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Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Sister-City Relations with Norfolk & Tacoma
Special Sister-City & Exchange Edition
For the many people in Kitakyushu and its two sister-cities in America who have participated in exchanges over the past fifty years, it may be hard to believe that it all began with a doll. In 1958 the Honolulumaru sailed into the Port of Moji and to commemorate the occasion the then Mayor of Moji decided to present the captain with a “kazashi” traditional doll that was a local craft and hence representative of the town of Moji. After departing from Moji the ship next docked in Norfolk, Virginia in the United States. The news media caught sight of the doll and interviewed the captain about the “amazing” gift from Japan. Word of this reached the then Mayor of Norfolk who then presented a letter and a replica of a royal mace which is the city’s symbol to the captain who was instructed to present them to the Mayor of Moji. Shortly after this, the two cities entered into an official sister-city relationship which then spurred the neighboring town of Kokura to establish its own sister city. After applying to the governing organization Sister Cities International, Kokura was matched with the City of Tacoma, Washington and the two cities entered into relations right away. Not long after this eventful year, financial hardship forced the five neighboring towns of Moji, Kokura, Tobata, Yahata and Wakamatsu to form the City of Kitakyushu which now counts both Norfolk and Tacoma as its sister-cities.

The past fifty years have seen much exchange including the construction of traditional Japanese-style gardens in both Norfolk and Tacoma. [For more on these gardens see past issues of Bridges.]

Tacoma and Kitakyushu have held a friendly youth baseball exchange, bringing high school athletes from Tacoma to Kitakyushu and vice versa for home-stays, sightseeing, and baseball competitions for over three decades. This event has occurred 13 times between 1988 and 2005 making it a highly regarded event. The games are held in alternation between Kitakyushu (8 times) and Tacoma (6 times). Each team is formed from outstanding players from various high schools from each city. The players form ties with other local athletes in the all-star team, befriend the all-star team from abroad, and the away team form bonds with their host family during their stay, creating a triple exchange effect.

The “Voices of Virginia” musical stage performance by students of the Governor’s School for the Arts in Norfolk has been performed in Kitakyushu a few times since the start of the program in 1994. They will stay with host families, mix with peers from local high schools, and maintain a busy schedule that includes three performances during their short stay in Japan (one show in Kobe, Kitakyushu, and Miyazaki.) [Flip the page for more information on these events.]

Other international youth musical events have been held in both Norfolk and Tacoma. Several sister-school relations have been established, including a strong relationship between the University of Kitakyushu and the Old Dominion University in Norfolk. Since the establishment of this relationship, students from the University of Kitakyushu have gone to visit the Norfolk campus, and professors from Norfolk have come to give guest lectures at the Kitakyushu campus and the Kyushu Institute of Technology. The University of Kitakyushu also has relations with the Tacoma Community College where many Kitakyushu students go to Tacoma during the summer to participate in English immersion programs over the summer in Tacoma. The Port of Tacoma and the Port of Kitakyushu have also established a sister-port relationship.
To commemorate this auspicious event and the copious exchange that has occurred between the people of Kitakyushu and the people of Norfolk and Tacoma over the last fifty years, all three cities as well as companies and volunteer groups have come together to plan a wide variety of events to celebrate this anniversary.

Firstly, a delegation from Kitakyushu City Hall led by Mayor Kitahashi went to visit both Norfolk and Tacoma to take part in the celebrations the two cities had planned. In both Norfolk and Tacoma, the delegation took part in a tree-planting ceremony in which the City of Kitakyushu donated trees to the traditional Japanese-style gardens located in both cities. The respective garden in Norfolk was then renamed “Kitakyushu Park.”

Each city elected a few of their residents whom had been the most active in sister-city exchange and those individuals received awards and plaques from the visiting delegation. Mayor Kitahashi presented four individuals in Norfolk and three in Tacoma with awards and delegations from the two cities presented awards to residents of Kitakyushu upon their visit.

Before coming back to Japan, the Kitakyushu delegation went to Tacoma’s next-door neighbor Seattle to participate in a business exchange seminar. [See the article below for more information on this event.]

While in Kitakyushu, the delegation from the cities of Norfolk and Tacoma got a chance to tour the City’s famous Eco-town recycling complex and the Mojiko Retro area as well as participate in Kitakyushu’s largest festival the “Wasshoi Summer Festival.” Before leaving these shores, all three Mayors got together for a symposium on the environment which is described in further detail on the next page!

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**Eco-Business Seminar in Seattle**

As part of the 50th anniversary of sister-city relations with Tacoma, the delegation from Kitakyushu took part in a seminar in Tacoma’s neighboring city, Seattle, to promote environmental cooperation between the City of Kitakyushu and the Tacoma-Seattle region.

