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Tokaj approves Sonoma as Sister City

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THE RECENT Sonoma-Tokaj Committee's organizational meeting was attended by 50 people, including, from left, Nicholas Bartsch, honorary consul of Hungary in Sacramento; George "The Count" Webber; and Bill Boerum, president of Sonoma Sister Cities Association.

Tokaj, Hungary, the town at center of the world famous Tokaj wine producing region, has approved a Sister City relationship with the City of Sonoma.

Janos Majer, mayor of Tokaj, in a letter to Sonoma Mayor Joanne Sanders wrote, "The main motivation of the partnership shall be the spreading of wine culture, the cooperation of wineries and that of touristic entrepreneurs. We would like to add that we see further perspectives in cultural, educational, health care, industrial and social relation as well."

Bill Boerum, president of the Sonoma Sister Cities Association, said that the association's board previously had voted to support formation of the Sonoma-Tokaj Sister Cities Committee and was now seeking a date on the Sonoma City Council's calendar for consideration of the relationship. "This initiative is further evidence of Sonoma's increasing international allure in the world of wine," Boerum said. "If approved by the City Council, Tokaj would be the fourth premier wine city we are connected with: Chambolle-Musigny in Burgundy, France; Greve in Chianti in Tuscany, Italy; and Penglai in Shandong Province, China."

The relationship developed from a visit last November to Buena Vista Winery by members of a Hungarian trade and tourism mission and the dinner meeting with Jean-Charles Boisset, the new owner of Buena Vista. The Hungarian delegation included Sandor Fazekas, minister of rural development of Hungary; and

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Ambassador Balazs Bokor, consul general of Hungary in Los Angeles.

The Buena Vista group in addition to Boisset, included Tom Blackwood, director of retail operations of Buena Vista; and George Webber, who portrays Count Agoston Haraszthy at the winery and at promotional events around the United States telling the story of Haraszthy's life. Webber is the chair of the Sonoma-Tokaj Sister City Committee.

Haraszthy, a native of Hungary, is universally regarded as "The Father of California Viticulture" and one of the most important Europeans to begin California's wine industry.

He founded Buena Vista in 1857. This year marks the 200th anniversary of the count's birth, which will be honored by a grand celebration at the winery on Sept. 1.

Webber recently conducted the organizational meeting of the committee and has scheduled the next meeting for 6 p.m. Thursday, March 22, at Buena Vista.

Anyone interested in joining the committee and attending can reach Webber at thecount@buenavistawinery.com or 260-9511.

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