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**Birmingham Sister Cities Commission wins *Sister Cities International's*  
Best Overall Program Award**

WASHINGTON, DC – Birmingham Sister Cities Commission has won *Sister Cities International's* 2011 Best Overall Program Award for a city with a population between 100,001 and 300,000. The award recognizes sister city programs that demonstrate outstanding accomplishments in advancing the goals and mission of the sister cities movement.

In 2011, Birmingham Sister Cities Commission successfully conducted multi-faceted projects with its sister cities. The Commission hosted the Fourth Open World program on the theme "Accountable Governance" with participants from sister city Vinnytsia, Ukraine. A delegation of six high school students and two chaperones visited sister city Winneba, Ghana to conduct a service project.

An E-Pal program with Rosh Ha'ayin, Israel now includes four schools in Birmingham and two in Rosh Ha'ayin. Over 300 students communicate each week via email and video conference. The Commission also sent two local college graduates to Hitachi, Japan for two years as English teachers.

As a result of a delegation visit from sister city Chao Yang, China, the University of Alabama Birmingham School of Public Health and the Emergency Management Agency of Jefferson County are now collaborating to develop hospice programs in China. In December 2011 the city's Mayor and a member of the Sister Cities Commission went to Beijing as part of the U.S.-China EcoPartnership program.

With the Commission's support, Birmingham jazz guitarist Eric Essix performed in sister cities Szekeshfehrevár, Hungary and Rosh Ha'ayin. Lastly, there were several art exchanges with sister cities Guadiawaye, Senegal; Hitachi, Japan; Karak, Jordan and Plzen, Czech Republic.

The *Sister Cities International* Annual Awards are awarded in several categories. Award winners will be honored at a special luncheon ceremony on July 14 during the *Sister Cities International* 56<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in Jacksonville, Florida.

**About *Sister Cities International***

*Sister Cities International* facilitates nearly 2,000 partnerships in 136 countries on six continents between 600 communities in the United States with similar municipalities abroad. *Sister Cities International* represents citizen diplomats who work tirelessly to promote the organizations' mission of creating world peace and cultural understanding through economic and sustainable development programs, youth and education projects, arts and culture, and humanitarian assistance.

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