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## U.S. Rotarians help Afghan city end 20-year isolation

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Rotary International

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The Rotary Club of La Jolla Golden Triangle, California, USA, recently helped build a school in Jalalabad, Afghanistan.

Rotarians have been closely involved with development efforts in Afghanistan for the past 20 years, at first mostly through [polio eradication](#) efforts and more recently by bringing humanitarian aid to hundreds of thousands of Afghans who fled the war against the Taliban in 2001 and helping to resettle refugees returning to the country.

Now, fresh from supporting projects such as health care provision and the building and

rehabilitation of educational institutions in postwar Afghanistan, some U.S. Rotarians have added to their list of achievements helping the Central Asian country break its 20-year isolation. Through their efforts, the Afghan city of Jalalabad and the U.S. city of San Diego, California, have become sister cities. The process culminated on 28 June when the San Diego City Council approved a resolution recognizing the sister city relationship with citizens of Jalalabad.

Jalalabad, one of Afghanistan's largest cities, is the capital of Nangarhar Province, and is situated near the Khyber Pass. The population of Nangarhar is three

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million; Jalalabad proper has several hundred thousand residents.

"This is one of the final steps in an internationally successful and personally rewarding effort," says Steve Brown of the Rotary Club of La Jolla Golden Triangle, who has led several humanitarian missions to Afghanistan. "It's important for people from different cultures, and from different parts of the world, to meet and understand each other. Linking San Diego and Jalalabad offers opportunities at this critical time in history."

"Our sister city program is intended to promote peace and prosperity through interaction and understanding between cultures," says San Diego Mayor Dick Murphy. "This new relationship with Jalalabad offers us an excellent opportunity to pursue those worthy goals."

In 2002 Brown and Flouran Wali, a local Afghan American, explored establishing a school in Jalalabad as a result of fellow Rotarian Fary Moini's work with Afghan refugees in Peshawar, Pakistan. Moini learned of the refugees' desire for a school in Jalalabad, the home where many would return following the end of war in 2001.

In November 2002, Brown, Moini, and Wali traveled to Jalalabad. They were warmly received by government officials and citizens and were encouraged to develop the school. They also learned of needs at Nangarhar University, with its 3,000 students and 250 faculty members.

James Ritchie, a San Diego County resident and friend of Jalalabad Mayor Abdul Razzaq Aarsalai, initiated the idea of a sister city pairing. Brown and Ritchie approached Murphy, who wrote a letter of invitation to the Jalalabad mayor. Aarsalai responded enthusiastically. Committees in both cities formed in fall 2003 to develop the program.

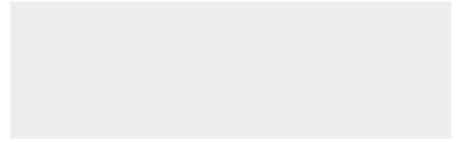
Brown, Moini, San Diego State University professor Steve Spencer, and Farid Saydee, a leader in the local Afghan American community, returned to Jalalabad in March 2004 and met with Aarsalai and his sister city committee. Brown reported back to San Diego's International Sister Cities Corporation, which approved a resolution for the relationship to develop. Following the unanimous recommendation of San Diego's International Affairs Committee, the matter came to the San Diego City Council for final approval on 28 June.



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