

EUGENE SISTER CITY PROGRAM SUFFERS FROM BUDGET CUTS

The April 25 earthquake that struck near Kathmandu, Nepal, followed by a second earthquake near Mount Everest on May 12, brought the tiny South Asian country to the forefront of the national conscience and brought out Eugene's generous donors.

Eugene has had special ties to Kathmandu since 1975, when the two cities partnered through Sister Cities International. Recent confusion over the nonprofit status of Eugene-Kathmandu Sister City Association, which was accepting donations through the Kathmandu Relief website, has called attention to the sister city program and its lack of funding.

Although the Eugene City Council recently voted to donate \$50,000 for disaster relief to Kathmandu, the sister city program itself has witnessed a series of budget cuts since 2002, when Eugene "drastically" reduced funding for the program, according to Ki-Won Rhew, president of the Eugene Sister City Organization. Since that time, the program has relied on fundraising to supplement the costs of travel and communication.

Eugene has three other sister cities: Kakegawa, Japan; Jinju, South Korea; and Irkutsk, Russia. Every sister city has a committee, comprised of volunteers, that facilitates exchanges of delegates between the cities.

According to a 2015 report from the Eugene Kakegawa Sister City Committee, the city allocated \$2,500 for the 2014-15 year. In past years, the report says, the city has allocated \$7,000 per year, and the committee had set a budget of \$4,865 for 2014-15.

"Our budget for the normal year predicts \$2,750 in costs to host the Inbound Adult Delegation," the report says. "So total funding of \$2,500 isn't adequate to act as official hosts during the normal year."

But this isn't a normal year. On May 27, the mayor of Kakegawa and his wife are scheduled to visit Eugene in a tour of the city, including a visit to Shasta Middle School, which has a sister school relationship with Japan's Kakegawa North.

Because sister city mayors rarely visit, 'this visit with the mayor is a special occasion.'

— JAMES KNEPLER, PRESIDENT OF THE EUGENE KAKEGAWA SISTER CITY COMMITTEE

Eugene for immersion," Knepler says.

He adds that those involved in the sister city program are making do and appreciate Eugene's ongoing support of the program.

The Eugene Kathmandu Sister City Association (EKSCA) has also felt the impact of funding reduction, which was tied to the temporary loss of tax-exempt status. Delegates visited Kathmandu in 2000 but didn't visit again until 2014, says Dennis Ramsey, president of EKSCA.

Kathmandu Relief reports on its website that the sister city organization's tax-exempt status is being reinstated and all donations will go directly to Kathmandu relief efforts. It has raised more than \$20,000 and has a goal of \$100,000. — Mike Bivins



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Cross-Cultural Communication

May 29,* 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
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June 4,* 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
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