



[JETAA ACTIVITIES] Prime Minister Abe meets with former participants of the JET Programme 1
 [JLGC UPDATE] A Greeting from the New Directors 2
 [JLGC UPDATE] A Message from the New JLGC Assistant Directors 3
 [JLGC RESEARCHER'S EYE] Japan Enacts Education Reform Bills..... 4
 [JLGC RESEARCHER'S EYE] My Introduction to Japanese American History 5
 [SISTER STATE / CITY] Maryland - Kanagawa / Thunder Bay - Gifu City..... 6
 [CORRESPONDENCE FROM FORMER JLGC MEMBER] Return to Okinawa..... 7
 [DESIGNATED CITY] City of Saitama 8

Prime Minister Abe meets with former participants of the JET Programme

Robert Tuck / JETAA New York President

J E T A A A C T I V I T I E S



Prime Minister Abe meets with the President of JETAANY

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's visit to the United States on April 27th, 2007 was his first official visit to these shores and his first trip to Camp David. It was also his first meeting with JETAA New York. Along with Mr. Hiroshi Sasaki of the JLGC, I and two other JETAANY members (Secretary Carol Elk and Linda Kim) had the considerable honor of being invited to the Ambassador's Residence in Washington D.C. in order to meet the Prime Minister alongside past JETs from all over the country. While most were from the DC metropolitan area, some had come from as far away as Alaska and Oregon, and they were equally diverse in terms of their JET experience. Some, like myself, had returned relatively recently, some had been in Japan ten or more years ago, and one or two numbered among those semi-mythical beings who were the very first JETs to set out at the program's inception in 1987.

Part of the point of this gathering, of course, was that it has

been twenty years since the JET program began. Shortly after being introduced to the assembled JETs, Abe made sure in a short speech to note both the milestone and the incalculable value to Japan of having had 20,000 Americans participate in the program since it began, remarking that it had served to "shorten the distance between Japan and the United States". Indeed it

has! Things have changed a lot since 1987; one wonders if the first JETs imagined that trade friction as a key issue in US-Japan relations would give way to debate as to whether the Red Sox got a good deal with Matsuzaka. Concluding his speech, Abe and his wife proceeded to work their way around the room, making a point of shaking hands with and talking to everyone in attendance, including yours truly. He asked when and where I had been stationed in Japan, whether I had picked up the local dialect at all, and what I was doing now; when I told him I was studying for a Ph.D. in Japanese literature, he seemed somewhat surprised (though speaking from experience, that's not an uncommon reaction). Each of us then had the chance to speak with his wife, Deputy Cabinet Secretary Shimomura, instrumental in creating and strengthening the JET program and Ambassador Katō, too. And finally, the Prime Minister was good enough to pose for an individual photo with each

and every one of the fifty or so of us in attendance.

It was a polished performance by the Prime Minister. I suspect that after spending the morning discussing matters of state with US President George W. Bush, he was happy to have the chance to do something a little more light-hearted. I think everyone there was suitably impressed that he was willing to take a little extra time to meet and talk to us, a courtesy that heads of state do not always manage to extend. With individual photos over, so too was the reception, and we were left with a little time to explore the Ambassador's residence. Then it was time to return to New York.

Only three weeks into the presidency of JETAANY, and I'd met the Japanese Prime Minister in Washington DC. My only concern arising from an otherwise unforgettable day is that when the high point comes so soon, there can only be one way to go for the remaining two years...



Masthead:

The *Asagao*,

or *Morning Glory*, is one of the most popular summer flowers in Japan.

It opens in the morning and closes in late afternoon. In the language of flowers, it signifies short-lived love.



A Greeting from the New Directors

Ryuichi Kohama, Toru Mukaikubo / Directors of JLGC

JLGC UPDATE

Hello, my name is Ryuichi Kohama. I have been appointed director of the Japan Local Government Center, New York, (JLGC) beginning June 1, 2007. I have the honor of succeeding Erena Niwa who worked here for more than two years.

