

Milwaukee – Carora Sister Cities Renewal Application



Mayor Tom Barrett of Milwaukee shakes hands with Mayor Edgar Carrasco of Carora

Information about applicant organization:

Organizational status:

The Sister City relationship is maintained through Peace Education Project of Peace Action Wisconsin, a 501c-3 organization. This entity functions as the main contact for any fiscal or official correspondence relating to the Sister Cities relationship.

Board members of the Peace Education Project of Peace Action Wisconsin:

Mary Laan, President: 414-231-3965
Deb Metke, Secretary: 414-881-0904
Susan Modder, Treasurer: 414-265-3309

The group that is primarily responsible for the programming of the relationship is called the Milwaukee-Carora Sister Cities Committee (MCSCC). Our membership is as follows:

- Daniel Pneuman: President, Peace Action Wisconsin
- Mitchell Sandquist: Program Director, Peace Action Wisconsin
- Erik Sperling: Law student at Georgetown University, Co-Founder of Sister Cities agreement
- Mike Helbick: Staff Assistant in Sen. Tammy Baldwin's Milwaukee Office, Co-Founder of Sister Cities agreement
- Aimee Dellemann: area activist and visitor to Carora
- Atty. Arthur Heitzer: National Lawyers Guild, Milwaukee Chapter
- Conor McMullen: Student activist, Peace Action at UW-Milwaukee
- George Martin: United for Peace and Justice

Goals:

We support President Eisenhower's original Sister Cities mission through relationships based on cultural, educational, and informational exchanges through person-to-person "citizen diplomacy." We strive to connect the citizens of Milwaukee and Carora by facilitating opportunities to make meaningful connections and lasting relationships. We also strive to cultivate economic, educational, and cultural programs that are sustainable and mutually beneficial.

Methods used to reach these goals:

The hosting of education events, the utilization of social media and online resources (Sister Cities website and Peace Action website), and the providing of opportunities to visit Venezuela are the primary methods we use to reach our goals, and we have hosted a number of gifted activists and speakers that focus on Venezuela and have facilitated people-to-people connections, some of which are listed below:

Charles Hardy, a former priest from Wyoming who spent eight years living in a cardboard shack in a dangerous, poverty-stricken "barrio" of Venezuela as part of his religious mission, came to Milwaukee to share his published memoir entitled *A Cowboy in Caracas*. The book is a unique blend of culture and history, as seen through the eyes of a man committed to working with some of the poorest and most marginalized people in the world. Mr. Hardy's perspective is humorous and optimistic, although many of his experiences were anything but so. His visit was greatly contributed to an understanding of Venezuelan culture for all in attendance.

Dr. Mark Weisbrot is an economist and co-director of the Center for Economic Policy and Research who has served (and continues to serve) as an economic advisor to a number of Latin America nations, including Venezuela. Mr. Weisbrot gave the audience an expert analysis of the history and reality of Venezuela's politics, economics, and culture, and also shed light on many questions about daily life for Venezuelans and their government's foreign policy (including prospects for improving relations with the United States).

Gregory Wilpert, together with Martin Sánchez, launched Venezuelanalysis.com in September 2003. Founding member of the Milwaukee-Carora Sister Cities Committee, a UW-Milwaukee Alumnus and current Georgetown law student who was also a legal observer for the April, 2013 Venezuelan election, was employed by Venezuelanalysis.com while living in Carora. We continue to circulate this website as an educational tool in understanding Venezuelan culture and politics.

Eva Golinger is an author and the editor of the *Correo Orinoco*, a leading Venezuelan bi-lingual publication. Her journalistic contributions have helped us understand Venezuelan history and politics, and catapulted her to stardom in Venezuelan television and print. A warm person and captivating speaker, Milwaukee residents benefitted greatly from her visit.

Jessica Luna is a Venezuelan student activist based in Caracas. She studies agrology and her main volunteer work is in urban gardening and the cooperative movements in low-income neighborhoods of Caracas. She visited with local faculty at UW-Milwaukee, as well as tours

with the Riverwest Coop and Growing Power. She also delivered a public presentation, free of charge, of her work in Venezuela (on August 23, 2013, at Brewing Grounds for Change).

Each year, we co-host a film fest entitled Documentaries Del Sur. This is a local, multi-night film series held at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee in partnership with local and student organizations. This film fest offers a variety of films, many of which are focused directly on Venezuela and its culture, politics, etc. Attendance throughout the fest usually reaches about 350 people, who leave with a greater grasp of the reality of life in our Sister city. We have also included special guests at this fest, including Emmy Award-winning director, Saul Landau.

Erik Sperling, current law student at Georgetown University and Co-Founder of the Sister Cities relationship, was invited to monitor the April, 2013 elections in Caracas, Venezuela. He was also able to visit Carora while on that trip and meet and discuss with folks we have been working with there since 2007. MCSCC also hosted a Venezuelan election party in April of 2013, complete with traditional Venezuelan food, Venezuelan television via the internet, and skype video calls with Venezuelan friends in our Sister City. This was very enjoyable, and we look forward to doing more.

