

Fall 2025

What's the difference between a sister city and a project city?

Sister and Project Cities are national initiatives to develop economic, cultural, and technical exchanges between US cities, counties, and states with corresponding communities worldwide. Sister Cities promote peace through people-to-people relationships. Project cities are partnerships with other cities to foster growth towards a specific goal. Rochester has two other sister cities besides Siheung: Moosburg, Germany and Xianyang, China. A sister city relationship with Tbong Khmum Province, Cambodia is also in the works.

The project city relationship between Rochester and Akita, Japan, focuses on promoting peace. Rochester's other project city is Münster, Germany, with whom we exchange ideas about energy.



Mayor Norton, Mayor Lim, and City Council Chairwoman Oh in Siheung, South Korea

A Summer of connection with Sister and Project Cities

This summer saw the rejuvenation of relationships between the city of Rochester and our sister city of Siheung, South Korea as well as our project city, Akita, Japan.

In June of this year, Winona State University professor Joel Traver led a group of students to Siheung, South Korea on a short-term study abroad program. In the final days of the program, they were joined by Mayor Kim Norton as well as the mayor of Siheung, Lim Byeong Taek. Through interpreters, the students shared a presentation with the Siheung City Council on Winona State University, and the mayors discussed the commonalities between Rochester and Siheung, particularly their biomedical enterprises. The group also enjoyed traditional Korean food and music as well as a short trip to Turtle Island, where they learned about Siheung's efforts to develop tourism.

While the next WSU trip to Rochester is currently slated for Summer 2027, Mayor Lim has expressed interest in visiting Rochester in 2026.

In August, a delegation comprised of approximately twenty Rochester community members, including Council Member Nick Miller and Mayor Norton, visited Japan. In addition to spending time in Tokyo and Hiroshima, the delegation also visited Rochester's

project city, Akita, where they were greeted by city officials with waving and cheering. The US flag was flown at City Hall in honor of their visit, and the group took part in a formal reception, cultural performances by local students, and a traditional tea ceremony.

Jun Numaya, the Mayor of Akita, commented in his greetings to the group, **"It is significant that you have visited Akita City, the site of Japan's last air raid, this year, marking 80 years since the end of the war. I hope this will be the first step in future exchanges."**

Indeed, Mayor Numaya expressed interest in visiting Rochester, as a sitting mayor has not visited Rochester in an official capacity since the retirement of Mayor Hazama in the mid-1990s. The local newspaper in Akita covered the delegation's visit. The headline read, "Delegation from Rochester, USA visits Akita, Renewing Old Friendships from the 90s." The visit was also broadcast on the local TV news.

Rochester has had a formal sister city relationship with Siheung since 2008. The relationship with Akita was established by an exchange project organized by the Akita Junior Chamber of Commerce in 1992.

STAY TUNED! In October, the mayor visited our sister city in Xianyang, China. A full report of that visit will be included in the winter newsletter.

Willkommen to our friends from Münster!

On September 23, a delegation from Münster and North Rhine-Westphalia visited Rochester to exchange ideas about development, infrastructure, and biking paths. After presentations by both the city and the county, the group visited Peace Plaza and Discovery Square. They enjoyed walking from place to place in our skyway system.

Oliver Krischner, minister of environment, nature protection and transportation, told the Post Bulletin, "We have a very good partnership between North Rhine Westphalia and Minnesota. Rochester is definitely one of the most important towns."

The group was greeted by the Mayor and members of the International Relations Committee, who met them in front of City Hall while waving German flags. The group responded by waving their own Minnesota state flags.

IN RELATED NEWS:

Mayor Norton will be hosting a trip to Moosburg and Münster among other cities in Germany. The trip is tentatively scheduled for June 2026. To learn more (or come along), visit the brochure here: tinyurl.com/KNSG2026 or photograph the QR code below!



This summer and early fall, International Relations Committee members took part many celebrations of the diverse cultures that make up the Rochester community.

In July, the Indian Cultural Association of Minnesota hosted the Festival of Colors in Peace Plaza. The event included a 5K, food mela, and color splash.

The color splash tradition originates in the Hindu festival of Holi, in which participants throw handfuls of colorful powder in the air and at one another to celebrate the coming of spring. While the Holi festival takes place in March, ICAM holds its color splash Utsav (Hindi for festival) in the more Minnesota weather-friendly month of July.

This year, the International Relations Committee hosted a booth at ICAM in which visitors learned how to say the word "peace" in various languages around the world by spinning a translation wheel. The booth was well-received by attendees.

In September, the International Relations Committee participated in two more festivals, LatinoFest and Oktoberfest.

LatinoFest is an annual festival hosted by the Alliance of Chicanos, Hispanics, and Latin Americans (ACHLA). This year, the event took place in Peace Plaza and the Chateau Theatre. The event included more than 20 performances and more than 60 vendors. Over 2,500 people attended the event.

The International Relations Committee staffed a booth at the event at which information was provided about the committee and Rochester's sister cities.

Oktoberfest, which featured live music and vendors, was hosted by DBS Group in downtown Rochester. The International Relations Committee hosted a booth at which donations were collected for projects supporting our mission. Necklaces made of pretzels and Oktoberfest buttons were also distributed, and guests enjoyed taking photos with German-themed props.

Celebrating a globally diverse Rochester



In other news...

-Mayor Norton is leading a delegation to China this fall as part of the Mayors for Peace organization. She will also visit Rochester's sister city of Xianyang.

-The Rochester City Council approved a one-time \$20,000 start-up fund for the IRC. We are grateful to City Council and the people of Rochester for supporting the values of cultural exchange.

-The International Relations Committee is searching for an Events Coordinator to research international events in Rochester and organize IRC's participation in these events. If you are interested in this volunteer role, email mayor@rochestermn.gov for more details.