

Sister City Affiliation – Two Successful Stories

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Consul General

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to attend two separate commemorative events regarding two sister city relationships between Japanese and Florida cities. Allow me to introduce briefly what the events were like.

55th Anniversary of the Sister Cities of Nagano and Clearwater



Mayor of Nagano and Clearwater

Mr. Hisao Kato, Mayor of Nagano city, accompanied by a thirty member delegation arrived in Clearwater on February 8 on a six-day visit to celebrate their relationship which started in 1959. There have been exchanges of middle school students every year along with mutual visits by Mayors on special occasions over the decades.

On Sunday, the visitors from Nagano were welcomed by many citizens of Clearwater at the airport. Afterwards, they were greeted by Mr. and Mrs. Cretkos, the Mayor of Clearwater and his wife, at a welcome reception held in the evening. Many of the visiting members and residents already knew each other due to previous visits under the sister city exchange program. They hugged, talked and laughed together.

The next day, before the formal ceremony, the Nagano delegation was greeted by songs sung by a children's choral group at the entrance lobby of the Clearwater City Hall. Nagano and Clearwater representatives celebrated the occasion by tolling, a miniature model of the bell at Zenko-ji temple in Nagano.

At the formal ceremony held in the assembly hall, both Mayors and representatives from each party delivered speeches, in which they appreciated the achievements made so far through the sister city exchange programs and expressed their intentions to further develop the relationship in the future. It was also noted that this year marked the centenary of the city of Clearwater. The ceremony ended with a graceful violin performance by a visiting Nagano member and an exchange of gifts commemorating the event.

25th Anniversary of the Sister Cities of Urayasu and Orlando



Mayor of Orlando and Vice Mayor of Urayasu

Mr. Takeshi Nakamura, Vice Mayor of Urayasu city, accompanied by a delegation of twenty two citizens visited Orlando on a five-day visit to celebrate the relationship that began in 1989. Exchanges of high school students, sports and cultural groups of citizens account for the major part of the sister city exchange program between both cities.

At the formal ceremony held at Orlando City Hall on February 9, the last day of their visit, Mr. Dyer, Mayor of Orlando, and the Vice Mayor acknowledged the achievements made since 1989 and wished to further develop the relationship. Mr. Nakamura made a special mention about the extraordinary kindness offered by the Mayor of Orlando when he personally presented to the Mayor of Urayasu the donations collected from the citizens of Orlando to help Urayasu city, which sustained heavy damages by the Great East Japan Earthquake. Mr. Nakamura also mentioned the donations extended by the Japanese Association in Orlando and thanked all those who gave a helping hand to the city during a time of severe trouble.

After exchanging mementos, both the Mayor and Vice Mayor signed a new agreement to further enhance the sister city relationship.

Thereafter, young drummers of *Matsuri-za*, a Japanese Taiko Group, gave a magnificent Taiko performance, which received a huge round of applause from the participants. The ceremony ended with the reception where the Urayasu delegation and local participants enjoyed conversations, food and drinks.

Sister City Relationship that Strengthened
the Ties between, not only Two Cities, but also Two Nations.

First of all, I wish to pay my deep respect to the above cities that have maintained the successful relationships for such a long period.

Both sister cities agreed to a relationship through the exchange of agreements between city officials, however the essential part of the student exchanges and homestay are undertaken by citizens and citizens take the initiative in making mutual visits by cultural or sports groups.

I am pleased to observe a part of Mayors or Vice Mayors making mutual visits on special occasions, and citizens taking care of the regular activities. I find that to be a complimentary function between the government authorities and civil society. These shared, yet differentiated responsibilities, give us a hint on how to successfully maintain the relationship in a sustainable fashion. Here we can find a great example of success.

I have heard a number of stories from participants from both sides that they enjoyed togetherness in many joint activities under the exchange program. I was greatly encouraged by learning that the sister city relationship has nurtured a strong bond between peoples of Japan and the United States, friends and allies.



Consul General Nagashima and Mayor of Nagano



Vice Mayor of Urayasu and Consul General Nagashima
