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**HIGHLAND PARK ILLINOIS SISTER CITIES FOUNDATION WINS SISTER CITIES INTERNATIONAL'S BEST OVERALL PROGRAM AWARD**

WASHINGTON, DC – Highland Park Illinois Sister Cities Foundation (HPISCF) has won the Sister Cities International (SCI) 2017 Best Overall Program Award for a city with a population between 25,001 and 50,000. The SCI Best Overall Program Award recognizes sister city programs that demonstrated outstanding accomplishments in 2016 in advancing the goals and mission of the sister cities movement.

In 2016, HPISCF clearly demonstrated their ability to blend humanitarian, cultural, and youth program efforts into highly successful initiatives that positively impacted both their own community and their sister cities. HPISCF facilitated several exchanges and visits including an ongoing architect exchange; a visit from Puerto Vallarta orchestra students to Highland Park to attend workshops at the Midwest Young Artists Conservatory; a visit from Puerto Vallarta firefighters to train on Jaws of Life equipment; and a robotics exchange in which students of the Highland Park High School robotics team accompanied students from the Yerucham, Israel FTC Robotics team to the World Championship in St. Louis. HPISCF also sponsored the Puerto Vallarta Student Jazz Festival, which brings student jazz groups from around the US to Puerto Vallarta, in order to strengthen their "Cultures United by Music" program. HPISCF also provided seed money for tortilla-making equipment and a vehicle to help Puerto Vallarta orphanage Corazon De Nina make and deliver tortillas as a source of income; donated musical instruments to student orchestras in Puerto Vallarta; and sent Jaws of Life equipment to Puerto Vallarta to improve emergency services.

SCI's Annual Awards are awarded in several categories including Best Overall, Innovation (Arts and Culture, Economic Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and Youth and Education), and Volunteer of the Year. Award winners will be honored at the Lou Wozar Diplomatic Awards Dinner on Saturday, July 15 during SCI's 61<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference in Virginia Beach, VA.

SCI's 61<sup>st</sup> [Annual Conference](#) events, which include a [Youth Leadership Summit](#) and a [U.S.-Russia Mayors' Summit](#), will take place in Virginia Beach, VA from July 12-16, 2017. The events will bring together hundreds of the most influential global leaders in diplomacy, foreign affairs, policy, business, and innovation. Elected and municipal officials, business leaders, youth delegates, and citizen diplomats will discuss this year's theme "Global Communities for World Peace," building on President Eisenhower's initial vision of creating a more peaceful world by building global relationships through communities.

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**About Sister Cities International**

Founded as a Presidential Initiative by Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956, Sister Cities International serves as the national membership organization for over 500 member communities with 2,000 partnerships in 145 countries on six continents. The sister city network unites tens of thousands of citizen diplomats and volunteers who work tirelessly to promote the organizations' mission of creating world peace and understanding through economic development, youth and education, arts and culture, and humanitarian assistance.

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