



Among the landmarks of Cheongju are, clockwise from top left, the Sandang Mountain Fortress, Myeongam Resort, Cheonju Historic Museum of Baekje, the Korean Craft Museum, and the Avenue of Trees.

## Bellingham to get fifth Sister City

*Cheongju, Korea will be added in 2006*

by SARA GEBALLE  
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**BELLINGHAM** - For the first time since 1996, Bellingham is anticipating the addition of a new sister city to join its other four. Last month Bellingham Mayor Mark Asmundson and a Bellingham delegation of 10 visited Cheongju, South Korea to meet with local dignitaries and lay groundwork for the official announcement by the Bellingham Sister Cities Association (BSCA). Cheongju is expected to become our sister city in 2006 pending final approval by BSCA and Sister

Cities International.

According to BSCA President Ellen Lind, while it is not typical for a mayor to visit a prospective sister city ahead of time, "there is no set way to do it." In this case, the Bellingham delegation had the chance to meet with Korean business people, including those interested in investing in Bellingham's waterfront, explained Betsy Bierer, executive assistant to the mayor and Sister City Liaison.

Bellingham's four existing sister cities represent tremendous geographical and cultural variety. But what they and Bellingham share in common is they are all port cities

situated along the Pacific Rim. They are: Tateyama, Japan; Port Stephens, Australia; Nakhodka, Russia, and Punta Arenas, Chile.

While Cheongju, Korea is not strictly a Pacific Rim city, what it shares with Bellingham is being a university town with an emphasis on training teachers, explained Lisa Woo, a key nominator of the new sister city. She also pointed out how both cities are similar distances from their respective major cities - namely, Seoul and Seattle. According to Woo, who is herself Korean, one goal of the new sister city collaboration will be to set up a

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## Vagrancy: no good solutions

*Business owners, social service agencies, city stumped*

by MARILYN OLSEN  
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**BELLINGHAM** - City officials, business owners, social service representatives and police officers met Monday at the Bellingham Library to discuss the issue of vagrants, panhandlers, the homeless and transients in the area surrounding Railroad and Champion Streets in downtown Bellingham.

group under discussion would have to be management, not abatement.

"If these people find that one area is a less desirable place to be, they'll just move somewhere else," he said. "Right now Railroad and Champion is that somewhere else."

Sheila Hardy of the Planning and Community Development Department identified the issue as

*"They're living proof that Capitalism works."*

— Mayor Mark Asmundson

Mayor Mark Asmundson identified this group as "those who hang out and do things we wish they weren't doing."

Citing federal, state and local laws and ordinances relating to the right of people to loiter, assemble and even be intoxicated in public, Asmundson said the emphasis in dealing with the

a "pack mentality" of those who gather in the area whose "negative behaviors impact the ability to rent newly renovated commercial space, threaten safety and comfort of employees, customers and general pedestrians." A long list of these behaviors from public urination to prostitution in the

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Merchants and police remain frustrated by inability to keep vagrants away from downtown businesses.

Photo by James Stauffer

# The China communique

## Economic development zones – and the gap

by LARRY KLEPINGER  
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Earlier this year, 2004 Congressional Candidate Larry Klepinger moved to Fujian province in China and accepted a teaching position offer at Fuzhou University. The WI has invited him to write a series of articles communicating what is really happening in China— through the eyes of a casual observer – without the major media spin. You can contact Larry via email at larry@larryklepinger.com. Or visit his website [www.larryklepinger.com](http://www.larryklepinger.com) for more information.

**FUJIAN, CHINA** - According to official data, "Economic Development Zones (EDZ) are areas specifically designated to receive massive amounts of government funding in so-called test areas for China's continual process of social and economic reform."

In essence this means certain areas of China are picked out by the government to receive large amounts of money to help develop the targeted area. Fujian Province,

along with the city of Fuzhou, is one such area of economic concentration.

With this in mind, my wife, Akiko, and I decided to take a stroll downtown to the river that runs through the city. As we walked – and gawked – at the mind-boggling amount of construction going on in all directions we slowly became aware that we had ventured into an impromptu beggars row.

Stationed on both sides of the sidewalk were dozens of beggars in every state of poverty you could – and couldn't – imagine. There was a man with no legs, wrapped in rags so grimy that they appeared to be held together by crusted perspiration and caked-in red dirt. He was dragging himself along with a bowl clenched between his teeth, collecting coins.

Then we came to the leper whose face resembled a pound of uncooked hamburger, white glistening bone for a forehead and eyes in which you could see the sockets that literally held his eyeballs in place.

Other people in varying degrees of physical decay were strewn along the walkway, begging – pleading – for a handout, some actually crying in their despair.

As we hurried our departure I

noticed a sparkling new black Mercedes Benz 500 SL sedan speeding through town honking at everyone in sight. The thought occurred to me how wide the gap really is in China between those who have a tremendous amount – and those who have virtually nothing. In fact, it is not a gap at all. It is a veritable chasm.

### China's historical dilemma

The Chinese government is in a race with time to bridge this gap before the nearly one billion people who live at, or below, the "real" poverty line simply revolt. The divide is that pronounced.

