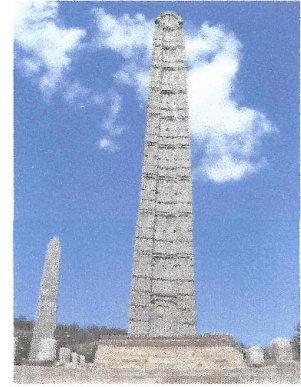




DENVER
THE MILE HIGH CITY



25 YEARS of the AXUM-DENVER SISTER CITIES RELATIONSHIP



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A note from the Founder: Daniel Yohannes, former United States Ambassador to OECD

Congratulations to the Axum/Denver Sister Cities committee for your 25th anniversary. I want to express my appreciation to Tsegaye Hailu who led the committee as chairperson for the first nine years, and to the other chairpersons who succeeded him, and to all the committee members since it was established in 1995.

My family and I moved to Denver in 1992. Soon after, I became interested in creating a relationship between my birth country of Ethiopia, and my newly adopted country the United States of America. I wanted to connect these countries for cultural, educational and business opportunity exchanges. I discovered the Sister Cities program to encompass my vision of creating this relationship and was fortunate to meet many wonderful people, including my good friend former Mayor of Denver, Wellington Webb, and the late Councilman Hiawatha Davis. I approached Councilman Davis, Mayor Webb, and the other City Council members to garner their support for a Sister City relationship with the city of Axum.

Axum was chosen because of its long history of over three thousand years, and its significant contributions to modern Ethiopian culture and history. Several were from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and for developing the Ethiopian alphabet. Through the Sister Cities relationship with Axum, the residents of Denver could learn a lot about the richness of the Ethiopian culture and history and Denver can support Axum's effort to become a modern city. The proposal to make the city of Axum a Sister City was accepted and approved by the City Council of Denver on January 9th, 1995 and signed by Mayor Webb on January 24, 1995. After two years of effort, the dream finally came to fruition and I was elated.

To inaugurate the Denver/Axum Sister Cities relationship, Mayor Webb and I led a group of thirteen business and civic leaders from Denver and other US cities to Axum. Upon our arrival in Axum, we were greeted by all the dignitaries and over twenty thousand residents of the city in a welcoming ceremony. Greeters were lined up from the airport to the central city wearing beautiful, traditional Ethiopian garments and were singing and dancing in Tigrigna. It was an emotional and unforgettable experience for all of us. This was the first trip to Africa for Mayor Webb, the first African American Mayor of Denver, and his wife Wilma Webb. For them,

seeing the love and affection expressed by the residents of Axum was extremely moving.

Immediately after we arrived at the main square of the city and after the traditional welcome ceremony by the Ethiopian Orthodox priests, we proceeded to inaugurate the major street facing the famous Axum Obelisk, to be named after the city of Denver. We were accompanied by Mr. Gebru Asrat who was then the region President for Tigray, Mr. Seeye Abraha, the former Defense Minister and Chairman of Ethiopian Airlines, Mr. Abay Woldu, the Mayor of Axum, and thousands of city residents. I am grateful for the regional and city administration officials who worked with me to name the major street in Axum after Denver.

Another notable relationship that was established during our time in Ethiopia was the alliance between Ethiopian Airlines, the largest Airlines in Africa, and United Airlines. Ethiopian Airlines hosted us throughout our trip and invited us to visit their headquarters in Addis Ababa. Through the initial connection with the Vice President of United Airlines who was on the trip with us, Ethiopian Airlines had a pathway to join the Star Alliance group, founded by United. Today, Ethiopian Airlines flies to five major US cities from Addis Ababa.

The following year in 1996, through the efforts of Mayor Webb and Councilman Davis, we inaugurated the City of Axum park located on Martin Luther King Blvd in Denver. Mayor Webb, Wilma Webb, Councilman Davis, Deputy President of the Tigray region Ms. Aregash, Tsegaye Hailu, Abuna Matthias, who is currently the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and many friends were present at the Park dedication. This was the closing of the first chapter in the building of the Sister Cities relationship.

These events are significant because Axum park in Denver and Denver street in Axum serve as reminders for the close relationship built between the two cities. The forging of these ties encourages cultural understanding, friendship, and many educational and business opportunities. I wanted to create a relationship



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to not only benefit the two cities but for the country of Ethiopia as a whole. Bringing both cities together enable citizens to enjoy and benefit the richness that exists between the two countries.