Some of the important tasks our center performs include: promoting the mutual exchange of ideas and activities among Japanese, American and Canadian local authorities, supporting the JET Programme, introducing the Japanese local administration system to local authorities in the United States and Canada, conducting research concerning issues pertaining to American and Canadian local governments, and assisting the overseas activities of Japanese local authorities. Since local-level internationalization is ubiquitous today,

JLGC's purpose is as important as ever.

This year will be unique for the JLGC NY office because it now has one executive director and two directors. As one of the two new directors, I am in charge of the JET Programme, assisting the overseas activities of Japanese local authorities and general affairs and accounting within the office.

I have been employed with the Tokyo Metropolitan Government in Japan for thirteen years. During this period, I worked for different departments such as the Bureau of Housing, Bureau of Port and Harbor, and for the headquarters of the Governor of Tokyo. In many respects, Tokyo like New York City is experiencing municipal problems that require solutions. I am pleased to be given the opportunity to work in New York.

I look forward to getting to know you and working with you. Also, I look forward to visiting a variety of wonderful places in the United States and Canada while cultivating international exchange and mutual understanding.

Finally, I should like to thank you for welcoming me and for the assistance I know I will be given during my stay here.



Ryuichi Kohama

JLGC UPDATE

Hello. My name is Toru Mukaikubo and I have recently been appointed to serve as director at the Japan Local Government Center. I began my duties on June 1, 2007.

The Japan Local Government Center was established in 1989 to foster, develop and cultivate at the sub-national level, an international mutual understanding between Japan and other nations. Our mission promotes the exchange of ideas relating to local government administration and management.

For the past twenty-three years, I worked as an employee of the city of Hiroshima in Japan. During this period, I held many job positions and worked on numerous projects including: establishing a new city university, supporting small and medium businesses, promoting the tourism industry and promulgating a peace

culture. Hiroshima City is well known for its initiatives supporting and nurturing the world wide peace movement and I am thankful for my small part in furthering it.

I am not a stranger in the United States having briefly visited New York City in May 2005 to support Hiroshima City's participation in the Nonproliferation Treaty Conference held at the United Nations. At this conference, the Mayor of Hiroshima City and mayors from all over the world gathered to support peace through the eradication of nuclear weapons.

My first visit to the United States was in 1996. I was fortunate to be able to live in America for three months. I visited many interesting places in the urban cities of New York, Washington D.C., Boston and San Francisco. I also enjoyed my experiences in smaller cities such as Des Moines, Iowa and Freeport, Illinois. During the time I spent in all

these cities, I learnt about local governments in the United States. I especially enjoyed my home stays with American families.

For the next two years, I look forward to working with many state and local government officials in the United States and Canada. New York City is a vibrant and exciting place to live and being able to work and enjoy everything the Big Apple has to offer is a dream come true!



Toru Mukaikubo



A Message from the New JLGC Assistant Directors

Sho Nakazono, Kaoru Fujiwara, Kazumitsu Tanaka, Satoru Kimura, Shinya Bando, Hidenori Inoue, Takashi Daito / Assistant Directors of JLGC

JLGC UPDATE

Hi! My name is Sho Nakazono and I am from the City of Sakai. Sakai became a designated city in April 2006 affording it the potential to progress in many new areas. It will be a great honor to represent Sakai City during my two year stay at the Japan Local Government Center in New York City. As an architectural engineer I am looking forward to visiting as many places as possible to observe a variety of building styles and designs. I am eager to make new connections in the United States and renew old relationships made years ago when I lived in New York.



Hello! My name is Kaoru Fujiwara. It is a great pleasure to meet you. I am a detective with the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department. I was transferred from the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department to work for two years at the Japan Local Government Center in New York City. During my stay in New York, I shall continue to cultivate the strong relationship between the New York City Police Department and the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department. The job of city police to protect citizens from crime and accidents is becoming all the more important as recent trends indicate higher criminal activity perpetrated by international crime groups. While working at JLGC, I would like to investigate and research measures used to combat criminal activity by illegal immigrants in order to assist Japanese police dealing with similar problems as Japanese cities diversify.



