne, to organize and promote the celebratory events and to plan future activities.

Working at the Ethnic Affairs Commission at the time as its Publicity and Public Relations Officer, I was entrusted with the role of Producer of the "CONCERT - Celebrating the Friendship City Relationship between Melbourne and Thessaloniki" at the Melbourne Concert Hall on 20 March 1984.



From left to right: Gary Sheppard Chairman Ethnic Affairs Commission, Mr Theocharis Manavis Mayor of the City of Thessaloniki and Christos Ioannides Composer/Singer at the Concert on 20 March 1984

The Concert was a showcase of both traditional and modern songs and dances. Tassos Ioannides was the Musical Director/Conductor with his brother Christos composing a special Overture for the night "Taxidi". Singers on the night included George Malliaros, Rena Hatzilepou, Sandy Kallinikos and Michael Kyrios. There was also participation by the Olympia Dance Theatre, the Australian Children's Choir and the Dance Factory.

In his speech Peter Spyker MP Minister for Ethnic Affairs said, "The twinning of Melbourne and Thessaloniki is an historic occasion and an official recognition of the contribution made by the people of Greek origin to the social and economic development of this State."

The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of Melbourne Cr Kevin Chamberlin continued by saying, "The City of Melbourne is looking forward to the positive benefits which will flow from the mutual exchange

and co-operation inherent in our new Friendship City Relationship. I believe that through such exchange and co-operation can come mutual trust, friendship and understanding, on both a personal and civic level, and the foundations for greater international harmony.”



Guests at the Concert on 20 March 1984 including Mr Theo Sidiropoulos MP and Noulie Skoumbas SBS TV Presenter

Mr Theocharis Manavis Mayor of Thessaloniki followed by saying, “This Sister City Relationship will create the conditions for the development and tightening of the links and the co-operation between their citizens, within the frames of the traditional Friendship Relationship and co-operation of the people of Australia and Greece.”

Since 1984 there have been several delegations from Thessaloniki visit Melbourne and vice versa. Apart from the Covid years, there have been many events celebrating the link between our two great cities and communities, such as art exhibitions, book launches, lectures, dinners, student visits and of course the annual festival at Federation Square. Melbourne’s Thessaloniki Association has been instrumental in organizing these events under its auspice, with the support of the City of Melbourne.

Personally, I was involved with the Thessaloniki Association as an Executive Member and then as its Vice President from 2009 till 2016. We hosted two delegations during that time. One for the 25th Anniversary and the other for the 30th Anniversary. Both delegations met with both Councillors and Council Officers as well as many Greek organisations.

One of the many projects undertaken by the Thessaloniki Association to celebrate the relationship was the “White Tower Melbourne Project”. This multi-faceted community project brought together members of the Thessaloniki and wider community to create a scaled replica of the White Tower, Thessaloniki’s most famous landmark.

The replica comprised thousands of crocheted white flowers (laurels), representing the national flower of Greece, the emblem of prosperity and fame. These flowers were crocheted by members of the Greek and broader Australian communities. There was also participation from people in Athens and Thessaloniki.

I was overwhelmed and had not anticipated such a positive response.

The Thessaloniki Association has always supported these initiatives and has been keen to find new ways to re-vitalize awareness of the link between Thessaloniki and Melbourne.



Greek dancers at the Festival celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Melbourne/Thessaloniki sister city relationship at Federation Square

Melbourne hosts the largest Greek speaking population outside of Europe. It was appropriate therefore that it have a strong and vibrant sister city relationship with a suitable Greek partner.

Thessaloniki became the first European sister city to Melbourne.

Over the years this relationship has strengthened the very close bonds which already existed between Australia and Greece and has created an ideal cultural bridge between our two magnificent cities.



Christina Despoteris OAM President Sister Cities Australia and Former Lord Mayor of Melbourne Cr Kevin Chamberlain at a recent reception at the Royal Thai Consulate General in Melbourne

Forty years on, let's all take the opportunity to celebrate this amazing connection.

