

# THE FUTURE OF CITIZEN DIPLOMACY

BY MARY D. KANE



**F**or 56 years, Sister Cities International has fostered and empowered a global citizen diplomacy network, spreading peace through people. This year we launched a new brand, complete with a new website, logo, and tagline: “Connect Globally. Thrive Locally.” The new brand effectively showcases not only the strength of the entire sister city network but also the impact of everyday citizens in bringing the world closer.

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Founded by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Sister Cities International serves as the national membership organization for individual sister cities, counties, and states across the United States. Our network creates and strengthens partnerships between U.S. and international communities, promoting peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation— one individual, one community at a time. This network today unites tens of thousands of citizen diplomats, educators, political and business leaders, youth, and volunteers in approximately 600 U.S. cities who have partnerships with around 2,000 communities in 136 countries across six continents.

The success stories of Sister Cities International are endless. Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping, widely considered a frontrunner for the Chinese presidency, was a member of a Sister States delegation to Iowa in 1985. He returned this year, almost three decades later, to visit his host family in Muscatine. He discussed economic opportunities in agriculture with Iowa officials and secured a purchase of \$4.31 billion worth of soybeans in a meeting at the World Food Prize Center in Des Moines.

Mayor Joe Riley of Charlotte, North Carolina in May commented his city's sister partnership with Spoleto, Italy brings in \$30 million annually to the local economy. And in August 2011, ECON Inc., a Lakeland, Florida engineering firm with 22 employees, received a five-year, one billion USD contract to build a theme park in Shanghai as a result of the relationship built through their local sister city program.

Sister Cities International's Africa Urban Poverty Alleviation Program includes 25 sister city partnerships representing 13 African countries and 16 U.S. states. These partnerships,

consisting of community members and civic, municipal, and private organizations in both the U.S. and Africa, are completing projects in the areas of water, sanitation, and health in African cities. With administrative and technical support from Sister Cities International, the U.S. and African partners combine their technical expertise and experience to plan, implement and monitor their projects.

These are just a few of examples from our recent history of strengthening partnerships. We are also seeing encouraging trends in our network: increasing number of business and economic development programs. In the coming months, Sister Cities International will be forming an advisory committee of elected officials to discuss the mutually beneficial opportunities in what the U.S. Department of State defines as “smart power” - the use of diplomacy and development to create conditions for a peaceful, stable, and prosperous world.

We look forward to continuing to empower and strengthen this movement spearheaded by the everyday citizen. As the world's premiere citizen diplomacy network, we invite you to explore our connections and start your own. When we connect globally, we thrive locally. **IX**

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*Mary D. Kane is the President and CEO of Sister Cities International. Kane formerly served as the Secretary of State of Maryland and as an Assistant State's attorney. Following her term in office, she served as an Executive Director at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Kane was also a senior advisor to the Business Civic Leadership Center, a nonprofit affiliate of the Chamber dedicated to improving business and society relations.*