When I say "real" poverty line I am referring to what you see on a daily basis – I am not talking about the "official line" of poverty, as referred to by the Chinese government. And please remember, we are in a designated "Economic Zone." If the level of poverty is this pronounced here I shudder to think what it is like in the so-called "hinterland."

But to the credit of president Hu Jintao (pronounced Who Gin Tao) this dilemma is at least being recognized and trying to be dealt with. Currently there is a "Poverty Relief Trade Fair" being held in Dalian, China, for the express purpose of involving companies from all over

the world in finding ways to eradicate the grinding poverty that afflicts this country to an astounding degree.

China's eleventh Five Year Program, recently passed by the government – and its emphasis on dealing with the eradication of poverty in China – is one of the main elements of concern being addressed in a forthright and professional manner.

If President Hu can be successful on this one issue alone, I predict that he will become one of China's great leaders. He is intelligent and very resourceful in trying to make China a respected member of the world community. But time is of the essence. The degree of poverty in this country demands immediate action in a very concerted manner.

### America's growing historical dilemma

America's gap between the rich and not rich, while not as dramatic, is widening at an alarming rate. Whether people simply don't care or are not aware of this I don't know. What I do know is that the present Administration is not attempting anything like what China is undertaking. First and foremost, if you are sick you have to acknowledge that you have a problem.

As long as the American people don't realize that there is a rapidly growing disparity between income groups in United States the situation will only get worse.

In China, they have taken the

bold step of admitting to the international community they have a potential economic – and possibly political – disaster on their hands. But at least they recognize it and are trying to do something about it.

It is time for America to wake up and do the same thing. ♦WI

## SISTER CITY

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### Bellingham's Four Sister Cities

Bellingham's sister city tradition began almost 50 years ago when Tateyama, Japan became our first official sister city in 1958. About two hours southeast of Tokyo, Tateyama is located on Japan's East Coast and has a population of more than 53,000.

Our second longest sister city relationship is with Port Stephens, Australia. Becoming our sister city in 1982, Port Stephens is located three hours north of Sydney and has a population of about 53,000. With its year round warm climate and white sandy beaches, Port Stephens is a thriving tourist destination. Bellingham's connection to this city dates back to 1978 and business ties between the local Intalco Aluminum refinery and an aluminum company in Port Stephens.

In 1989, Nakhodka, Russia became our third sister city. Considerably larger than Bellingham, with a population of 220,000, Nakhodka is located at the eastern terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railroad.

Our fourth sister city is Punta Arenas, Chile located at the very tip of South America across from Tierra del Fuego. With a population around 117,000, Punta Arenas is a frequent departure point for trips to Antarctica. It became a sister city in 1996.

Cheongju, South Korea is expected to become Bellingham's fifth sister city in 2006. It is a 1,000 year old city with a population of 700,000 centrally located in the heart of South Korea where it serves as a transportation hub. And Bellingham's sixth potential sister city, Vaasa, Finland is currently under consideration.

Bellingham's ever first "Korea Day Festival."

According to Bierer the City of Bellingham has a line item budget for its Sister Cities program and "spends approximately \$3,000 a year." In addition, the mayor's recent trip to Cheongju cost the city \$1,868 in travel and lodging expenses, she confirmed. In the past 11 years, Mayor Asmundson has made a total of six sister city trips, including last April's visit to Punta Arenas, Chile.

BSCA is the non-profit, community-based organization charged with developing and maintaining Bellingham's sister city relationships. Each year BSCA sponsors cultural exchanges, educational programs, and community events both here and abroad to foster those international ties. These range from visitors from our sister cities participating in Bellingham's Skito-Sea event, to student exchanges with Bellingham High School, to city staff reciprocal visits, to local medical professionals working in clinics abroad, to participation in the biennial "Pacific Rim Challenge" sailing regatta.

The sister cities idea was conceived in 1956 by President Eisenhower, as an alternative to official governmental diplomacy. In the words of BSCA Past President Kraig Pencil, "It is diplomacy at the personal level involv-

ing the everyday person...and in Bellingham's case, we are very rooted in making it a community-based activity."

Over the 47 years since Bellingham's first sister city Tateyama, Japan was named, there have been many cultural exchanges that Pencil said, "allow people to experience a culture first-hand at a very personal level, not as a tourist." Or as Bierer put it, "In light of the war, it is easy to feel separate from all the countries in the world... but people are people everywhere. It makes you realize the world is small and we are all connected."

According to Pencil, sponsoring a new sister city "is a long term commitment, kind of like getting married. We don't take it lightly." There has to be enough local, long-term volunteer support to make the commitment work. Local volunteers have to be willing to provide assistance with escorting and transporting guests, offering home stays, hosting potlucks, providing interpreting services when needed, and more.

BSCA is part of a larger, worldwide organization, Sister Cities International, that represents a network of more than 2,000 international sister city partnerships. ♦WI

To learn more about Bellingham's Sister Cities Program, please visit [www.bsca.org](http://www.bsca.org). To learn more about Cheongju, please visit [english.cheongju.go.kr](http://english.cheongju.go.kr).