My name is Kaz Tanaka and I am from Yamagata Prefecture. Yamagata is located at the northern part of Japan and you can reach there in two and one half hours by bullet train (Shinkansen) from Tokyo. The prefecture is famous for its beautiful mountains, delicious



assortment of fruits, such as cherry, peach and pear and for its tasty beef. The Yamagata landscape features historical temples and shrines and fabulous hot springs. If you visit Yamagata, you can enjoy traditional as well as modern Japan.

My job at the Japan Local Government Center is to introduce Yamagata to American people and to promote industrial, educational and cultural exchanges between the United States and Yamagata. If you are interested in visiting Yamagata Prefecture, please let me know.

Hello! My name is Satoru Kimura. I am glad to be living and working in New York. It will be a great and certainly unique experience for me to reside in the United States.



I am originally from Saitama City located in the central part of the Kanto Plain in Japan. Saitama City is a beautiful place to visit as I explain in my article included in this newsletter. Please enjoy it! I'd like to communicate with many people in America and to get to know American culture. Also, my goal is to learn about how the American local government system operates and to share information about Japanese local governments with my American counterparts.

Hello! My name is Shinya Bando and I am the first representative from Wakayama City to work for the Japan Local Government Center (JLGC) in New York City.



Let me introduce Wakayama City. Wakayama City is situated in the northern part of Wakayama Prefecture. Wakayama City is famous for its beautiful beaches and the magnificent ocean views from the top of Wakayama Castle. If you like the sun and surf, I am sure you will enjoy our pristine beaches.

I am interested in environmentalism. I should like to focus my research on how local government policies and practices protect the environment from pollution.

While in NY, I would like to meet a lot of

people and experience different cultures. I shall make the most of this wonderful opportunity.

Hello! My name is Hidenori Inoue. I am originally from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications where I assisted in the preparation of the Ministry's budget and the planning of local government bonds. Also, I had an opportunity to work for Kagoshima Prefecture government where I provided financial advice and guidance to municipalities in Kagoshima Prefecture. While working at the Japan Local Government Center in New York, I should like to research American and Canadian local government, specifically issues relating to taxation and finance.



I came to New York City with my wife and daughter. I know that living in a foreign country will be a valuable experience for us; therefore, I would like to visit many places with my family. I also hope to improve upon my English language ability and by talking to a lot of people I will be able to better understand the language and culture.

Hi! My name is Takashi Daito and I am the second person from the city of Hamamatsu to work at JLGC.



Located between Tokyo and Osaka, Hamamatsu is an attractive city which has a beautiful lake, magnificent beaches, and dramatic mountain ranges. The people of Hamamatsu are friendly, and are said to have an adventurous spirit. Hamamatsu is the birthplace of Soichiro Honda, the founder of Honda Motor. Automobile and motorcycle manufacturing is a major industry in Hamamatsu. Furthermore, Hamamatsu City is trying to promote new industries such as optical electronics. With a sense of adventure, I look forward to meeting new people and experiencing many new situations while living and working in the United States.



Japan Enacts Education Reform Bills

Seth Benjamin / JLGC Senior Researcher

J L G C R E S E A R C H E R ' S E Y E

In the current session of the Japanese National Diet, the ruling party, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), submitted three bills to begin the process of reforming education in Japan. Each of these bills has been passed by both houses of the National Diet and has become law. Education reform has been and is one of the most important policy areas for the current Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe.

Before becoming prime minister, Shinzo Abe had published a book, titled *Utsukushii kuni e* (Toward a Beautiful Country). In that book, he spoke about the importance of reform in Japan's educational system. Almost immediately he became prime minister, Shinzo Abe set up an 'Education Rebuilding Council'. As he said, at the time, "Restrengthening Japan's education system is one of the most important items on the Cabinet's agenda". Indeed, he added how dispiriting it was to hear about what he called "heart-wrenching news such as children committing suicide because they were bullied. Experts today point to declines in children's morals and academic abilities, and the families and communities in which children grow up are said to be less and less capable at filling the educational roles they once did". The thrust of the prime minister's reforms is to recreate the spirit of 'love of country', which can be found in the words of Shoin Yoshida who was executed in 1859 for plotting against the Tokugawa Shogun's treaties with the American Commodore Perry. The opening words of his *isho ryukonroku* (a sort of last will and testament), written the night before he was executed, began "though my life may end on the Musashi Plain, my Japanese spirit shall be left yet in this land".