The event began early in the morning at the Seattle Chamber of Commerce with Mayor Kitahashi from Kitakyushu giving a presentation that outlined Kitakyushu’s history of technological innovation and industrial pollution. Then presentations were given by the Executive Director of the Kitakyushu Eco-Town recycling complex, the Director of the Sustainable Development Business Consortium, and the Director of Fukuoka University’s Recycling and Environmental Control Institute. After the presentations, Mayor Kitahashi put forth to American industries and research institutes about how Kitakyushu is strategically located close to other Asian countries and is a great gateway to Asian markets and a center for eco-related research.

In the attendance were over fifty representatives of local businesses and academic institutions who all joined in a lively discussion session after the presentations which lead to much potential business matching and more inter-city cooperation than ever.
While the Norfolk and Tacoma delegation were in Kitakyushu, Mayor Fraim of Norfolk and Mayor Baarsma of Tacoma joined Mayor Kitahashi to hold the International Sister-City Symposium on the Environment. The symposium was held on July 31, and was one of the many events linked with the 50th anniversary. The keynote speech was given by Roger Ballentine who is an expert on energy and climate policy. He is a former chairman of the White House Task Force on Climate Change.

Mr. Ballentine’s speech introduced America’s environmental initiatives after which each of the three mayors gave a presentation on their respective city’s environmental efforts. Lastly, all three mayors signed a pledge to work together to improve each city’s natural environment and to contribute towards environmental awareness regionally and nationally.

Bridges Talks With the Symposium Coordinator Kuniko Yoshizaki

Q. What was challenging as the coordinator for this event?
A. I was new to the environmental efforts, so I had to study over 2 full binders worth on the field and efforts each of the cities that had representative speakers. Timing was also a challenge to run the event in 80 minutes with 4 speakers.

Q. What was interesting about the speeches?
A. The word “green” was incorporated into each of the speeches and used as part of the titles of their eco projects. This symposium broke my prior conception about the U.S.A. to one of admiration and interest. I was impressed by the ambitious efforts the three mayors talked about. I learned that “green” is now a symbol of the 21st century – representing eco, healthy, and clean future.

Q. What progress do you hope to see from the sister-cities (Tacoma and Norfolk)?
A. I hope to see more combined eco-efforts that are open to the public, international information exchange, daily appliance manufacturers, and youth involvement. I was delighted to hear that the symposium triggered Norfolk’s interest in Kitakyushu’s 1 million anniversary tree planting project.

Q. What do you think can be done to promote eco-mindedness?
A. Today’s youth needs to become involved. The internet and the innovations of today can help shape our green future. I hope this symposium will continue and through the exchange of information, more cities will become green.
The City of Dalian is in Northeastern China and is the northernmost (warm water) seaport. The city has long prospered as an industrial seaport, but historically faced pollution problems. This made Dalian a good match for Kitakyushu, which has experienced many of the same pollution problems. Today, Kitakyushu is a leading city in anti-pollution measures and recycling and is an environmental model town of Japan. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of friendship-city relations between Kitakyushu and Dalian. In May, a delegation of 50 City Officials visited Dalian where they met-up with 8 local residents members. The group took part in a tree-planting ceremony and a local festival. Additionally, as part of the 30th anniversary celebration, experts from Kitakyushu will go to Dalian to assist in the implication of advanced water and sewage recycling facilities. In early October, a delegation from Dalian came to Kitakyushu to celebrate in a tree-planting ceremony, visit Mayor Kitahashi, and tour the city.

The friendship-city relation and assistance from local organizations helped the City of Kitakyushu to establish a business promotion center in the City of Dalian. The combined office and showroom is owned and operated by the Fukuoka Financial Group, the Kitakyushu Chamber of Commerce, JETRO, the Kitakyushu Trade Association, and the Fukuoka Prefectural Association of Medium and Small Businesses.

The purpose of the facility is to help small local businesses in the Kitakyushu-Fukuoka area in promoting their products and gaining an entrance to the Chinese market. Located on the first floor of a fancy hotel on one of Dalian’s busiest streets, the office both displays local Kitakyushu products (mostly food, environmental technology, and industrial goods) and offers business matching / consulting services.

Tacoma Sister-City Friendly Baseball Exchange

This year was the 14th baseball exchange, hosted in Kitakyushu on August 10, 11, and 13th at the Kitakyushu Municipal Baseball Stadium. Six delegates (including one guest) and 16 all-star players came from Tacoma to play ball in Kitakyushu. The first two games ended in a tie game of 5 – 5, and 10 – 10, making people wonder if the third game would be a tie as well. In the end, the Kitakyushu team was victorious.

This exchange was created and continues from the passionate efforts of Tony Anderson and Yukio Suetake. They bridged the language and cultural gap and became like brothers.

Norfolk Sister-City Musical Performance

The Voices of Virginia - GET ON YOUR FEET!
Kitakyushu Performing Arts Center
November 8, 2009

This is the 4th time the Governor’s School for the Arts has brought their musical group to Kitakyushu. The cast of 32 will perform over 30 American hit classic songs. The musical will open with a performance by the Kitakyushu City High School symphonic band. Ticket reservations have been steadily coming in as the citizens of Kitakyushu eagerly look forward to the spectacular performance.
Letter from Kitakyushu

Mid-August marks the end of this Bridges editor’s contract with the City of Kitakyushu, making this issue the last one I will produce before passing the proverbial torch onto the next Bridges editor.

