

SMITHS FALLS

THIS WEEK

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MELISSA DI COSTANZO / THIS WEEK

Ashley Delorme, 11, and Natasha Hamilton, 11, jog in Lower Reach Park for the St. Francis de Sales Catholic School Terry Fox Run Sept. 24. The school raised approximately \$1,500.

Partnership struck between Smiths Falls and Xiangfan City

MELISSA DI COSTANZO

THIS WEEK

Four representatives, two interpreters and deputy director and vice-director general, from Xiangfan City, China came to Smiths Falls Sept. 25 to sign a memorandum of understanding with the town.

The group arrived in council chambers at roughly 3:30 p.m. to sign the memorandum, which aims to establish and develop mutual co-operation on economic/business trade, culture, education, science and technology, health and well-being, tourism and to promote collaborate development in both Smiths Falls and Xiangfan City.

The group went for lunch with representatives from the town, including Mayor Dennis Staples and chief administrative officer, Wayne Brown, and then took in local sights with community development officer, Chuck Hudson, such as the Aquablue factory and

Guildline Instruments.

After signing the memorandum, Staples and Li Wenfeng, deputy director for the city, exchanged gifts. The mayor received a brass plate and silver coins, which represented Xiangfan City's history. Staples presented Wenfeng with gifts such as prints of the Rideau Canal and golf shirts.

Xiangfan City is home to about 5.8 million people, and is located in the province of Hubei. The city is approximately 2,000 years old, and is also sister city to Boston, Mass.

The meeting between the town and the city, as Staples says, was arranged through Rima Aristocrat, president and CEO of Willis College.

The college has been developing educational partnerships with Chinese educational institutions and government departments for the past 10 years because, Aristocrat says, there are tremendous business and educational opportunities

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Smiths Falls partners with Chinese city

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"Chinese cities are looking for opportunities to establish business relations and to develop sister city partnerships between Canadian and Chinese municipalities," she says. "The opportunities are tremendous."

During her trip to China in August, Aristocrat had discussions with Xiangfan City officials; the city then expressed an interest in exploring economic opportunities with Smiths Falls.

Aristocrat became an unofficial ambassador in arranging for the two municipalities to meet in Smiths Falls. She says the similarities between both communities are strong.

"Smiths Falls is expanding ... and Xiangfan City is looking for this vision, as well," she says. "It was a perfect match."

Staples says the delegation seemed to be very happy with what they saw.

"This is the start of a very important and significant relationship," he says. "It's been a privilege to have met the group, and we are looking forward to a continued relationship."

Wenfeng says he was delighted to be in town, and is very impressed with everything he saw Sept. 25.

He says the environment was the one



MELISSA DI COSTANZO / THIS WEEK

Li Wenfeng, deputy director of the Xiangfan City, watches as Smiths Falls chief administrative officer Wayne Brown a memorandum of understanding.

aspect of the town that interested him.

"It's a very beautiful neighbourhood," he says. "The people here are very friendly and we received very warm hospitality."

Liu Bangjian, vice-director general, says Smiths Falls is a beautiful town and was impressed with the hospitality he

experienced.

The delegation flew back to China the following day.

Smiths Falls can expect another delegation, this time, government officials from Xiangfan City, to come to town Oct. 22, where they will make a formal announcement.