After the sister cities were established, I worked with Mr. James Jackson, the founder of Project CURE, and their current President and CEO, Doug Jackson to donate over 40 million dollars' worth of medical equipment and supplies to Axum and many other cities in Ethiopia over the last twenty-five years. These efforts provide more accessibility to healthcare and are aimed to improve the health and wellbeing of all Ethiopians.



I want to thank you all who have enabled the Sister Cities relationship to successfully continue. The bonding and flourishing of the two cities were important to me, and I appreciate everyone for making this dream possible. I'm looking forward to seeing the Denver/Axum relationship continue to prosper in the years to come.

The Axum/Denver Sister Cities Committee Activities from January 1995 – January 2020 by Tsegaye Hailu

Twenty-five years ago, many Denverites knew nothing about Axum, Ethiopia. Likewise, Axumites knew nothing about Denver. It may not be surprising for Axumites not to have kept up with what was going on in the rest of the world for over three decades. They were trying to cope with two evils: the natural disaster of severe, back to back droughts from the 70s to the 90s, as well as a man-made disaster - fighting a civil war against a ruthless military government that practiced a scorched earth campaign, comparable to what Fascist Italy practiced over Ethiopia in 1936 to 1941.

However, much has changed since 1995, to increase the awareness of people across the Atlantic ocean and the African continent, partly through the activities of the Axum-Denver Sister Cities Committee, and partly due to the increased immigrants to Denver from various parts of Ethiopia, the organized tours to Axum, and the educational exchanges between the Denver Metropolitan State University and its sister University of Axum.

In 1994, Lou Malandra, Director of the Littleton Town Hall Arts Center, had a grant that he wanted to use for a cultural event. We brought a troupe of traditional dancers from Tigray. The dancers performed for several days at the Center to the delight of Ethiopian immigrants in town. I was hoping that the city of Littleton, where I live, may be interested in a sister city relationship with Ethiopia, but that did not materialize. Instead, Mr. Daniel Yohannes, CEO of Colorado National Bank at the time, felt confident that we can do it with the City of Denver. In his introductory note, Daniel has briefly described his efforts to cement the Sister City relationship between Axum and Denver.

Questions like, why Axum and what good can the sister city relationship bring, were raised from various quarters. As far as the why Axum, we felt that the city has unmatched credentials for representing both the ancient and modern Ethiopia more than any other city in the country. In one of our earliest newsletters that our capable Editor, Sylvia Harmon maintained, I wrote, "Any city in Ethiopia could have been the Sister City. In fact, we wish to see more Sister City relationships established between Ethiopian and US cities, if only the Ethiopian communities in the US cities take up the challenge of initiating them." Now, there are three more Ethiopian cities that have Sister Cities in the US.

In 1995 after the shipment to Axum Hospital of a container full of medical equipment and supplies from Project C.U.R.E., an American friend of mine wrote from Ethiopia, "Congratulations to all involved in the medical supplies shipment. If that came about due to the Axum Sister City Program, then I owe everyone an apology for my skepticism".

It was only two years after Ethiopia came out of 17 years of bloody civil war and several decades of recurrent and very severe drought and famine, that the Axum-Denver Sister City relationship was established. The country needed peace-loving people around the world to reach out and welcome it. Making Axum a Sister City was a small gesture of welcome and a fitting one for the Sister Cities International movement, whose mission is to promote world peace through citizen diplomacy.

I was privileged to be the Chairperson of the Axum-Denver Sister City Committee with Dr. Peter Van Arsdale as the Vice-Chair, Mr. Dave Stephenson, the Secretary, Dr. Ron Larson, the Treasurer, Ms. Maggie Stewart, Program Officer, and Ms. Sylvia Harmon, Historian/Newsletter Editor. I stayed as Chairperson for the next nine years and I was succeeded by many capable people including Don and Gloria Curtis, Mrs. Gayle Stallings, Mrs. Flora DuPree, Dr. James Aubrey, and our current Chairperson, Mr. Chuck Kreiman. Our Committee has been one of the most active committees of DSCI, mostly due to Daniel's dedicated and generous

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mentorship and our equally dedicated Executive Officers and members.

During the visit to Axum by the delegation led by Mayor Webb and Daniel, Dr. Ron Larson, our Treasurer, happened to be in Mekelle, the principal city of Tigray, as a volunteer consultant to Tigray Development Association (TDA) on renewable energy. Below are excerpts from his eyewitness account of the reception the people of Axum gave the visitors.

