

# Monterey Bay News & Views

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## Azerbaijan Counsel General tours Monterey

By [John Sammon](#) / June 12, 2012 / [No Comments](#)

Seeks agriculture, tourism and cultural ties



Nasimi Aghayev, Azerbaijan counsel general for Los Angeles, speaks with guests at Colton Hall on May 29. The country of Azerbaijan is seeking closer cultural, agricultural and tourism ties to Monterey County.

MONTEREY — Nasimi Aghayev, newly appointed counsel general for the Euro-Asian country of Azerbaijan, toured the Monterey area at the end of May, touring sights a first-time visitor usually sees, like the Monterey Bay Aquarium, and Cannery Row.

“I’m struck by the natural beauty you enjoy here in Monterey,” he said. “I’m also delighted by the great warmth of your people. In Azerbaijan we have similar goals. We want to develop tourism and agriculture.”

Aghayev, who is based in Los Angeles, acts as an ambassador to develop trade and relations between Azerbaijan and the United States.

A reception was held to meet and greet Aghayev and other Azerbaijan officials at historic Colton Hall in Monterey on May 29 in celebration of Azerbaijan Republic Day, the day the country first

declared its independence from the old Russian Empire in 1918, and then again in 1991 from the former Communist Soviet Union.

Azerbaijan is one of the world's oldest civilizations, located on the divide between Europe and Asia, a strategically important area with Russia to the north, Armenia to the north and Iran to the south.

At its 1918 inception, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic became the first modern parliamentary republic in the Moslem world and granted equal rights to all its citizens including the right to vote for women — two years before the United States granted women's voting rights.

Today, Azerbaijan is a rapidly growing state seeking closer economic ties with the United States and Europe.

“We are a modernizing, forward-looking, progressive country,” Aghayev said.

Aghayev cited Azerbaijan's contrasting physical beauties, from the snow-capped Caucasus Mountains, to the shore of the Caspian Sea.

“Out of 11 possible climate zones, we have nine of them,” he said.

Officials of Azerbaijan hope to build an aquarium of their own and there are also plans to build a ski resort in the north of the country.

Monterey City Council officials, including Nancy Selfridge and Jeff Haferman, journeyed to the country two years ago, and Selfridge returned again this earlier year seeking closer ties. Azerbaijan is rich in oil and cash crops, fruits and nuts, like pomegranate concentrate, melons, tomatoes, cucumbers, pecans and cashews.

Farmers in Azerbaijan don't use pesticides or fertilizer, and have produced disease-resistant seeds. Monterey County agricultural officials are eager to learn about them to improve crops here. The country could also become a valuable import export market.

Last year the City Council named the Azerbaijan city of Lankaran and its population of 83,000 on the Caspian Sea as a “Sister City” to Monterey.

Aghayev in particular praised Selfridge for what he said was her “instrumental” efforts to develop closer ties and presented her with a certificate of appreciation. Also singled out for praise was Shafag Mehraliyeva, a former resident of Azerbaijan whose husband attended the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey and who now serves as a press correspondent for her

country in Washington D.C. She advised the Monterey City Council to adopt Lankaran as a Sister City in 2011.

Micah Lund, an advisor to the City Council on Azerbaijan, a student at the Monterey Institute of International Studies and a former Peace Corps volunteer, delighted the audience with his tales of working with residents in the north of Azerbaijan. He demonstrated a native folk dance used by men to court women.

Lund said the people value family and friendships.

“Never once did I feel unsafe when I was there,” he said. “The country is a moderate and tolerant country, and people were very kind to us. They are noted for their warmth, their character and honesty.”