This, then, is the background to the push for education reform in the current Abe Administration. Late in 2006, the Education Rebuilding Council

made its first report to the prime minister with the aim of defining clearly what the principles for education reform were. Thus, the first-ever revision to the 1947 Fundamental Law of Education actually was made at the end of 2006 and stipulated that Japanese children should be taught a respect for the tradition and culture of Japan as well as a love of country and the community in which they grow up. Nevertheless, a respect and an appreciation for other countries, together with a desire to embrace an international spirit, also were to be just as important.

With its second report to the Prime Minister, the Education Rebuilding Council made recommendations for specific changes to the structure of the educational system in Japan. Subsequently, in late June 2007, the National Diet passed three bills that will have an impact on how Japan's children will spend their schooling days in the future. The major changes are as follows:

▶ School Education Law:

- The first change involves aligning the School Education Law with the revision to the Fundamental Law of Education to include the teaching of 'love of country' and discipline to students as a goal of Japanese education.
- Academic guidelines for elementary, junior high and high schools will be adjusted. Textbooks reflecting such adjustment will be available shortly thereafter.
- More managerial posts will be allowed in kindergarten, elementary and junior high schools. These include vice principal, managing teacher and advising teacher. The aim of these positions is to improve school oversight and the instruction of teachers and students.

▶ Education Personnel Certification Law:

- Teachers will be required to renew

their certification every ten years, in order to update their skills. It is expected that roughly 100,000 teachers will take the 30-hour training course each year. The local board of education will determine whether or not the teacher is competent.

▶ Local Education Administration Law:

- The change to this law allows the education minister to order boards of education to take remedial action if the minister considers that they have not followed the education laws. (This change is, in part, a response to the widespread acknowledgement that more than 650 high schools in the last academic year had not offered enough of the required classes for students to graduate.)
- Also, at least one parent of a student must be allowed to sit on the local board of education.

Of course, it is too soon to know what effect these changes will have. Education, however, is always uppermost in the mind of society when it is going through uncertain times.



Junior high school students attending classes.



My Introduction to Japanese American History

Stephen Fasano / JLGC Senior Researcher

J L G C R E S E A R C H E R ' S E Y E



Volunteer docent giving a tour to interested children.

Photograph by Don Farber

One of the many pleasures about being a researcher is that you always have the opportunity to self educate and learn about subjects that somehow escape the traditional education process. I have been working as a researcher at the Japan Local Government for seventeen years. During this time, I have learned many things from my Japanese colleagues about Japan and about being Japanese and living and working in America.

What I did not know and fully understand was the history and plight of Japanese Americans living in the United States. My curiosity about this subject piqued during a business trip to California where the Japan Local Government Center hosts a pre-departure dinner for American and Canadian government officials who visit Japan as participants of the CLAIR Fellowship Program. Prior to the dinner, the group listened to a presentation on the history of Little Tokyo, an ethnic Japanese American district in downtown Los Angeles. The group was treated to a tour of one of the original Japan town's visiting small stores and taking photographs of historic monuments located near the Japanese American National Museum.

The Japanese American National Museum is a striking venue located in the

historic district of the Little Tokyo neighborhood in downtown Los Angeles. It is the only museum in the United States dedicated to sharing the experience of Americans of Japanese ancestry. Founded in 1985, the Japanese American National Museum has chronicled more than 130 years of Japanese American history. From 1985 to 1992, the Museum raised funds to renovate a former Buddhist temple, which became the first headquarters for the institution. In 1999, the National Museum opened its brand new Pavilion which contains the Manabi and Sumi Hirasaki National Resource Center that serves researchers, writers, students, family historians, filmmakers and other museum visitors both onsite and online through its reference, research and reproduction services.

I recalled my earlier visit to the Japanese American National Museum and was astounded to view the difficulties encountered by Japanese Americans during the first half of the 20th century in the United States. Needless to say, as a researcher with a basic instinct to attain further information, I could not resist the temptation to explore what was for me the beginning of a new and fascinating understanding of minorities in America.