Thinking back over the past three years, I noticed that a lot has changed in Kitakyushu since I first arrived here. Kokura Castle has received a much-needed face-lift, the Moji-Pusan Ferry came and went as have flights via Kitakyushu Airport and –most notably– the city had finally elected a new Mayor! Former Mayor Sueyoshi had a good run of it spending two decades in office and current Mayor Kitahashi has come into office at an unfortunate time what with the current financial crisis, but –in this humble editor’s opinion– I feel he is taking the city in a good direction.

As the saying goes, the more things change, the more they stay the same and while there have certainly been a lot of Changes in Kitakyushu, it is still a big city with a small town feel, the summers are still hot and humid and there are still awesome summer festivals to look forward too! Being a member of a local taiko (traditional drumming) group, I have to say, “Do not miss out on the Kokura Gion Taiko Festival!”

The new Bridges editor has been kept busy since her arrival in late July, with sister-city related events, exchanges, and finishing the hardest last third of this issue of Bridges. Yet I am enjoying my new life and work in Kitakyushu with much to learn, see, eat, and do. Next issue will include a more extensive introduction of this new Bridges editor. Au revior (till we meet again)!

Exchange Agreement with Hai Phong, Vietnam

Earlier this year, the Mayor of Kitakyushu, Mr. Kenji Kitahashi, went to Hai Phong, a northern port city in Vietnam. On April 17, Mr. Kitahashi and Trinh Quang Su, the chairman of the People’s Committee of Hai Phong City signed a Friendship & Cooperation Agreement Proposal for the progression of both cities.

The three points in the agreement are: 1 – implementation of cooperative enterprise exchange for the progression of both cities, 2 – put effort into advancing economical and cultural exchange at the citizen level, and 3 – both cities will strive towards the betterment of Hai Phong’s community and environmental conservation through international technical collaboration that is balanced and sustainable for the city.

The agreement is valid for a five year period. During the fifth year, both cities will re-evaluate the current state of the exchange.

The City of Kitakyushu is actively creating new international agreements, exchanges, and collaborative events towards the betterment of the community, environment, and economy.
Since last year, the City of Kitakyushu has been looking into establishing relations with cities in Southeast Asia. After many visits and much negotiation, Kitakyushu entered into a friendship agreement earlier this year with the City of Hai Phong in Vietnam. The agreement set down areas of exchange to be enacted over the next five years as well as goals for future exchange and represents the first step toward a possible sister-city relationship!

As one component of the agreement, Kitakyushu will accept City employees from Hai Phong to work for the City of Kitakyushu gaining practical experience and training. Thus, Tran Minh has joined the International Division! An engineer in Hai Phong, Tran is working on international exchange while learning about city planning. He will be with us for the next seven months as will three other trainees: one person from Thailand studying waste disposal, one person from our friendship city of Dalian in China studying industry-promotion and one person from our sister-city of Incheon in Korea who is studying fire-prevention policy.

Luckily for three college students attending Winchester University in the U.K., when their study abroad program in Beppu was suddenly cancelled, their journey to Japan did not have to be cancelled as well. Instead, professor Dennis Woolbright of Kitakyushu’s Seinan Jogakuin University took up the torch and managed to pull together a last-minute program for the British exchange students. Studying to become ESL teachers, the three student’s program at Seinan consisted largely of teaching methods, study of phonetics but they also had ample opportunities for comparative culture studies and Japanese lessons! According to Professor Woolbright one of the things that prompted him to bring the students to Seinan was the opportunity for a bit more diversity on the campus which sees precious few foreign students. Host families were arranged for the students and they mixed very well with their hosts and fellow students. As part of the their cultural education, the students went on trips to Yufuin and Kyoto among other places and took first place in a debate competition in Kagoshima along with members of the Seinan debate team.
Kitakyushu City is now home to its very own professional soccer team, the New Wave! While the team is currently part of the Japan Football League, they are striving to rise to the major league by 2010!

The team’s motto is “give children dreams” and the players do a lot more than just play hard on the field; they travel to local elementary schools to hold workshops and talks with the kids about their goals and dreams. As role models, the players lend their celebrity status to help motivate their young audience.

Currently, the emphasis on international competitions in sports is decreasing in favor of regional and city-to-city competitions. People carry great pride in their local team and as New Wave stands to become a symbol of the city, carving out its niche in the identity of Kitakyushu residents!

The team name will be changing to Giravanz Kitakyushu starting next year in 2010. The name comes from two Italian words, “Girasole” (sunflower) and “Avanza” (progress forward), which reflects the City of Kitakyushu’s symbol: a sunflower that follows its goal.