



# BRIDGES TO THE WORLD

## President's Message

### 2020-2021 SCAS Board of Directors

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**Anahi Abassy**  
Youth Ambassador



Usually, at the end of the year we get to look back at all the wonderful things we've done and share photographs of our luncheons, visits, and other events.

But, as I look back on this year, I couldn't be more proud of how the SCAS Board Members have adapted and developed new ways to connect with each other, our Sister City Partners, and our Members.

Although no longer able to travel (to our Sarasota office or to Sister City) we have been able to conduct virtual Board Meetings and Sister City to Sister City Meetings. Plus, like every other group, we continue to explore ways to provide high quality virtual events, even after COVID precaution measures are relaxed. It provides us the opportunity to connect to members and the public even if they are not physically here on the Gulf Coast.

Our City Directors, although "benched", have not been idle. Not only have they volunteered to conduct Virtual Presentations as part of our "Conversation With..." series, when our Sister City students faced missing out on the FST Write-a-Play competition, the CDs developed a Video and Photography Competition which highlights each of our Sister Cities. We hope to share the winning entries on a virtual presentation to the winners.

**SCAS City Directors  
2020-2021**

Dunfermline, Scotland  
**Pauline Mitchell (CD)**  
**Karen Malesky (ACD)**

Merida, Mexico  
**Michael Fehily (CD)**  
**Grisell Aleman (ACD)**

Perpignan, France  
**Marie des Neiges  
Grossas (CD)**

Rapperswill-Jona,  
Switzerland  
**Nelly Camardo (CD)**  
**Charlotte Hull (ACD)**

Tel Mond, Israel  
**Jonathan Katz (CD)**  
**Alice Cotman (ACD)**  
**Kim Sheintal (ACD)**

Vladimir, Russia  
**Miriam Kramer (CD)**

Xiamen, China  
**Douglas Sparks (CD)**  
**Larry Bennison (ACD)**  
**Duane Finger (ACD)**

Busseto, Italy  
**Phillip Gordon (CD)**  
**Kenney DeCamp (ACD)**  
**Mirco Chiodi (ACD)**

Miriam Kramer, CD for Vladimir, Russia has been named VP, Sister and Candidate Cities. Richard and Betty Greenspan have joined the SCAS Board as VP, Sports and VP, Fundraising and Beth Hullinger has rejoined the Board as our new Secretary. Thanks to all of you for your continued support.

City Director, Philip Gordon, took on the task of launching a fundraiser for the Villa Verdi, located in our newest Friendship City, Busseto, Italy. Each of our City Directors is working with their contacts in their City to help SCAS create an inspiring promotional video. Not an easy feat while most of the world still has restrictions on movement. But it is this person-to-person effort that makes our organization work both locally and worldwide.

Our partnership with the City of Sarasota was renewed in September and the new Mayor, Hagen Brody has stated his commitment to becoming involved and learning about Sister Cities Association of Sarasota first-hand by attending Board Meetings and participating in exchange activities beginning with our 10-Year Signing Anniversary with Merida, Mexico in December.

I don't know about you, but I am ready to say "Goodbye" to 2020 and, "Hello 2021!"

We have much to look forward to. Be on the lookout for our 2021 calendar of events and as always stay safe and smile.



## Meet our Youth Ambassador Anahi Abbasy



Youth Ambassador is a member of SCAS Executive Board appointed annually by the County Youth Development organization. He/She representing the views and interest of youth on the Board of Directors and reports to our Vice President of Education. Youth Ambassador brings forward opportunities for SCAS involvement in youth initiatives, and carrying through the projects assigned by the Board, with the view to increasing awareness and expertise in aspects of not-for-profit management.

Here is an interview with our newly appointed Youth Ambassador Anahi Abbasi.

Anahi is a Senior at Sarasota High School, born and raised in Honduras, and moved to Sarasota two years ago.

### ***You are a youth ambassador, how did that come about?***

I learned about youth leadership positions through the STAR program at the Boys and Girls club, where they teach us how to give back to our community and become better leaders. They provided us with volunteer hours as well and a list of associations with available youth leadership positions. Once I saw SCAS had to do with different cities all across the world I had to sign up.

### ***Did you hear about SCAS before you heard about this opening?***

No, I heard about SCAS through the Boys and Girls Club.

### ***What areas are the most interesting to you in SCAS?***

Definitely the Sister Cities all over the world, like France, Israel and Russia. I like to travel and when I heard about we have members traveling to our Sister Cities and them coming to our city, my interest grew even more! I want to travel the world, get to know about SCAS Sister Cities.

