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## Sisters Were Doin' It for Themselves in Orinda

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Amelia Chen Photo provided

The City of Orinda welcomed an international dignitary and community leaders from across Northern California on Friday and Saturday, October 28 and 29 when it played host to the 2011 Conference of the Northern California Chapter of Sister Cities International.

The weekend of fun and learning at this 35th annual meeting began with a special reception held at the home of Orinda's former mayor, Bobbie Landers, on Friday evening. Landers said that, during the planning process when she and her fellow board members were thinking about the wine fest presented as part of last year's conference in Lodi, planners hit on the idea of presenting an opening beer reception to both increase awareness about Czechoslovakia's reputation for beer production and educate attendees about Orinda's Sister City, Tabor.

Tabor, which has had a special relationship with Orinda since the late 1990s, was chosen as Orinda's Sister City to help Taborans strengthen their emerging democracy. Since that time, many Orindans have visited the city and, in turn, Tabor has sent several of its students to live and learn in Orinda.

On Saturday, the democratic principles of both countries were celebrated once again as local Boy Scouts presented first the U.S. and then Czech colors at the opening of the day's events. Both national anthems were also performed.

Mayor Victoria Smith welcomed attendees, and encouraged them to explore restaurants throughout the City and to "Shop Orinda" during their visit.

Ambassador Gao Zhansheng, Consul General of the People's Republic of China, then presented the conference's keynote address. Zhansheng spoke about the economic

relationship between the United States and China, and indicated his support for the Sister Cities International program by encouraging the leaders of cities across Northern California to collaborate with the cities in China that are currently looking for partners.

But it was a young Orinda resident who most eloquently communicated the bridges that can be built by programs such as Sister Cities International. Zhansheng was welcomed to the conference through song by Amelia Chen, the petite K-2 division soloist who captured the hearts of Lamorinda residents during the recent 2011 Orinda Idol finals. According to Landers and other audience members, Chen sang so beautifully and so impressed the Consul General that he was moved to hug the little girl following her performance.

Lunch catered by a Czech bistro gave attendees the chance to experience tasty new foods and enjoy one another's company before an afternoon of workshops that included a presentation by Orinda City Council member Dean Orr and a review by Orinda's current Sister City student, Stepanka Jandova, of the ways in which cities across Northern California can involve their youth communities in their respective Sister City initiatives.

Landers, when asked about the overall impact of the event, mentioned that one highlight in particular was the workshop presented by Richard Westin. Westin, a 40-year resident of Orinda who has served on both the Planning and Parks and Recreation Commissions and is now the current President of the Orinda Community Foundation, led a roundtable discussion on "How to Successfully Raise Funds for Your Organization."

He addressed the different components of successful fundraising activities - volunteer recruitment, selecting the proper venue, advertising - and stressed the importance of taking the time to recognize and thank the planners and supporters of any event. He also discussed an important leadership role being played by Orinda's foundation, which has launched a user-friendly calendar on its web site ([www.orindafoundation.org/](http://www.orindafoundation.org/)) that gives residents a centralized place to learn about area happenings while also enabling community organizations to reduce scheduling conflicts as they plan their special events.

Participants in Westin's workshop were also invited to share their best fundraising strategies. "We're non-competing; we love to share ideas that work," he said as he reflected on the enthusiasm of the roughly 35 people who attended his session.

As with so many of its fellow Sister City groups, Orinda's own organization raises funds and recruits volunteers in support of its work. The committee's meetings are open to the public and held the fourth Thursday of every

month. And because it is a 501 (c) (3) organization, contributions made to the City of Orinda to support its work are tax deductible. For more information about the Orinda Sister City's upcoming holiday program or about becoming a member, contact Bobbie Landers: (925) 254-8260.

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