"...It was obvious Axum was taking the Sister City delegation's arrival seriously.

... as we walked to the airport, the excitement was obvious everywhere – more than an hour in advance of the delegation's arrival. Numerous bands and similar groups were practicing their dances or songs, and thousands of Axumites were patiently and exuberantly waiting for the plane to land.

...the roads were lined by happy, cheering thousands.

This fascinating little city will soon be receiving many thousands of international visitors every year and virtually the only international name those visitors will see will be that of Denver."

Incidentally, the Denver Street sign in both English and Ge'ez letters (shown in the picture above) was made by the Denver Wastewater Management office, thanks to Mr. Reza Kazemian, Director of Operations.

Upon return to Denver, Lieutenant Governor Gail Schoettler, acquired two electricity generators from the army, and shipped them to Axum as donations, to be used as backups at the hospital and other government institutions.

Brief History of Axum

Axum is in north-central Ethiopia near the border with Eritrea. The city is rich in history and culture, but only a fraction of its history has been researched through archeological digs. When I was a toddler, I started my education at the Abraha-Atsbeha Elementary School in Axum. I remember two things clearly from my childhood days. One of them is that Axumites believe there are nine cities buried under the current one. This may seem an exaggeration, but the fact is that the limited archeological diggings that have taken place from time to time, have unearthed more history than previously known. No doubt, more history awaits discovery. The second thing is that the Ark of the Covenant (known in Axum and the rest of Ethiopia, as Tsilate Musie or Moses' Tablet) is kept at Saint Mary of Zion Church. This belief is so strong and has been for centuries, that I never questioned the claim until Graham Hancock published his bestseller book, The Sign and the Seal, in 1992.

According to the historian, Stuart Munro-Hay, the rise of Axum as a world power, may date back from about "2nd-1st century BC". The city's prosperity came as a result of its location on the trade route between the Roman Empire, Arabia, India, and China. Later, Axum became a Holy City in Ethiopia when King Ezana (known in Ethiopian history books as Abraha), declared Christianity as the state religion in mid-4th century AD. At the time, Ezana's empire stretched from the Nile River in the west to southern Arabia in the east.

Axum is also famous for its tall obelisks (stelae), which are carved from single granite blocks to mark subterranean royal burial chambers



before Christianity was introduced into the country. A common characteristic of the major obelisks is that they are tapered on all sides ending with a crescent top, which, in my opinion, may represent the pre-Christian worship of the moon. The tallest of the obelisks at 108 feet, lies broken on the ground to the left of the above picture. Shown in the picture, the 79-foot obelisk on the right, has stood there for many centuries. In 2005, it was joined by the 87-foot tall obelisk, on the left, after it was repatriated from Rome where it had been taken by Mussolini's army. One interesting feature of these obelisks is that they were meticulously carved imitating multi-story buildings with many floors and false doors, false ringers, and windows. Given that multi-story structures are commonplace today, it is easy to overlook the fact that the ancient Axumites also had the concept of multi-story buildings more than 20 centuries ago. As markers of burial chambers, could these obelisks also represent a passage, in the pre-Christian religion, for the departed soul to ascend to heaven?

Past Activities of the Axum/Denver Sister Cities Committee

The Axum-Denver Sister Cities Committee has been actively helping the City of Axum with some of its problems. In this writeup, I have focused on its problems of municipal water supply and sanitation, because these have a greater impact on the health and welfare of the residents and a bearing on the tourism industry.

Water-Related Activities

In 2000, Sister Cities International (SCI) had its annual conference in Denver. Our Committee invited the Mayor

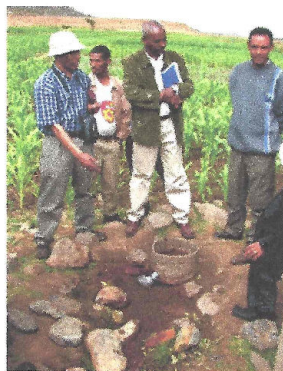
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of Axum, the former Director of the Axum Hospital and a young girl who needed prosthetics for an arm that she lost during the civil war. The Mayor and the medical doctor expressed to us Axum's most pressing problems, namely, municipal water supply and sanitation. We sought and found support from the late Chips Barry, Manager of Denver Water. We thus carried out the "The Axum Water Supply and Sanitation Feasibility Study" project in 2002. Denver Water assigned Mr. Sandy Dee, a microbiologist, to the project team. Sandy set up a water quality testing lab and trained eleven technicians. Along the way, he tested representative water samples from sources in the city and found them all unacceptable for human consumption based on the United States and World Health Organization standards.