### ***What's your interest and passion?***

One of my passions is helping others, I enjoy helping others and making their day even in the smallest details possible. I also love to travel, get to know new cultures and their different traditions and local foods!

### ***What is your expectation in this role?***

I hope to connect the youth of Sarasota with the youth of our Sister Cities, to attract other young people to our beautiful city with the same travelling passion that I have; be a voice for our young people.

### ***Do you have someone you look up to as a role model when thinking of people to people diplomacy?***

I admire Malala Yousafzai. She's a strong woman who fought for her own education rights at a very young age and continues to give motivational inspiring speeches that influence youth and others.

## Take a Walk in the Park

By Ray Young, VP Planning & Programs

Many of us have put a greater focus on outdoor activities during this difficult period of time. It is a great opportunity to visit our Sarasota Sister City Ceremonial Tree Walk in Bayfront Park, just north of O'Leary's Tiki Bar & Grill, where we have planted a row of mainly Mahogany trees, with each tree representing a new Sarasota Sister City. Mahogany is native to the Americas and even to south Florida. The wood is desired for the appealing reddish-brown color. The tree is most easily identified when it produces the "sky fruit," shown below, which are 16-inch capsules containing 70 winged seeds!

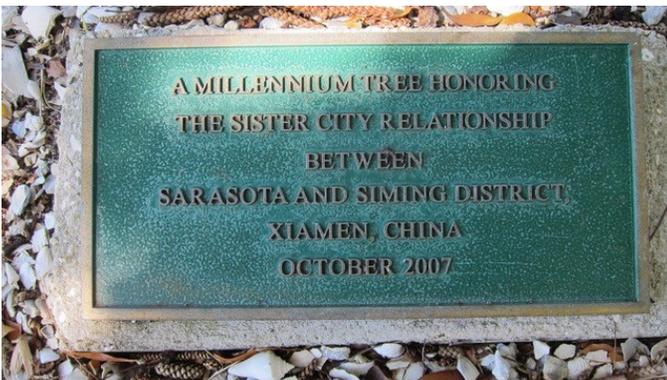


The Tree Walk crosses the island with signage at each end describing our mission of Peace and Understanding and listing our eight sister cities. Under each tree is a plaque with the name of the sister city and the date the city became a part of our program. Whenever we have a visiting delegation from one of our sister cities we take them to our Tree Walk in Bayfront Park and their sense of pride is palpable when they realize their city has a special presence in our city.

I thought Sarasota's Sister City Tree Walk was unique, but on a trip to New Zealand several years ago I wandered into the Christchurch city park and saw several trees planted with plaques for their sister cities. Indeed, Christchurch has a designated Sister City Garden with botanical collections representing the landscape in each of their sister cities.

A number of other cities have planted trees in their parks and botanical gardens in dedication ceremonies for sister cities including, Norfolk, VA for 60 years of friendship with Miyoshi, Japan; Monroe, MI with Hofu, Japan and Edmonds, WA with Hekinan, Japan. Hundreds of Cherry trees in Columbus, IN were donated by their sister city of Miyoshi, Japan and the Japanese city of Iwamizawa donated so many trees to Pocatello, ID, that they named the area Sister City Park!

So don't miss an opportunity to stroll through our special Sister City Tree Walk and reflect on our connections to our city and to the friendly people in our Sister Cities and our continued mission for Peace and Understanding in the World.

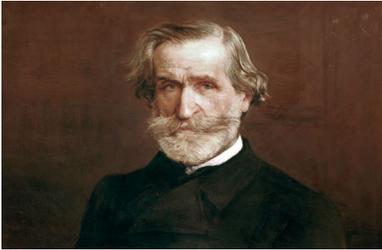


## BUSSETO, ITALY

### BIRTHPLACE OF GIUSEPPE VERDI

*By Phillip Gordon, SCAS City Director of Busseto, Italy*

**Giuseppe Verdi** was born in Roncole di Busseto on 10 October 1813 in a small farmhouse, now a national monument. After learning to play the organ by age seven, Verdi's gift for music was already apparent. When he was ten years old, Verdi's parents arranged for the boy to attend school in Busseto. Antonio Barezzi, the director of the Busseto Philharmonic, recognized Verdi's musical talents and took him under his wing and offered him lodging at his palatial home. Barezzi became Verdi's patron and helped him throughout the early part of his career. During his stay at Casa Barezzi, Verdi gave piano lessons to Antonio's daughter, Margherita, who he later married. Sadly, it was a short-lived marriage as she died just two years after they married.



