

New Bedford's Mayor Mitchell, Rep. Cabral to join ceremonies in Horta, Azorean Island of Faial

"This weekend, at the invitation of the Mayor of Horta Municipality, Carlos Manuel de Silveira Ferreira, Mayor Jon Mitchell and State Representative Antonio Cabral will join with Mayor Ferreira and Luis Garcia, President of the Legislative Assembly of the Autonomous Region of the Azores, to honor of the 50th anniversary of the Sister City Agreement between New Bedford and Horta.

New Bedford and Horta, the capital of the Azorean Island of Faial, have been closely connected for two centuries. In the 19th century, whaling vessels from New Bedford would routinely stop in Horta to offload whale oil and re-supply their vessels. Those interactions eventually led to immigration to New Bedford and elsewhere in New England by residents of Faial and the other Azorean islands. In the early 1970s, Ward 5 City Councilor Manuel Fernando Neto, a native of Horta, proposed that the long-standing relationship between the two cities be formalized in a Sister City Agreement. In 1972, then-Mayor John A. Markey traveled to Horta, where he signed the agreement with Azorean officials. The anniversary of the signing was originally to be celebrated last year, but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mayor John Markey and Counselor Manuel Neto, accompanied by President Victor Macedo and Councilor Pacheco de Almeida, greeted the acting substitute Governor, Dr. Pereira de Freitas, and the President of the General Board, Dr. Linhares de Andrade. The picture was taken during a trip to Horta from July 4, 1972 to July 8, 1972.

Mayor Mitchell and Representative Cabral also will commemorate the 65th anniversary of the Azorean Refugee Act, which rushed in a wave of Azorean immigration to New Bedford and other American cities. In 1957, the Capelinhos Volcano on the Island of Faial erupted for nearly 13 months and caused massive destruction across the island. The disaster prompted Senators John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts and Frank Pastore of Rhode Island to propose legislation to lift immigration quotas on Azoreans so that they could find refuge and opportunity in America. In 1958, Congress passed what became known as the Azorean Refugee Act, which was signed into law by President Dwight Eisenhower on September 2nd of that year in Newport, Rhode Island, where he was vacationing. The Act ultimately brought tens of thousands of Portuguese citizens to the U.S.

The New Bedford delegation's itinerary includes a meeting with the Municipal Government of Horta City Council, an official reception by Luis Garcia, President of the Legislative Assembly of the Autonomous Region of the Azores, and an official reception of the delegation by the Regional Government of the Azores. The delegation will join officials from Faial to unveil a plaque at the edge of the Capelinhos Volcano to commemorate the Azorean Refugee Act.

"The bond between New Bedford and Horta has been strong for two hundred years, and the most important gift Horta has given New Bedford is its people," said Mayor Jon Mitchell. "We have benefited beyond calculation from the contributions they and the immigrants from all the Azorean islands have made to the City and America more generally. New Bedford is a stronger, more vibrant city on account of Azorean immigration. The reaffirming of our Sister City Agreement underscores our collective gratitude and the high hope for the next 50 years of our friendship."

"It is an honor to be celebrating the 65th anniversary of the Azorean Refugee Act of 1958 in Horta, New Bedford's Sister City. This celebration is an enduring testament to the

strength of the relationship between New Bedford, the Island of Faial, and the Portuguese Azorean and American people,” said Rep. Antonio Cabral. “Thousands of families that call New Bedford and the SouthCoast home today benefited from the expansion of the Azorean Refugee Act, including my own family, and so I am honored to visit Horta for this celebration, which speaks so clearly to the enduring strength of and exciting future for New Bedford’s partnership with the Azores.”

“I’m grateful for Mayor Mitchell’s delegation in representing our great City on this exciting trip to the place of my birth and New Bedford’s Sister City, Horta,” said Manuel Fernando Neto. “Hopefully, the renewed efforts of the present political leadership will continue with future generations with substantial and sustained endeavors for the mutual benefit of both Cities and their people. To that end, hopefully, our children and grandchildren will be part of that effort.”