I look forward to the many events which will hopefully be organized during the year to celebrate such an exceptional milestone.

On behalf of Sister Cities Australia, I would like to take this opportunity to wish the City of Melbourne and the City of Thessaloniki all the very best for a most successful 40th Anniversary Celebration.

New National Secretary

I am very pleased to announce and welcome Peter Filmer OAM as the new National Secretary of Sister Cities Australia. Peter put his hand up at our recent meeting in Melbourne to take on this very important role. I look forward to working closely with Peter to continue the work of SCA in the future.

National Awards

SCA is looking forward to another successful National Awards Program in 2024. Members will be receiving the new Nomination Forms and Handbook in the near future.

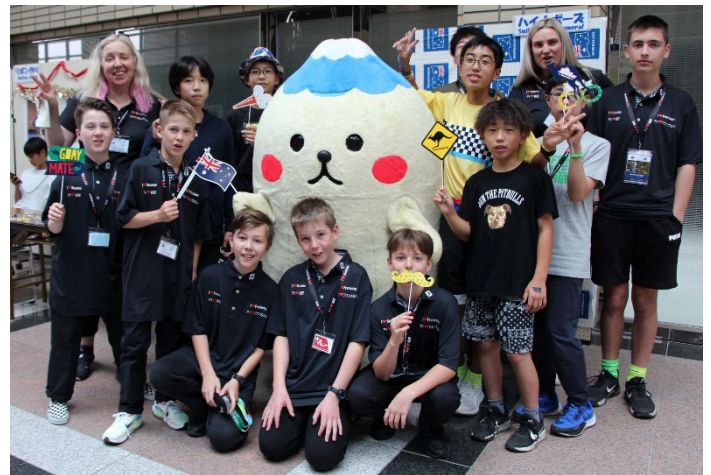
Our Program for 2024

SCA is in the process of finalizing the Program for 2024. Members again will be advised accordingly.

Christina Despoteris OAM
President Sister Cities Australia

Happy Anniversary ***Susono and Frankston***

On 22 February Frankston and Susono celebrated the 42nd anniversary of its sister city relationship which officially commenced in 1982 after delegation visits to each city occurred the previous year.



In that time there have been many delegation tours, homestay visits, student exchanges, festivals and fairs, speech contests, welcome and farewell parties, ceremonies, music, dancing and so much more.



The first post-COVID delegation visit was held in October 2023 when 36 Frankston delegates were warmly welcomed back to Susono for 4 wonderful days, which included a very successful Australian Fair!

The friendships developed remain as strong as ever, due in no small part to the fact that the relationship is managed by passionate, volunteer citizens in both cities, plus the on-going support of Frankston and Susono City Councils.



Happy anniversary, and here's to many more!

Strengthening Global Bonds: Promoting Sister Cities at the Point Cook Multicultural Festival

Each year, thousands flock to the Wyndham Multicultural Lunar Festival which is held in the Point Cook Town Centre. With beautiful weather, a jam-packed program including over 90 stage performances, a boulevard of stalls and a stellar fireworks finale, this one-day event saw an estimated 20,000 residents, families and friends celebrating Wyndham's multicultural community.

Wyndham is fortunate to have a culturally rich, diverse, rapidly growing and relatively young community. Approximately 48% of the residents were born overseas and 197 different languages are spoken in Wyndham homes. With a population of over 300,000, the City warmly welcomes new faces, celebrates its diversity and encourages residents to maintain their global connections.



So, what a great opportunity Sunday 18 February presented for staff to join in the festivities and actively promote its Sister City relationships!

Council staff chatted with residents who were thrilled to learn about Wyndham's three international relationships: Chiryu-Japan, Changzhou-China and Costa Mesa California.



Children coloured in flags or images from the various cities whilst parents learnt more. And all received a little something to take home to remind them of our global connections: branded fan, yo-yo or notepad "Celebrating Wyndham's Sister Cities".

Mildura Sister City Association



Wyndham City will continue to engage community in its international relationships and activities recognising they are important in the strengthening and development of relationships for mutually beneficial outcomes.



