

# Sister City Remarks to the Riverside City Council

*March 18, 2014*

--Mayor, Members of the City Council

--The Vietnam War started over 52 years ago; it has been over for more than 40.

--It is certainly time for people to people contact, to a sister city relationship with Can Tho.

--By my account, I participated in over 1,500 Council meetings. This is the first I have attended since I left office in December 2012.

--I am here because of unfinished business that started when I was Mayor.

--In December, 2013, there was a letter to the editor titled, "Agree to Sister City." Let me read it: "Having served as a combat infantryman gives me the right to weigh in on this "Vietnam sister city plan may go forward." I returned to Vietnam in August 2012 and I found proud and friendly people with no animosity toward Americans. I looked into the eyes of Vietnamese men my age who knew why I was there. My smile was always returned. Isn't it time we give up the bitterness inside? This has nothing to do with politics." Mark Cataldo, Riverside.

--The sister city request for Can Tho is not a conservative versus liberal issue, it is not a Republican versus Democrat issue. Instead, it's the right thing to do!

Let me quickly highlight three overarching reasons.

First, Riverside is not a city with a moat around it. We are serious participants in the global marketplace. Foreign imports, exports, and investments are all important.

The City is working closely with Tom Freeman and the County on international economic matters.

One major competitive advantage is our three universities and RCC. These campuses compete for international students, and the competition is also serious. Many colleges and universities are in Vietnam recruiting students.

Another competitive advantage is our sister city programs--I understand that Lalit effectively explained their benefits and resources. Can Tho is such a city.

Riverside can become the international city of Inland Southern California.

Second, looking at the past 56 years, the benefits--in summary--of our sister city programs are real, notable, and impressive.

They have brought economic benefits to the City of Riverside. They have brought cultural benefits. They have brought visitors. And they have brought educational benefits.

Can Tho will likewise. It is a large (1.5 million people) and a prosperous city. It has important colleges and universities that can connect with us.

It should also be emphasized that the costs to the City of Riverside are minimal. Sister city activities are, for the most part, privately funded.

By awards and reputation, the Riverside Sister City Program is recognized as among the best in the country.

And third, Vietnam in 2014 has obviously changed since the 1960's and early 1970's.

The United States now ranks first on Vietnam's export list. Major U.S exports to Vietnam include agricultural products, machinery, yarn/fabric, and vehicles.

US State Department Fact Sheet: "Since our Bilateral Trade Agreement came into force in December 2001, the economic relationship between the United States and Vietnam has flourished. Our two-way trade has grown from about \$1 billion in 2001 to almost \$22 billion last year, with a 17 percent increase in exports from 2010 to 2011. We continue to see great potential for expanding U.S. exports into the growing Vietnamese market in support of Vietnam's economic and development aspirations. As a symbol of our growing ties through both trade and people-to-people engagement, today Secretary Clinton witnessed the signing of two contracts between U.S. and Vietnamese enterprises and congratulated the recipient of a Higher Engineering Education Alliance Program scholarship for young women."

As to U.S-Vietnam relations, here are several sentences from a State Department fact sheet.

"U.S. relations with Vietnam have become increasingly cooperative and broad-based in the years since political normalization. In July 2013, Presidents Obama and Sang launched the U.S.-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership, an overarching framework for advancing the bilateral relationship. The new partnership advances key initiatives to bolster U.S.-Vietnam relations and underscores the enduring U.S. commitment to the Asia-Pacific rebalance. The partnership provides a mechanism to facilitate cooperation in areas including political and diplomatic relations, trade and economic ties, science and technology, education and training, environment and health, war legacy issues, defense and security, protection and promotion of human rights, and culture, sports, and tourism."

And to offset the increasing role and strength of the Chinese military, the Department of Defense is looking for ways to work with Vietnam.

Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, for example, traveled to Vietnam for a two-day visit in 2012. The announced purpose was to advance a strong bilateral defense relationship.

For the record, I would also note that Can Tho is in the very south of Vietnam. Most young men from Can Tho fought in the South Viet Nam Army, on our side.

Let me close with two e-mail letters. The first is from Bill Gavitt. No one has been more active with veterans and with sister cities than Bill Gavitt. He is on the wall in the Council Chambers for receiving a Riverside Spirit Award.

Here are parts of Bill's e-mail:

“Please click on this link to the Sister Cities International web site and review President Eisenhower’s thoughts in 1956 when he proposed forming people-to-people contacts and subsequently Sister Cities relationships with citizens of other countries, even those with whom we had been at war.

Today, US cities have 178 partners in Japan, 152 in China, 112 in Germany, 69 in Italy, and 75 in Russia. Have we been at war with any of these countries? Are we still at war with any of them? Do you think the defenders of the Alamo would care that we now have 182 partnerships in Mexico? It does not make one whit of difference. Sister Cities is not a government-to-government program. It is a people-to-people program. The purpose is to promote peace and common understanding. The more we interact, the more we will understand others and peace will prevail.

I say quit thinking up reasons not to understand others. It is time to start helping others if we want to change their behavior or improve their situation in life.”

And the last is from my younger brother. He is my mentor and tutor on Vietnam. Gary went to college on a Navy ROTC fellowship. He chose the Marines. He led a combat platoon in Da Nang, where five members were killed.

Here is my brother Gary’s e-mail:

“Forty-nine years ago I was commissioned and trained as a Marine second lieutenant. By the end of 1965, 180,000 U.S. troops were on the ground in South Vietnam. Many more would follow. I would soon be one of them. We went to war when we were called to do so by our President to maintain, we were told, a non-Communist bastion in South Viet Nam. Our warriors' honorable dedication to their duty on our country's behalf should not be forgotten. We owe this to the new generation of warriors just as we owe it to our fallen comrades.

We should not, however, conflate the honoring of our warriors with a hatred for the Vietnamese people. They were never our enemies. We did not come to Vietnam as colonialists or conquerors. We came because the great powers deemed Vietnam critical to the success of their political beliefs. In a sense, the Vietnamese people were caught in the middle of this worldwide struggle. I returned to Vietnam in 1999 with my wife and daughter. We traveled from Hanoi to Da Nang. The people of Vietnam were warm and welcoming. They had not forgotten the "American War" but they had moved on. They were looking forward to the future and not the past. We should as well. I now often buy clothes labeled "made in Vietnam." I could not have imagined doing so while engaged in combat as a 23-year-old second lieutenant. I imagine the members of the "greatest generation" didn't think that they would be driving Toyotas and Mercedes when they were engaged in fighting World War II. Japan and Germany are now two of our country's strongest allies.

A sister city relationship with Can Tho will help the citizens of Riverside and Can Tho to learn about the unique qualities of each culture. I believe that we can build better relationships with the people of Vietnam without dishonoring our warriors' efforts. I know that I can. Semper Fi. Gary Loveridge”

Thank you for the opportunity to return, and to speak.