According to the 2000 United

States Census, there are 796,700 Japanese Americans with the highest concentrations in California, Hawaii, New York, Illinois and Washington. In addition there are another 300,000 to 400,000 individuals who self identify themselves as Japanese and at least one other race.

The Japanese American experience in the United States spans more than a century. It can be analyzed in three periods: First, 1868-1924 was the major period of Japanese immigration to Hawaii and the United States and the beginning of organized efforts against Japanese Americans culminating in the Immigration Act of 1924, which barred further immigration from Japan. The period 1924-1941 represented Japanese settlement and community development and the emergence of the nisei, American born Japanese Americans. The period 1941-1945 were the years of war time incarceration and 1945 to the present, the post war recovery period when Japanese Americans rebuilt their lives and communities.

One of the best reference books written about the history of Japanese Americans is: [Japanese American History: An A to Z Reference from 1868 to the Present](#). Edited by Brian Niiya, it is the first work of its kind to provide an overview of the Japanese American experience. It is an encyclopedia that reflects the current knowledge in the field of Japanese American studies. The book highlights the achievements of the brave issei pioneers and their descendents, the third and fourth generation Japanese Americans whose names are easily recognizable: U.S. Senators Daniel Inouye and Spark Matsunaga, former Congressmen Norman Mineta and Robert Matsui, sculptor Isamu Noguchi, actor George Takei, astronaut Ellison Onizuka and Olympic gold medalist Kristi Yamaguchi.



Kanagawa Women's Council Visit Maryland for Seminar on Health and Aging

Shinya Bando / Assistant Director of JLGC

SISTER STATE

A delegation of ten members of the Kanagawa Women's Council from Kanagawa, Japan visited Maryland for an international woman's health and aging seminar hosted by members of the Maryland-Kanagawa Sister States Women's Issues Subcommittee. Kanagawa Prefecture is Maryland's second oldest Sister-State, having celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2006.

The sister state relationship between Kanagawa and Maryland began in 1981 when the governor of Kanagawa attended a meeting of the Japan-U.S. governors to deepen understandings with American governors. Subsequently, the Embassy of Japan and the United States Department of State served as go betweens as Kanagawa and Maryland agreed to enter into a sister-state relationship. The formal agreement signed in April 1981 pledged that "with mutual prosperity and happiness as their shared objective, both states will endeavor to bring about better understanding and closer cooperation through the implementation of exchange programs in various fields." Although originally intended to focus on economic development the relationship during the intervening years has blossomed to include exchanges and events in areas such as education, sports, art, culture, senior citizens and women's issues. In fact, this is the third time the Kanagawa Women's

Council has visited Maryland!



Kanagawa Women's Council presentation on health and aging issues

During this recent visit, the delegation's itinerary included tours of the Annapolis Senior Center and the Bates Senior Residence facility. On site presentations included lectures by various consultants for the aging and aging issues. Moving to Baltimore, the delegation visited the Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi) where the featured speakers were Gloria G. Lawlah, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Aging and Dr. Steven Gambert, the Physician in Chief at Sinai Hospital. Members of the Kanagawa Women's Council and the Maryland Sister States Women's Issues Subcommittee also spoke about women's health and aging in the United States and in Japan and a lively discussion ensued after the informative presentations were completed.

After the seminar, the members of

the Kanagawa Women's Council visited the Maryland State Arts Council. They enjoyed viewing Landscape & Nature: A View from Maryland, an exquisite exhibit of Maryland artists' works with plans to travel to Kanagawa. Before this exhibit, an ardent volunteer from Kanagawa was able to have numerous *ukiyo-e* prints sent from Kanagawa and displayed in Maryland. This example of cultural exchange is indicative of a proactive sister state relationship.

The Kanagawa Women's Council exudes the passionate interest that embodies the Kanagawa / Maryland sister state relationship these past 25 years. Exchanges continue as a result of the hard work and diligent effort of the many volunteers from Kanagawa and Maryland. With this type of commitment, there is a growing confidence that the relationship will continue successfully for the next 25 years.



