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## Boning up on Norfolk, our other sister city

By ANGELA MOMBOURQUETTE Don't Get Me Started

SHE'S THE SISTER that most of us didn't even know we had.

Many of us are aware that Halifax and Hakodate, Japan are "sister-cities," and a few may know about our relationship with Campeche, Mexico, but I was reminded by a phone call this week that Norfolk, Virginia and the Halifax Regional Municipality have been sister-cities since mayor Peter Kelly and Norfolk mayor Paul Fraim signed a proclamation declaring us "twinning" in April 2006.

Apparently our two cities have a whole lot in common. My caller was Marie Kerrigan, a member of the Halifax Norfolk Sister Cities Society, and she says the similarities between Halifax and Norfolk are almost uncanny. "If you were standing on the waterfront in Norfolk," she told me, "you would be looking right across at Portsmouth. You'd think you were standing on the Halifax waterfront and looking across at Dartmouth."

She also told me that, like Halifax, Norfolk has a maritime museum on their waterfront with an extensive boardwalk, and that the neighbouring community of Hampton is home to a star-shaped fortress called Fort Monroe, which is very similar to our Citadel. Norfolk also hosts a Tattoo which is patterned on our own Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo, and local Tattoo producer and artistic director Ian Fraser has been instrumental in the development of the Virginia show.

Kerrigan is just one of many people who have taken an interest in this twinning. Retired Vice Admiral Duncan 'Dusty' Miller is the chairman of the Halifax Norfolk Sister Cities Society, and for several years he's been enthusiastically promoting the benefits that these connections can bring to both cities.

"There's the military connection, of course, because Norfolk is home to the largest naval base in the world," Miller told me, "and we are home to CFB Halifax — the largest Canadian forces base in the country." He pointed out that the aircraft carrier USS Norfolk came to Halifax about a year and a half ago for the first time ever, and he says the U.S. military is now looking at sending contingents here on a much more frequent basis. "That's huge economics for the city. You get one aircraft carrier in here, and that's 5,500 people spending money downtown."

And here's the thing: some of the relatives are going to be in town this week, because Norfolk is also home to the schooner Virginia (which I'm told looks very similar to the Bluenose II), and she is coming to town for the Tall Ships festival.

Mayor Peter Kelly will be hosting a reception on board the Virginia for the crew, our city councillors, and members of the local business community; the Virginia's crew will include several Halifax high school students who have been sponsored by the local Rotary Club to sail aboard the ship on a goodwill voyage from Connecticut to Halifax to Boston.

Miller is optimistic that connections like these will help create a bond that will reap dividends for both cities. "My hope is that we can continue a relationship that increases trade, tourism, understanding, the military relationship, and cultural and educational relationships. Maybe that's all a little nebulous, but I think it's all good stuff," he says, with genuine enthusiasm.

"We're kind of excited about it," he adds. "I think it's really positive to go into the next decade having a special relationship with a city in the United States."

I'm sure it can't hurt. And maybe this newfound sister will even ask first before borrowing our brand new boots.

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