Another Denver Water staff, Mr. Steve Schmitzer, Planner and Manager of Water Resources Analysis was also assigned to the project. At the conclusion of our study, he was responsible for publishing the report, "Evaluation of the Water Supply and Sanitation of the City of Axum, April 2003". The rest of the Project Team consisted of Professor David Hubly, Civil Engineer at the University of Colorado in Denver and Mr. Jim Horner, retired Bureau of Reclamation Geotechnical Engineer. Mrs. Linda Dee, Mrs. Pamela Horner, and Mrs. Janet Guizzetti also joined the team. Denver Water Manager requested my employer, the Environmental Protection Agency, to allow me to join the Project Team as a Project Coordinator and as Hydrogeologist.

In a previous attempt to improve the Axum municipal water supply, an infrastructure of shallow wells in basalt aquifer intercalated with ash beds, a clear well to collect the water, a disinfection system, booster pumps to push the water uphill to storage tanks in the city and a distribution system of PVC pipes, had been installed. Unfortunately, due to poor material quality, improper installation and lack of maintenance, the infrastructure was in disrepair. On top of the inadequate water supply, there was also a good deal of wastage through leakage. We obtained a leak detection equipment from Denver Water and sent it to Axum with Ms. Becky Mitchel, to train the water department staff on the use of the equipment.

Mr. Birhane Hailu (the gentleman with the coat in the picture on the right), Deputy Administrator of the Tigray Central Zone, did a great job of gathering our counterparts from the Water Resources Bureau in Mekelle and the Water Resources Authority in Addis Ababa. Without



wasting any time, we got down to work the day we arrived in Axum.

In addition to the inadequate supply, the water was borderline potable due to high iron, indicated by the reddish coating of the rocks in the picture below, elevated manganese, and low pH.

A pilot plant designed by Prof. Hubly, showed that aeration, addition of lime (calcium hydroxide, CaOH) and slow sand filtration, lowered the iron and manganese and increased the pH, making the water potable. However, the building of the full-scale facility was abandoned when the yield from the source wells drastically diminished over time. Instead, the Tigray Bureau of Water Resources opted to build a transmission line to draw water from the neighboring town of Adwa, over 15 miles away.

The Adwa supply is treated surface water from a reservoir. However, looking into the future, building a larger dam or two, further downstream, below the confluence of several major drainages, needs to be considered as a more sustainable source that could supply several other communities along the ridge between Adwa and Shire Enda Selassie, in addition to the current customers of Axum and Adwa residents and the textile factory in Adwa.

Another project that our Committee undertook was to introduce a simple water treatment technique using Proctor and Gamble (P&G) PUR Sachets (or packets). One tea bag sized Sachet can quickly treat 10 liters of turbid (cloudy) water and make it safe to drink. In 2009, our Committee won an award for several thousand PUR Sachets, which we systematically distributed for a year, to the families of the 600 Hawelti Elementary School children and the staff. The effectiveness of the exercise was measured in the drop of student absences by over 37%, compared to the previous school season. This was due to the children drinking safe water, which reduced the occurrence of water-borne sickness, like diarrhea, that kept children from going to school. This treatment technique would be useful for rural communities if it could be marketed at affordable price.

Sanitation Related Activities

Previous sanitation studies had recommended the use of septic trucks to service public and private pit latrines that most homes use. So, beginning in 2003 the Axum Committee embarked on fundraising and finding a septic truck at affordable prices. On September 29, 2014, we shipped a septic truck to Axum that had been obtained from Denver Wastewater Management Division, thanks to Mr. Reza Kazemian, Operations Manager, who offered us a used truck under 60,000 miles of service at a price we could afford.

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The septic track loaded on a trailer bed ready to be shipped out of the Denver Wastewater Management yard.

The truck was shipped free through "HA-Transportation, Denton Program", from Denver to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. From there, TDA took over and delivered the truck to Axum. We are grateful to the office of Congresswoman Diana DeGette, for expediting the shipping process. In 2015, our committee received an award from Sister Cities International for the project.

