

# Chinese sister city deal yielding dividends for Halton Hills

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A sister-city agreement between Halton Hills and its Chinese counterpart Wenjiang signed in 2016 is evolving beyond just a ceremonial pact.

Delegates from Wenjiang, a district of Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, recently visited Halton Hills for the first-ever Wenjiang Festival last month from Oct. 23 to 28.

The five-day festival was a celebration of the agreement, and featured a number of events including cooking and dance demonstrations, an art exhibit, and a day of hockey games between local squads and teams from Wenjiang.

The visit was more than just a celebration, however, with delegates continuing discussions about possible economic partnerships between the two towns that began during a visit to Wenjiang by Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette and

members of council and town staff in September.

"Canada is No. 1 in the world for hockey, but children in China are starting to play. It's becoming popular. It unifies our two countries to work together in other areas, like a Chinese solar panel company and Halton Hills entering an agreement," Mayor Li Yi told The IFP during his visit.

The secretary was referring to a deal struck between Chinese green energy products manufacturer Sichuan Taiyi New Energy Development Corporation and Southwestern Energy Inc., which owns the local hydro utility, to supply 19 semi-solar-powered and high-efficiency street lights to be installed by Southwestern in the Halton Hills Town Hall parking lot.

The initiative is a pilot project that could lead to further partnerships down the road.

"We signed a memoran-

dum of understanding with (Sichuan Taiyi New Energy Development Corporation) and our company," said Art Skidmore, president and CEO of Halton Hills Hydro. "We're looking at sort of 'greening' the street light system, and this is a great opportunity for a demonstration project."

During their visit to China a few months back, the mayor and staff were asked to co-host a conference on sustainable development. Members of town staff and council not only took part in the conference - they were featured guests and speakers.

"I don't think even Toronto or anyone has ever done anything like this where we organized the agenda with the government in Wenjiang and had a conference room full of 200 people or so, with (Chinese) government officials from the local and provincial levels," said manager of economic development, innovation and culture, Da-

mian Szybalski.

Halton Hills reps also visited schools and hospitals during their visit to Wenjiang, which the mayor suggested as other areas where the two communities may one day be able to further collaborate.

Building off the budding relationship with Wenjiang, Halton Hills and the Town of Oakville recently held the Doing Business in China Forum, giving local business owners the opportunity to learn about possible future partnerships with other Chinese companies, as well as potentially opening up the Chinese market to local exporters and manufacturers.

"I think we want to keep the momentum going (with this partnership). We've got great momentum right now," said Mayor Bonnette. "I see more economic partnerships and prosperity moving forward, which will benefit both communities, (and) also both countries."



Photo courtesy of the Town of Halton Hills

**Halton Hills mayor, Rick Bonnette, and Secretary Dao Ming of Wenjiang, China, ceremonially water a "friendship tree" planted in Wenjiang's main park during a visit in September in honour of the sister-city agreement between the two cities.**

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