

The Break Room: Nancy Sikes-Kline, Mayor, September 17, 2024

Narrator:

You've tuned into another edition of the Break Room, a weekly conversation about how the city of St. Augustine works from those who do the work every day. Hosted by the city of St. Augustine's communications director, Melissa Wissel, the break room offers a closer look at the different city departments and provides updates on current and upcoming projects and events. And now your host, Melissa Wissel.

Melissa Wissel:

Welcome to the Break Room. I'm Melissa Wissel, communications director for the city of St. Augustine. Thanks for tuning in. The city of St. Augustine recently hosted a delegation from Aviles, Spain, celebrating 100 years of friendship between our two cities. Mayor Nancy Sikes-Kline was inspired by the decades long tradition of student exchanges, gift exchanges and visits by our respective elected officials. So joining us in studio this week, Mayor Sikes-Kline is here to give us her thoughts on the success of their visit. Mayor welcome back.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Thank you, Melissa. Before we talk about this year, I do want to recap for our listening listeners how we got here, and we don't need to go all the way back, but at least in 1924. In 1924, an American delegation of 20 people went to take part in the transfer of the remains of Pedro Menendez to the church of San Antonio de Padua there in Aviles. This was a really significant visit since it was the first time a city from the United States sent a delegation abroad. It was also the first time that a us ambassador had visited Aviles. And over the years following that special occasion, the relationship between the two cities continued. In 1967, the commission passed a resolution to reaffirm the commitment to the friendship for the purpose of goodwill and understanding between our cities. And in February 2000, the mayor of Aviles, Santiago Rodriguez Vega and St. Augustine, Mayor Lynn Weeks, signed the sister city agreement with the intent of continuing to deepen the goodwill and mutual trust between the two cities. At that time, they developed a mission statement and they agreed upon exchanges moving forward in the fields of trade and investment, academic and cultural exchanges, high technology and science, historic preservation, environmental

protection, artistic exchange, sports and tourism promotion and municipal economic development. That covers about everything.

Melissa Wissel:

That's a lot.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Yeah, that's a lot.

Melissa Wissel:

And the big thing that came out of that, I think, was our sister cities student exchanges. That was a big..

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

That's what was done really most consistently over the years, the high school student exchanges, which I think we were very fortunate to be able to do over those years until Covid. And there was a little bit of a break during that. And also during these years, there were really some magnificent gift exchanges. And 1969 Aviles's sent a statue of Pedro Menendez, which is a replica of their very own.

Melissa Wissel:

Right there in front of city hall, rather momentous monument or statue there. It's kind of defining of our city hall.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

And then 1999, the Atocha anchor St. Augustine gave to Aviles for their outdoor anchor museum. And 2002, the tile mosaic was sent from Aviles's to St. Augustine. And it is now installed beautifully down on Aviles street with its own contextualization to explain the

history behind that. In 2005, the stone faces Kanos de San Francisco that we have a copy of at the VIC now Aviles sent to us.

Melissa Wissel:

That's a really cool.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

And that's replica of what they have. It's a smaller replica of what they have there in Avili's. And of course, in 2015, during the, during the celebration of the 450th, a recreation of the Constitution monument in the plaza was sent from St. Augustine to Aviles's.

Melissa Wissel:

Ours is the original. Right.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

I'm sorry.

Melissa Wissel:

We sent one there.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

We sent a copy of ours there to them, and that was a really interesting project. And then this year, we recreated the marker on Aviles street. We created the app marker on Aviles street to talk about our history and commissioner, Springfield, Jim Springfield collected donations to give a gift from the people of a painting called Restless Hearts by Lisa O'Neill of Pedro Menendez Landing in St. Augustine.

Melissa Wissel:

That was nice.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

It was a beautiful, beautiful piece.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah, we can. Well, so many things have happened over the years with all of these visits that I do want to remind folks, too, when you were talking about the, the delegation and the transfer of the remains, we have that here at the mission. Took, it took it quite a few years to get back here. So folks are wanting to look, look for that as well. But I do want to also mention now, we went in August, you and I actually went with a delegation. Tell us a little bit about how we got into celebrating. I mean, obviously, we just said 1924 is 100 years. How did we decide to come into this? Why was this so important for us in 2024?

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Well, this year marks 100 years of that celebration, of that original delegation. And we thought it was important. I thought it was important that we go over and bring a delegation representing the ideals of the mission statement. So when we went in August, we took a representative from the Sister Cities association, Marilyn Weeks. We took a representative from the cultural council that was executive director Christina Parrish Stone. We took representation from the Chamber of Commerce, the president and chief executive officer, Isabel Renault, and the economic development director Scott Mayarde came as well as the St. John's County Visitors Convention Bureau. Treasurer and board member Charlie Robles came with us. Flagler College was represented by vice president and chiefs of staff Laura Stevenson Dumas. The Diocese of St. Augustine was represented by Father John Tetlow. And we brought Astoria, our very own historian, Paul Weaver, to record this historic visit. And then a special feature, we brought an artist, we brought one of our very own, plain air artist Martha Ferguson with us to take over and paint and make a gift of one of the paintings to the city of Aviles and as an exchange program. So when I, their delegation came here for the final leg of the, for the celebration, they brought us their very own artist, Samuel Armas to do plein air art and present it to us while they were here. So I thought that was a really cool feature that we did this. It was person to person. It was very grassroots. They did a nice selection. They picked who they wanted, each city picked who they wanted