Verdi's first major success was *Nabucco*, performed at La Scala opera house in Milan, which established him as one of the greatest composers of the time; so much so that he was commissioned one or more works a year by the major Italian and European theaters.

He moved to Paris in 1847 and began to live with Giuseppina Strepponi, a very well-known soprano at that time. They returned to Busseto two years later, where they lived in Palazzo Orlandi until 1851. They subsequently moved to the farmhouse Verdi purchased in nearby Sant'Agata which, over time, the Maestro transformed into the splendid villa that can be visited today. They finally married in 1859 in Collonges-sous-Salève, in Savoy, in absolute secrecy. They had no children and decided to raise little Maria Filomena Verdi, the daughter of a poor cousin of the Roncole family, later named universal heir.



Verdi reached the peak of the Italian melodramatic essence with the popular trilogy *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore*, *La Traviata* and *Aida*. Verdi died in Milan on January 27, 1901 in the room of his apartment at the Grand Hotel de Milan.

Many of the landmark buildings in Busseto provide insight - in one way or other - related to the life and fame of Giuseppe Verdi. Some of the more interesting sites to visit include Villa Verdi, Teatro Verdi, Casa Barezzi and - in nearby Sant'Agata – the house and now museum of Verdi's birthplace. However, there are other magnificent sites to visit: the Church and Monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli. The church and convent date back to the 15th century. Inside the monastery there are four chapels, beautiful ceiling frescoes, and other magnificent pieces of religious art.



Busseto is also renowned for its gastronomy. The town is located within the province of Emilia-Romagna, considered the culinary heart of Italy. One specialty food much sought-after by foodies is Culatello di Zibello, which is basically a superior prosciutto. Busseto is still today one of only eight villages that has the exclusivity to produce this prized delicacy. The town is located very near the city of Parma, famous for its prosciutto and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. Additionally, there are many facilities surrounding Busseto that produce both the famous Balsamic Vinegar, which is nearly exclusive to Emilia-Romagna, and also vineyards that produce quality olive oil.

Busseto may well be a small town but it offers many fascinating landmarks and a rich history of its famous citizen – Maestro Giuseppe Verdi; and is well-known for its prized gastronomic products.

## Save Villa Verdi



Villa Verdi is the home of world-renowned classical composer, Giuseppe Verdi, located in our newest Friendship City of Busseto, Italy.

The Villa Verdi – now a museum – needs serious restoration. Maestro Verdi’s descendants that manage the Villa are requesting the public’s help to save it.

Due to the loss of revenue from visitor entrance fees caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and lack of funding from the Italian government, the Verdi family has requested donations to support its restoration efforts. These funds will allow the museum to continue to showcase the beautiful legacy of Verdi’s life and classical works.

Without funding, Villa Verdi could be closed permanently to the public. The SCAS Board wishes to help prevent an essential cultural landmark from falling into grave disrepair.

Please visit our website ([www.sarasotasistercities.org](http://www.sarasotasistercities.org)) or click on the picture below – to access more information on the dedicated page of this Fund-Raising Campaign.

The Fund-Raising Campaign ends on Dec 31. If you like, you may make your contribution now by clicking the donate button here:



# Mérida

## A VISIT TO REMEMBER

BY **Grisell Aleman**, *Assistant City Director of Mérida, Mexico*



November was a productive month for the Sister Cities Association of Sarasota. I was able to return to Mérida Yucatán México. My mother lives there and I visited her for three weeks. While I spent time with my mother, I was also able to connect with various authorities from the government in person and attend Zoom meetings as well thanks to Mike Fehily, the City Director of Mérida, Yucatán, México.

Something I noticed while driving and walking through the city which surprised me were all the measures and precautions taken by everyone to protect people from COVID-19. Like I reported last September, Mérida was in an **Orange** state but now is currently in **Yellow** (a better position), due to everyone wearing face masks in public, both inside and outside.



### Here are some of the activities I was able to accomplish during this trip:

The first meeting I had was with Eduardo Seijo Solis, Director of Economic Development and Tourism of the City Council, and Julio Sauma Castillo, Secretary of Citizen Participation of Mérida. We had a great meeting as they wanted to reaffirm and work more to strengthen the bonds of the sister cities. The following was mentioned during the meeting:



The celebration of the Tenth Anniversary of the Sister Cities Association between Sarasota and Mérida that will be held virtually in early December, with the presence of the mayors and authorities of both cities in which the bonds of sisterhood will be reaffirmed.