Members of Kanagawa Women's Council and Maryland officials



Gifu City and Thunder Bay "Renewing Sister-City Relations"

Keitaro Tanaka / Assistant Director of JLGC

SISTER CITY

The cities of Gifu in Japan and Thunder Bay in Ontario, Canada recently celebrated their new sister-city partnership. The signing ceremony held at



Mr. Shigemitsu Hosoe, Mayor of Gifu, and Ms. Lynn Peterson, Mayor of Thunder Bay, exchanging city flags.

Gifu City Hall on May 28th, 2007, culminated with the exchange of city flags.

The twinning agreement with Gifu City is a continuation of Thunder Bay's relationship with the former town of Yanaizu, Japan which recently became part of Gifu City. The friendship between Thunder Bay and the town of Yanaizu began in 1988 when Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University located in Yanaizu town began operating student exchange programs with Lakehead University located in Thunder Bay. The successful program bore fruit and a "Friendship City" agreement was signed in 1997. Now with the new sister-city agreement Gifu City and Thunder Bay will



Gifu City officials, citizens and members of Thunder Bay's delegation discussing new opportunities for exchange programs.

initiate a fresh approach to furthering exchange programs that will bear additional success and more importantly be long lasting.



Return to Okinawa Rediscovering My Life and Work

Takao Aharen / Senior Staff of Military Base Affairs Division, Okinawa Prefectural Government (Former Assistant Director of Japan Local Government Center)

C O R R E S P O N D E N C E F R O M F O R M E R J L G C M E M B E R

After completing my two year work assignment at the Japan Local Government Center in New York City, I returned to my hometown in Okinawa, Japan. I thoroughly enjoyed my life and work during my time in New York City. I accomplished many things and met many interesting people. Indeed, I was a bit hesitant to return to Japan even though I missed my family and friends there.

Okinawa is an island prefecture located southwest of mainland Japan and has the distinction of being the only sub-tropical region in Japan. Okinawa accounts for a mere 0.6 % of Japan's total land area, yet hosts vast United States military bases, which represent approximately 74.6% of all facilities exclusively used by U.S. Forces in Japan. United States military presence on Okinawa is a contentious issue amongst the Okinawan people. Government policy has advocated for a reduction and realignment of the military bases.



Okinawa government building (left) and the Okinawa Assembly building (right)

I returned to work for Okinawa Prefectural Government, and was assigned a job with the Military Base Affairs Division beginning April 2007. My duties include compiling and recording statistics, and preparing responses for the Prefectural Assembly which meets four times a year. When the Assembly is in session, the Military Base Affairs Division, and other related

divisions must respond to inquiries from the members of the Assembly. At times, more than 300 questions out of a total of about 1,300 questions pertain to the military bases. Often, I have opportunities to receive visitors who are interested in learning more about the military base issue. In addition to our professional staff, Coordinators for International Relations from the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET Program) play an important role in assisting foreign visitors by serving as facilitators and interpreters.

The issue of American military forces in Japan and especially Okinawa is a sensitive topic and I personally hope that this issue will continue to be handled smoothly. Perhaps a solution can be attained by consensus of all the stake holders including the United States government, Japanese government and Okinawa prefecture and municipal governments.

On a less serious note has anyone heard of the latest Okinawan fashion craze called kariyushi wear? If you can visualize a Hawaiian shirt, you have got the idea. Kariyushi wear is designed and manufactured in Okinawa and believe it or not it can be worn for formal as well as casual occasions. The Okinawan term, "kariyushi" means something red-letter or lucky. Originally, kariyushi wear appeared in Okinawa in the 1970's, and it became

popular outside of Okinawa when world leaders including the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Canada wore it at the G8 summit held in Okinawa in 2000.

From April through November Okinawa promotes the wearing of kariyushi. Throughout the entire prefecture, you can see it worn everywhere. Even the Governor wears

kariyushi! The national government encourages kariyushi promotion as an example of "cool biz" casual wear. Since the national government actively promotes greenhouse gas reduction by keeping the temperature of offices at 82.4 degrees Fahrenheit even the Prime Minister and members of his Cabinet have begun to wear kariyushi!