We have also had a chance to cultivate people-to-people connections between Carora and Milwaukee. On more than one occasion, Mike Helbick, President of the Milwaukee-Carora Sister Cities Committee, collaborated musically with local Caroran musicians, including a band named Fusioncayado. A blend of traditional Venezuelan styles and modern rock, this band includes a seasoned artist who has played concerts in the United States as well promising, young musicians. In Fusioncayado's recording studio, Mike was able to perform with the band and record an original song with traditional Venezuelan influence. We look forward expanding the opportunity to mix our artistic styles and talents across continents.

In 2007, we launched our pilot Sister Cities delegation. Delegates learned about Carora's renowned "participatory democracy" and witnessed innovative social programs and progress in urban gardening, education, healthcare, housing, and more. The delegates also found themselves immersed in Venezuelan culture and enjoyed traditional dance, art, and poetry. Most importantly, they made meaningful connections to the people of Venezuela in Milwaukee's Sister City, Carora. We look forward to our upcoming delegation in January, 2014 and are sure it will be even more exciting and successful than the first!

Current activities:

The Milwaukee-Carora Sister Cities Committee is partnering with Peace Action Wisconsin, Edward Mercado of Waya Tour, and the Venezuelan Consulate of Chicago to facilitate a Sister Cities trip to Venezuela in January, 2014.

This delegation, comprised of delegates from the cities of Milwaukee and Madison, will visit Milwaukee's Sister City of Carora and Madison's Sister City of Sanare. The goal of this delegation is not only to facilitate, in the tradition of Sister Cities International, a people-to-people connection across cultures, but also to facilitate lasting relations and partnerships between these four cities.

Throughout this trip, delegates will experience and learn about the rich traditional culture of Lara State, including music, poetry, and crafts. Delegates will also learn about new advancements in education, health care, and nonprofit initiatives in Carora and Sanare. Further, this delegation will seek to economically connect these four cities for mutually beneficial future exchanges of goods and services. We believe that this trip will benefit not only all individuals involved, both Estadounidense and Venezuelan, but will also benefit these participating cities at large. (Please see the attached itinerary, flyer, and application for this upcoming delegation.)

A highlight of this trip will be meeting with our counterparts in our Sister Cities that are charged with maintaining the Sister Cities relationship on their end. We look forward to sitting down with them and discussing more projects, moving forward. Edward Mercado and Omar Sierra (of the Venezuelan Consulate of Boston) recently went to Carora in June to touch base with these folks and work with them regarding our upcoming delegation. The Venezuelans are excited to host us!

(Please see the attached application, flyers, and itinerary for this upcoming delegation.)

Local Support and Financial base:

Peace Action Wisconsin and the Peace Education Project of Peace Action Wisconsin provide financial support through the work of paid staff and the donation of resources, such as free meeting space, free printing, and free online promotion. Those in the Milwaukee-Carora Sister Cities organization operate as volunteers, donating time and energy to events and projects, including the upcoming delegation. We have a broad and diverse base of people who support us in this way. We do solicit donations, as well, although these are solicited generally in regard to specific needs (like sponsorship for low-income students to visit Venezuela, etc.). We have done much outreach with local entities, including UW-Milwaukee and other local organizations. We are also applying for a grant from Citgo to help provide scholarship funds for our January, 2014 delegation.

Information about the Sister City:

Communication and local support:

The following are names and titles of Caroran people who directly work with our Sister City relationship:

- Jose Luis Infante: Torres Mayor's Office (Popular Power Coordinator, International Delegations)
- Lic. Gilmer Graterol - Torres Mayor Office (Press Chief)
- Norys Saavedra: Carora-Sanare people to people coordinator
- Edward Mercado: WAYATour Exec. Director / Sister Cities promoter / Milwaukee-Carora Sister Cities Committee liason to Carora

These people have and continue to provide support for Sister City-related projects. Currently, they are helping to do on-the-ground organizing for our upcoming delegation in January, 2014.

In the past, some of them have done the same for our 2007 delegation, and have helped in making it possible for Milwaukeeans to teach English and reside in Carora for extended periods of time, among other things.

Other Caroran citizens have helped us by opening their homes and otherwise providing material and personal support for those who have traveled to Carora. These people all did so in goodwill under the auspices of the Sister City relationship, and consider themselves part of this special relationship.

Areas of Mutual Interest:

Milwaukee and Carora are interested in exchanges of technology and goods. The General Consul of Venezuela (Chicago Consulate) visited Carora and met with over 30 representatives of agricultural producers there. We have also logged local Milwaukee interest in potential exchanges. The information gathered, including what these entities would like to partner on, what they have to offer, and what they would like to learn, will greatly aid us in moving forward in planning these exchanges. This is a somewhat lengthy process, and we plan to further this program during our 2014 delegation. We have enjoyed robust cultural exchanges over the past many years, and look forward to expanding into business exchanges, as well.