Eduardo Seijo invited Sarasota to participate in the virtual fair of Tunich <http://www.merida.gob.mx/tunich/> that normally takes place every year. This occasion will be in virtual form from December 13 to 20, in which we will have a space to promote the Sister Cities Association of Sarasota.





We received support from Eduardo to make the promotional video of Bridges to Peace and Understanding. We completed the project with the help of the famous chef Roberto Solis who is currently featured in Netflix.

<p>La Asociación de Ciudades Hermanas de Sarasota</p> <p>&amp;</p> <p>visit Mérida mx</p>	<p>Invitan a participar a camarógrafos, aficionados o profesionales de cualquier edad para capturar en video la escencia y el espíritu de su ciudad!</p>
<p>Habrán premios para los primeros 3 lugares</p> <p>1°.- 100 USD 2°.- 50 USD 3°.- 25 USD</p> <p>Mérida contará con un premio adicional</p>	

The international video contest hosted by the Association of Sister Cities of Sarasota is currently being advertised with the help and promotion of the Town Council of Mérida through social media and email.

<https://twitter.com/VisitMeridaMx/status/1331625784784654337>

<https://www.facebook.com/VisitMeridaMx/posts/2847413022215029>

My second meeting was with Erica Millet Corona, Secretary of Culture and Arts of the State and Enrique Sauri López, head of the Public Relations Department. <http://cultura.yucatan.gob.mx/>

Erica Millet would like to visit Sarasota soon. She is extremely interested in getting to know the city, particularly the Circus Arts Conservatory for a possible exchange of artists, the Ringling Museum to meet Elizabeth Doud and the Mote Marine Aquarium. She is also hoping to attend any other cultural event that could be held during her stay.

We talked about the City of Sarasota possibly inviting and hosting Mérida's Folk Ballet, showcasing Yucatecan culture through traditional dance.

They are extremely interested in joining the virtual Celebration of the Tenth Anniversary that will be held to commemorate the union of the Sister Cities in early December 2020.

Enrique Sauri, the Director of Public Relations will be the contact person communicating exchanges between the Sister Cities.





My third meeting was a Zoom meeting with the Consul General Courtney Beale and Mike Fehily. The following was mentioned:

A new \$150 million American consulate is being constructed in Mérida.

We invited her to participate in the Zoom meeting of the Tenth Anniversary in which she gladly accepted our invitation.

She mentioned Mérida will have a new consul next year.

Another great experience I was fortunately able to attend included a vacation with the travel agency Mundo Maya Tours and Excursions <https://www.facebook.com/mundomayatours>. They had strict measures and protocols to prevent COVID-19 during the three tours I took with them, always wearing a mask, using hand sanitizing and shoe cleaning. The experience was unforgettable! We visited cenotes (sinkholes), archeological sites, churches, towns, and haciendas. I learned and relived history through all the wonderful and informative explanations of the different sites we visited. Their travel agency is focused on cultural tourism and they promote destinations with ancestral wealth, historic, gastronomic, and natural immersion experiences.



## Upcoming Events



January 14, 2021

### **Vladimir Presentation via Zoom**

A link will be provided at a later date

Time: 4:00 pm

Presenter: Miriam Kramer, SCAS City Director of Vladimir, Russia

January 20, 2021



**SCAS MEMBER SOCIALLY DISTANCED  
SUNSET HAPPY HOUR  
TURTLE BEACH, SIESTA KEY, SARASOTA, FL  
WEDNESDAY 1.20.21 | 4:30PM**

**BYO... BEACH CHAIR, REFRESHMENTS, SNACK, MASK**

**NOLLAIG CHRIDHEIL! MERRY CHRISTMAS!!**

### ***Christmas Customs of SCOTLAND***

***In Scotland religious services and quiet family gatherings dominate the celebration of Christ's birth.***

***Hogmanay, New year's Eve is a time for joyous revelry. At midnight, church bells ring as people join hands and sing "Auld Lang Syne" in remembrance of friends past and present.***

***The first person to cross the threshold after midnight is called the first-footer, and traditionally brings gifts of coal , bread, money or salt to ensure warmth, food and wealth for the coming year.***

***The Scottish wisely believe that the year is best begun this way:***

***Rise early, pay your debts and borrow no more. Dine well and cheerfully resolve to work hard.***

~~~~ from Pauline Mitchell, SCAS City Director of Dunfermline, Scotland