Miscellaneous Other Activities

As Daniel explained, on July 28, 1997, the park at Martin Luther King Boulevard and Birch Street was renamed City of Axum Park. At the August 16 dedication by Mayor Webb, the late Mr. Araya Zerihun, first Director of TDA, was also present. Painting of the outside walls of the restrooms and replicas of Axum artifacts at the children's playground were commissioned by the City of Denver.

Dedication of City of Axum Park



Daniel commissioned a sculptor to make a 3-foot replica of the Axum Obelisk from bronze. This replica became one of the artifacts among other cultural artifacts exhibited in City Hall. The replica commemorates the late Councilman Hiawatha Davies, who was instrumental in the establishment of the Sister City relationship. The Axum exhibit was unveiled by Mayor Wellington Webb and First Lady Wilma Webb on August 6, 1998. The Axum and other Sister City exhibits are currently found on the third floor of City Hall.



The Denver Metropolitan State University is a sister school to Axum University. Dr. Akbarali Thobhani, Executive Director, Office of International Studies, Metropolitan State University of Denver, was travelling to Axum and through email, I introduced him to the Mayor of Axum. I asked the Mayor to introduce Dr. Thobhani to the President of Axum University.

During subsequent visits, Dr. Thobhani observed children taking classes under a temporary shed made of tree branches while visiting an area close to Axum. He raised funds and succeeded in building the Gessesso Elementary School.

True to the mission of the Sister Cities movement, the Axum-Denver Sister City committee has organized and conducted three guided tours to Axum and other parts of Ethiopia. Another trip is currently in the works for September 2020. This time it will combine visits not only to Axum and other historic sites along that route, but also to the City of Adama, which is a Sister City to Aurora, part of the Denver Metro Area. Please visit www.denversistercities.org for further details and updates about the planned tour.

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Our committee has carried out many other smaller tasks. Below, I mention the ones I can remember:

- We hosted many Ethiopian government officials visiting Denver.
- For several weeks in 1997, our Committee exhibited Ethiopian costumes at Denver International Airport (DIA), along the bridge to concourse A.
- We sent school supplies to the Abraha and Atsbaha Elementary School in Axum.
- DSCI's past President, the late Teddy Throm, donated \$500 toward the building of a youth center in Axum. I took the cash and delivered it to the organization during one of my trips there.
- Artists Ray & Isolde Hathaway and Renee Morris returned from a visit to Axum where they saw the Denver Street sign. They joined our committee and helped establish school-to-school relationships between schools in Axum and schools in Denver and Boulder, Colorado; created pen pals among the school children, and had the children exchange art the children created.
- More recently, DSCI Axum has supported the Axumite Heritage Foundation Library through support of the children's library, book donations, computer lab, and the sponsorship of a window. While serving in Axum as a Fulbright Scholar for 10 months, committee member Janet Lee advised, provided training in library operations, and supported the move from the prior library in the old Governor's Palace to the newly built modern building.
- We organized social functions and still run a "City in a Suitcase" program to educate school children and the public about Axum and Ethiopia.
- We coordinated annual picnics with the Ashenda festivity at the City of Axum Park. Ashenda is a traditional festival unique to Tigray and parts of northern Ethiopia, dedicated mainly to young women and girls to show off traditional singing and dancing in their best attire.
- We have monthly meetings on the fourth Wednesday of each month and get together and/or plan fund-raising events on the Sister Cities anniversary.

Before concluding this brief history, I would like to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to past and present members of the committee who have given it their best to live up to the ideals of the Sister Cities movement, becoming the link not only between the peoples of the two cities but also the two countries. I would like to mention a few out of the many admirable leaders and members that our Committee has benefited from:

To Don and Gloria Curtis, our longest-serving members, I admire your dedication and your selfless contribution of your time, money and skills. Gloria's necklaces depicting various designs of Ethiopian crosses adorn many appreciative necks in our community. Don, your accounting skills served us well until our account was centralized under DSCI and even then, you straightened out DSCI's books as well.

Gayle Stallings' networking skills, salesmanship, and creative ideas for organizing and soliciting for funds, your persistence, and push for efficiency and action have served the Committee very well. We are proud of you for being named Ethiopia's Honorary Consul by the Ethiopian Embassy.

Chuck Kreiman, our current Chairperson, having been a Federal employee, applies his knowledge on how government works. We were stuck for too long in the shipping process of the septic truck and his suggestion to contact the office of Congresswoman Diana DeGette helped tremendously. Chuck was a Peace Corps Volunteer teaching in Asela. In his recent trip, he visited Asela, and his old neighbors welcomed him like a long-lost family member.