to represent them. And I just thought it was really interesting that that was an idea that came out of the cultural council.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah. And I think as you're talking about, you know, branching out from these visits being significant beyond just our governmental relationships, that was a great first start. Art this year. Maybe there's music, maybe there's culinary, maybe there's language. We don't know what it, what it can bring, but that really was a really cool piece. If you're just now tuning in, you're listening to the break room. I'm Melissa Wissel, communications director, and I have with me Mayor Nancy Sikes-Kline. We're talking about the 100th anniversary celebrations both in Spain as well as what we've experienced here in St. Augustine most recently. Let's talk about what we're doing, what all we did in case folks missed it, but the importance of what we did here in St. Augustine, starting with a very short ceremony. But you and Mayor Mariví Monteserín signed an affirmation of friendship. So we had yet another step in making sure that we're continuing to recognize this officially.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

That's right. We wanted to reaffirm our friendship after a number of years, had been 2000 since, and, you know, mayor of Aviles, Mariví Monteserín, through all of this, we've really become friends. And we wanted to solidify and have a more formal solidification of our friendship and that friendship between our cities as well, because we each come to this representing our cities and the people of our cities, not just the governments of our cities, but also the people of our cities. So we were able to do that. And Flagler College, as a part of this, it was really kind of a dream come true, because Flagler College also signed a memorandum of understanding with the college there in Oviedo, and with the intent that they continue an educational exchange over time, and it's going to be exciting. That is so amazing that they have already initiated that, that one tangible benefit that's come out of these visits with one another. Gosh, when they were there, so much happened. I mean, while they were here, when we hosted them, we're still kind of glowing about the whole thing, because there was just a lot of love felt between the two cities. They brought with them. Well, the cultural council brought the band Tejador with them, and so they had some public concerts. They had the Lewis auditorium sold out, public concert there, and they played on the plaza, and they did different demonstrations. They brought with them some of the dancers, some of the dancers from Aviles with the traditional costumes, and I'm not

sure if that's what you call them, but to show the dance, the traditional dance, too, and that was really wonderful. We love those bagpipes. And they were really just, you know, just.

Melissa Wissel:

They had quite a big time Saturday night. They were down in colonial quarter as part of sing out loud. They had quite a big time. So that was great to see.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Yeah, that's a perfect venue for what they were, what they were doing. And thank goodness the weather held somewhat. So. But yes, and then we had our big institutional, we called it institutional welcoming ceremony there in front of Pedro Menendez. In front of city hall. Yes, and in front of Pedro Menendez. It was very warm and the sunshine was very good. We did not get rained on. We had our poet laureate, Norm, Sherry, read a poem. Secretary of state, Florida, Secretary of state Cord Byrd, came and blessed us with his presence, and he spoke for us and was very supportive. We feel very supported by the state of Florida. We had our honorary consul of Spain, Sonia San Juan, came, and she also spoke, and we had representative, of course, our beloved representative, Cindy Stevenson, who was terming out, and she came and gave us some wonderful words, some warm words of support for our efforts to foster these and keep, and keep these ties flourishing, these cultural ties between ourselves.

Melissa Wissel:

So important. Yeah.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Let's see, what else did we do? We had a landing day in reenactment, which I think that always happens on the mission. This year was very special because we had our guests with us, we were able to show the outer coffin of Pedro Menendez, which was the gift, the 1924 gift.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah. And if folks don't know that, they can go to the mission, to that museum and see it as well.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

That's right. There's a film there when it was moved, and that was very fairly recently. Pedro Menendez remains are actually in Aviles, in the, the small church there, in a tomb there in the wall. You can actually go and see it, but we have the sarcophagus, and it's just beautiful. It's just absolutely beautiful. If you have hand painted, and it's really lovely. And we're very fortunate that we've been able to, been given that.

Melissa Wissel:

You're going to have to wrap this up in about a minute.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Okay.

Melissa Wissel:

We got lots to recap.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

We had concerts and we had unveilings, and we had more concerts, and we had receptions hosted by. What was really special to me was that the community just poured out whatever gifts they had to give, the food or the venue or the hospitality. Just what we do really well. And everyone participated, and that was what we were looking for. This is a, this is a grassroots, real connection that everyone has. So. And it's a start.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah, a new start. Well, I was gonna say, and I think this was a great start. Like you said, people were catching that energy, the Aviles street festival on Sunday. I think they did okay. I think the nighttime got a bit wet, but I do know they had a great afternoon of activities.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Oh, that was the first year for that. They're gonna keep doing that.

Melissa Wissel:

They want to bring that back really good.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Yeah, that's going to be one of the lasting benefits. So maybe next time I come on, we can talk about the lasting benefits.

Melissa Wissel:

We can do that. I think we definitely have to get. We are cut short because there's so many other things to talk about. So I'm going to say right here, come back and talk to me. We'll pick up where we left off about even recapping some of the weekend's activities anyway. But what we have to look forward to and why this is important and what it means to get how we can get the community involved.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

Wonderful. I'll look forward to it.

Melissa Wissel:

Thanks for coming down.

Nancy Sikes-Kline:

You're welcome. It's a pleasure.

Melissa Wissel:

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Narrator:

You've been listening to the break Room, a weekly program addressing projects and programs offered by the city of St. Augustine. Join us each week as the city's communications director, Melissa Wissel, has in depth conversations with the people who make our town work to meet the needs of our community. See you at this time next week for another edition of the break room.