Lesley Rogan Senior Advisor Civic Projects including Sister City Relationships at the Point Cook Multicultural Festival



If Covid taught us anything, it was to use modern technology to communicate even with the furthest places on earth.

More and more sister city relationships are being re-ignited via the use of Zoom.

Recently the Mildura Sister City Association connected with their sister city Upland via this means.



This is what they posted on their facebook page recently.

“Another special "Visit" with our Upland friends.”

Looking forward to the outcomes of their meeting.



Frankston Taiko (Japanese) Drumming

The Frankston Susono Friendship Association (FSFA) is a group of passionate and dedicated community volunteers who manage the sister city relationship with Susono on behalf of the Frankston City Council. Susono is located at the foot of Mount Fuji, about 95 kilometres south-west of Tokyo, and both cities celebrated the 42nd anniversary of their enduring friendship on 22nd February this year.

FSFA aims to promote Japanese culture, language, handicrafts, music and food by holding Japanese Festivals, delegation visits and exchanges between the cities, an annual Japanese Speech Contest for primary and secondary students, an annual Hanami (flower viewing) Party, maintaining the Japanese Garden at Frankston High School and in mid-2023 commenced the Frankston Taiko Drumming group.



The group meets twice a month on a Sunday morning for a lesson, and an additional practice session is held a fortnight later. Lessons are provided by Toshi Sakamoto from *Wadaiko Rindo*, a well-known taiko group who have performed at the Frankston Waterfront Festival, Richmond FC home games, Japanese Festivals, Moomba, the opening of Uniqlo in Frankston, and many other Melbourne events.

Age is no barrier as participants enjoy the fun of learning Japanese drumming, plus the social connection, moderate exercise and other benefits that taiko provides. Some members were part of the Frankston Delegation who travelled to Susono in October 2023 and were joined by students from Derinya Primary School to perform at the Australian Fair. The group also held a successful 'Come 'N' Try Taiko' event at Ballam Park and a 'Bring A Friend' lesson during April to further promote taiko drumming in the Frankston community.

If you would like to experience the power, passion and energy that is taiko, contact Bev on 0413 777 313 or frankston.susono@gmail.com for further details.

Sister Cities - Borodyanka Council in Ukraine and City of Tea Tree Gully in South Australia

In a show of solidarity, the City of Tea Tree Gully signed a sister city agreement with Ukrainian town, Borodyanka in May 2023.

The sister city agreement, the first between an Australian and Ukrainian city, aims to foster cultural exchange and support.

Located near Kyiv, Borodyanka is a suburban town with a population of about 24,000 residents who continue to endure the devastating impact of war. The Russian onslaught has left a trail of destruction, resulting in the displacement of about 3,000 residents. Borodyanka is important to Ukraine as it is on the freight and logistics route to Warsaw.

Cr Jessica Hawkvelt, who brought the initiative to Council, emphasised the importance of standing with Borodyanka.

"Though our new friends may be across the world, in a modern digital world, there are many ways we can offer our friendship, support, strength and share knowledge between our two cities. I am excited to see what opportunities will come of our relationship with Borodyanka."

Source: <https://www.teatreegully.sa.gov.au/Council-business-news-and-information/Sister-Cities>



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Sister Cities Australia

Sister Cities Australia Inc. (SCA) is an association of cities, towns, shires, ports and even states that have a Sister City relationship. SCA also takes a role in matching cities and towns in Australia with cities and towns both from overseas and within Australia seeking a sister city relationship. SCA is also the link between an Australian sister city or town and the many projects and ideas that have been experienced here and abroad.

Many cities, municipalities and shires in Australia have at least one sister city relationship with a city or town overseas, or within Australia with many have multiple affiliations.

The objective of **Sister Cities Australia** is to provide an umbrella of support and to promote these affiliations. SCA also aims to provide a forum for cultural, economic and educational interchange between communities and to encourage friendship, co-operation and understanding to improve peaceful co-existence worldwide.

