

Building partnerships one city at a time

By Guest Columnist Ricki Garrett, PhD,
Alderman-at-Large

As the City of Clinton liaison to Sister Cities International, and as Governor Bryant's appointee as the State Representative to Sister Cities International, I want to share with our citizens the work that has been taking place in developing a very exciting partnership.

Following my election as alderwoman-at-large in Clinton, Mayor Fisher asked me to serve as Clinton's liaison to Sister Cities International, in order to develop an official partnership between Clinton and a city in Uzbekistan. The country of Uzbekistan was chosen because the Mississippi National Guard has a longstanding relationship with the country, and they wanted Clinton to develop an official Sister City International partnership with a city in Uzbekistan.

Clinton officially joined Sister Cities International, becoming the first city in Mississippi to do so, and I began working with the organization to select a city in Uzbekistan with whom to partner and, also, collaborating with Adjutant General Durrwood Boyles and Major Amanda Villeret, state partnership director, with the Mississippi National Guard. Soon after that, a delegation from Uzbekistan was invited by Jackson State Univer-



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Pictured (l to r) are Alderwoman-at-Large Ricki Garrett and Roger Mark De Souza, president and CEO of Sister Cities International.

sity to come to Mississippi on an official visit, and Mayor Fisher and I had the opportunity to meet with them at the Mississippi National Guard Headquarters in Jackson. Through that meeting, we were able to establish a relationship with Alisher Akhmedov, attache and congressional liaison for

the Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan, to begin developing plans for the partnership.

In the meantime, Governor Bryant appointed me as the state representative to Sister Cities International, and I began working with the organization in developing Clinton's partnership as well as working with other cities in Mississippi to develop similar partnerships. At the international conference of Sister Cities International in Aurora, Colorado, I was able to work with other state representatives who have partnerships in Uzbekistan, and, also, further work with representatives of the Mississippi National Guard, who were invited there to share information about their work in Uzbekistan. They have been an outstanding leader in helping other states to understand the ways in which National Guards around the country can work with Sister Cities International in building partnerships. I have also reached out to Mississippi College, which is interested in helping to further the educational and cultural aspects of Clinton's partnership with Uzbekistan.

The Ambassador of Uzbekistan made the decision to ask Clinton to partner with the city of Zarafshan, and the Mayor of Zarafshan made the official request. I drafted the agreement, which was submitted to the city

attorney, and, on February 11, during a visit to Clinton by an Uzbekistan delegation visiting Mississippi, the Mayor signed the agreement, which was then given to the Uzbekistan delegation to take back for signing. Gabriel Prado, then with the Mississippi Development Authority, and now our economic developer, and Maj. Villeret joined us for that meeting. An official signing will take place in Uzbekistan during a visit this summer, which Mayor Fisher will attend.

As we begin this partnership, there are untold opportunities to share business, technological, educational, and cultural experiences with the leaders of both the city of Zarafshan and with the country of Uzbekistan. Many cities in the United States have very longstanding Sister City partnerships around the world, and they have enriched the lives of residents of both cities.

Sister Cities International President and CEO Roger Mark De Souza is extremely pleased to have Mississippi as a Sister City state, and we look forward to working together in order to bring programs to our community that will enhance the global outreach of our city and provide adults and young people opportunities to have educational, cultural, and other exchanges with those in Uzbekistan.

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King receives Sumner Hill Sharp Arrow award



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Sumner Hill Junior High freshman Nicameron King (center) received the third nine weeks Sharp Arrow award. Presenting his award are teacher Jody Hill (left) and Entergy Mississippi representative Tammy Rankin (right).