The author in kariyushi wear working at the office

I shall never forget my experiences in America. I currently spend most of my day working hard at my new job. Occasionally, I still find time to check out what is happening in the United States and Canada because I would like to stay connected. I also want to maintain my English language ability. Finally, I will try to use what I learned during my two year stay in the United States and keep in touch with the people I met.

For more information:

▶ Okinawa Prefectural Government
<http://www.pref.okinawa.jp>

▶ For visitors to Okinawa
<http://www.ocvb.or.jp>





Saitama City "A Dynamic Designated City in Eastern Japan"

Satoru Kimura / Assistant Director of JLGC

DESIGNATED CITY

Saitama City is the capital of Saitama-ken and is located in the southeastern part of the prefecture. Saitama City is a new city created on May 1, 2001, resulting from the merger of three cities formerly known as Urawa, Omiya and Yono. On April 1, 2003, the city of Saitama became the 13th government designated city in Japan. An additional merger with the former Iwatsuki City on April 1, 2005, has swelled Saitama City's population to approximately 1.2 million solidifying it as the urban center of the Kanto region.

Historically, the city developed as a railroad town along the Nakasendo Road. Today, Saitama City boasts an excellent ground transportation system with 5 shinkan-sen lines that along with the JR Railway and private railroads service the entire city. Saitama City is one of the major railway junctions in eastern Japan. Saitama City features convention centers including the Saitama Super Arena one of the world's largest movable stage systems. Its four different stages provide venues for concerts. You can easily reach Saitama City from Tokyo in about half an hour with convenient access to neighboring sightseeing resorts.

Saitama City is a sports city. Three stadiums are home to three highly respected soccer teams that play in Saitama City: the Urawa Red Diamonds, Omiya Ardija and Urawa Reds Ladies. The Urawa Red Diamonds won the J-League and Emperor's Cup tournaments in the Asia Championship League. Saitama Stadium 2002 hosted the 2002 World Cup championship games showcasing Saitama City to Asia and the world.

Saitama is a cultural city. Bonsai, the art of dwarfing trees or plants by growing and training them in containers according to prescribed techniques was introduced to Japan during the Kamakura period (1185-1333). After the Great Kanto earthquake, bonsai suppliers in Tokyo moved to other locations and Bonsai Village was established in

environs that are now part of Saitama City. Currently, there are bonsai in the village gardens that exceed 500 years in age and have been declared a national treasure. Bonsai lovers from all over the world visit to enjoy this precious experience. Saitama City is the Mecca for bonsai enthusiasts!

Saitama is a museum city; including the Tougyoku Dolls museum, the John Lennon museum and the new railway museum that will open this October. The Tougyoku Dolls museum is the largest traditional doll museum in Iwatsuki Ward exhibiting a wide variety of dolls. Fun workshops allow visitors to experience traditional doll making.



Saitama New Urban Center with Saitama Super Arena

Saitama City has a clear vision for its future. First, it strives to maintain its image as a dynamic hub city for Eastern Japan. The development of the Saitama New Urban Center will support and extend the transport of goods and services while serving as an incubator for creating new service and information industries. Second, city officials want to balance economic development with environmental interests. In the center of the city are the minuma tanbo (rice fields), to the west is the Arakawa River and to the east is the Moto-arakawa River. These are the foremost natural resources in the capital region. The green area of minuma and the waters of the Arakawa River harbor a variety of flora and fauna. It is Saitama City's intention to conserve, recover and create these and other places for their residents and visitors to enjoy.



Minuma Tanbo

Also, city officials and citizens hope to encourage the solving of environmental problems in order to attain a rich green city where humans and nature can coexist. Finally, to be a city that supports a comfortable lifestyle to nurture youth. The city actively promotes improvement in welfare, education and other social services to enrich human life and to develop a city that allows everyone in the community to live their lives to their fullest potential. The city also aims to nurture youth to enable them to carry forward a new era and bring unique and attractive culture into the city.

Saitama City is a comfortable, exciting and hopeful city for everyone. I enjoy everything it has to offer and I am sure that when you visit Saitama City you will agree. If you have any questions, please contact me! Thank you.

▶ More information:
<http://www.city.saitama.jp/en/index.html>

E-mail:
kimura@jlgc.org
(Satoru Kimura)

