On the Via Maitani in Orvieto, Italy is the studio of Livio Orazio Valentini. He was born in 1920 in nearby San Venanzo, but the artist’s family moved to Orvieto when he was two. Since young Valentini was impoverished, his formative years in painting were strictly self-taught.

At the age of 20, Valentini was called to the armed forces in Sicily, Albania and Greece. This led to his confinement in the concentration camp at Buchenwald, Germany. At war’s end, Valentini returned to his beloved Orvieto and undertook a remarkable Career. Exhibitions in Perugia, Rome and Florence, and later throughout Europe, followed with his work receiving national awards of merit.

Valentini has shown remarkable breadth as an artist and teacher, producing sculpture in terracotta, forged iron and stone. His paintings and graphic works often pursue themes that comment on the human condition. Some represent the concept of germination and rebirth; others dwell on the negative or violent in mankind. His symbolic use of the bird, caged or hunted, is especially memorable. More recently, Valentini has produced a series of large scale paintings based on the Renaissance frescoes by Luca Signorelli in the Cathedral of Orvieto. In the heart of Umbria, this native artist, with his lovely wife Flora, continues to fabricate images of historic synthesis, part Etruscan, part Renaissance, part Post-Modern.

Our goal is to showcase the sculpture and paintings of Valentini in the Etheredge Center at USCA in November 1997. This will be the United States debut of this internationally recognized artist from our partner city, Orvieto. Valentini has also agreed to visit area schools and speak to students. He will make himself available to students and the citizens of Aiken during his ten day stay in Aiken, providing many with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to meet and talk with a renowned artist.
It was a chance meeting between Livio Orazio Valentini and George Custodi in 1995 that began the journey of two cities, Orvieto and Aiken, toward the Partnership. The idea had already taken root in Aiken when George telephoned Fred Cavanaugh in the spring of 1993 and proposed the idea. Fred was very receptive. But which city? In which country? It would not be an easy task to find a city somewhere in the world that would provide the friendship, enthusiasm and cultural relationship that would foster such a partnership. And so, as with many events in the course of history, a strangely coincidental set of events and circumstances unfolded, as if guided by an unseen hand.

In the summer of 1993 a small but influential group of people met to endorse the idea. John Walker, Bill Weiss and Rich Waugh from the Aiken Sunrise Rotary Club, June Murff of the Greater Aiken Chamber of Commerce, and Steve Thompson and Frances Thomas of the City of Aiken, agreed to work together to foster a Sister City relationship. The City of Aiken joined Sister Cities International and during the next two years searched for a Sister City. After three candidate cities were considered without success by the Fall of 1995, everyone realized that the process might indeed be lengthy, requiring patience and perseverance.

Meanwhile, George had gone to Orvieto to visit a distant cousin in October of 1995. He had always admired Orvieto because of its rich artistic heritage dating back to the Etruscans; because of its setting high atop a volcanic bluff in the heart of Umbria, Italy; because of its people - industrious and independent, yet hospitable and warm. George, a member of the Aiken Sunrise Rotary Club, had planned to attend a meeting of the Orvieto Rotary because it would provide yet another opportunity to meet Orvietans. As with any other appointment in Orvieto, he set out on foot, along narrow cobbled streets toward the Ristorante Maurizio, almost across the piazza from one of the jewels of all European Cathedrals - the Duomo of Orvieto. It was about 8 in the evening. When George arrived, he asked the head waiter where the Rotary would be meeting. The answer was disappointing. The Rotary would not be meeting that evening. It was particularly disappointing because George had been counting on one of those famous Orvietan dinners, made even more special by that world renowned white wine, Orvieto Classico. but George was undaunted. How would he get credit for the meeting? He asked again. "So who is taking
attendedance?” The waiter’s answer: “Livio Orazio Valentini, the artist. He
did no go on the bus tour to Spain with the other Rotarians, so the
president put him in charge, but he’s not here yet - may not even show up.
Usually we don’t get visitors when the club doesn’t meet.” George pressed
on: “Where may I find him?” The waiter’s answer was simple enough. Livio
had a studio and gallery on Via Maitani, about 100 meters from the
restaurant.

A minute later George was meeting Valentini for the first time, in his
gallery; and upon finding out that George had come halfway around the
world to attend Rotary that evening, Livio was distressed, but quickly
recovered. He invited George back to the Ristorante Maurizio where they
sat down in the outdoor courtyard. Over a cup of espresso they began
talking about their clubs, their towns and their backgrounds. The coffee was
finished but the conversation was not. Livio took charge and suggested a
glass of that marvelous wine, Orvieto Classico. They began talking in earnest
about their two cities, about the endless possibilities for enriching the
citizens of Aiken with art and culture of the ancient world; and the
Orvietans with the new vistas, culture and opportunities of the new world;
and for both cities, with possibilities for business and educational exchanges.
The brainstorming, fueled by that serene setting in the shadow of the
Duomo, seemed endless in possibility and scope, but it was time to go
home. It was dark now, and the town was quiet. As they said their
goodbyes, and embraced in the Italian way of greeting, they pledged to
keep in touch, correspond and to keep the vision alive - the vision of two
cities, some five thousand miles apart, but joined in a partnership which
would provide its citizens culturally enriching experiences, business
opportunities and opportunities for travel and tourism.