



JLGC

News Letter

ISSUE No. **63** • WINTER 2008

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JAPAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT CENTER (CLAIR, NEW YORK)

The Culture of Governance in Japan: Diaries from a 2006 CLAIR Fellow

John Livey

GUEST COLUMN



IF CULTURE CAN BE SEEN in the daily life of a nation, it is vividly displayed in Japan. Perhaps a first time visitor sees this most acutely. There are myriad examples of the Japanese way of living. It is even evident in the workings of local government. Japanese history, culture and values shape the way its cities, towns and prefectures (the equivalent of our counties or regions) function.

In November of 2006, I took part in a Local Government study tour hosted by the Japanese Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) along with eight American officials. The Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) made my participation possible through their ongoing relationship with CLAIR's New York office - one of seven globally. CUI works to promote linkages between cities in Canada and abroad. Both organizations know that these linkages promote understanding between nations and that the knowledge gained

can be put to practical purpose by the participants.

In 1988, when Japanese business success symbolized globalization, CLAIR was formed to lend international experience to their local governments. Funded by local government and the Japanese national lottery, CLAIR conducts research, collects and disseminates information, organizes exchanges and study tours and sponsors foreign English language teachers for junior and senior high schools. In 1955, Nagasaki and St. Paul, Minn. became the first sister cities; now there are 1,560.

Local government distinctly different

Seeing what is happening elsewhere lets you consider new ideas, unconstrained by the culture and norms of our society. Reflected by a vastly different cultural context, you can see how strong British and U.S. influences have shaped Canadian local government. While the form and structure of Japanese local government are similar to Canada's, the way it works is distinctly different. No doubt, this is due largely to the way the Japanese approach life.

Japan is a nation that has integrated much from other nations, first Buddhism and writing from China in its early development and for the last 150 years many of the best ideas from the West. Throughout its history, Japan has swung between total isolation and an enthusiastic embrace of western technology. In 1639, all foreign trade was barred until 1853, when Commodore Perry sailed into Tokyo harbour and destabilized the last feudal shogun. Shortly thereafter, Japan catapulted into

an industrial powerhouse by retaining over 10,000 Westerners to modernize the economy. By the end of the century, Japan had the military and industrial clout to defeat China in 1895, colonize parts of Korea and sink the Russian navy in 1905. Rapid economic growth continued until the devastation of Japan in WWII. Although Japan was never invaded, the Allied bombings left few buildings standing in the cities. Millions were displaced and the economy was shattered.

The war also brought a new Constitution; a unitary government designed for control from Tokyo. No states or provinces were created, only the central government for a population of 127 million with 47 prefectures and 1,800 local municipalities. After a number of rounds of municipal consolidations, there are fewer municipalities in Japan than in Canada. The Japanese focus on efficiency does not allow uneconomic municipal entities to survive too long, especially when roughly 40 per cent of the municipalities' revenues come from national tax transfers, including income taxes. Since 1995, the national government has been pursuing a decentralization program to devolve power and costs to local governments. There are even proposals for a federal system with states to pare down the national government and further decentralize decision-making and accountability.

A very uniform set of rules

The Constitution provides statutory authority for local government. The Local Autonomy Act (LAA) defines

their roles and responsibilities and ensures that for any laws to apply only to one local entity, they can only be enacted by the Diet (the national assembly) with the consent of the majority of local voters. The LAA allows local governments to raise revenues from taxes on property, consumption, tobacco, auto purchases, light oil delivery, and real estate purchases. There is a stringent formula for the levels of taxes that can be imposed and much discussion on the sufficiency of that formula. According to officials, there is a very uniform set of rules for local government, a highly regimented remuneration system, no strike provisions, no dismissal without cause safeguards and only limited private sector “out-sourcing”. Two years ago, the proposal to privatize the Post Office was rejected by the House of Representatives and the Prime Minister responded by dismissing the House and firing several of his ministers. The Japanese respect for authority has no equivalent in Canada.

Without provinces or states between the national government and the municipalities, local governments in Japan play important roles in administrative matters such as registrations (births, deaths, residents’ cards for access to social programs, welfare, medical insurance) and services for the elderly, children and persons with disabilities. Local governments also administer five forms of insurance: medical, pension, unemployment, employee accidents and nursing.

As well, education, local courts, emergency services (including disaster relief), fishing, forestry and agriculture, housing and welfare are largely local matters. There is also a local allocation tax, which redistributes revenues to smaller, less prosperous prefectures. The number of civil servants is low: 33 per 1,000 in Japan versus 78 in the U.K. and the United States. Local municipalities have a strong mayoral system and the governor of the prefecture is elected at large. In both Shimane prefecture on the

west coast of Honshu and its main city, Matsue, the staff complement in their modest offices seemed to confirm this.

Focused on economic development

During our tour, we visited Shimane prefecture and Matsue. Here, in the second smallest prefecture in Japan (pop. 752,534), we observed a focused municipal effort in economic development. At the Shimane Institute for Industrial Technology, research focused on material science for computer applications, plasma technology, virtual reality systems and new films for solar energy applications. All of these technologies had a precursor in previous technologies in the prefecture, some going back centuries, such as metallurgy for swords and material science that has its origins in the technology of manufacturing roof tiles and ceramics.

The Japanese obsession with technology stems in no small part from the challenge the nation faces. With no oil, few remaining mines and a relatively small land mass, Japan has to rely on exporting high value products and services. It also is skilled in import substitution, avoiding the high cost of external goods by replacing them with local products. With 70 per cent of its land forested and a significant part of the remainder urbanized, agricultural land is intensively cultivated. Japan imports more food than it exports and has the world’s largest fishing fleet, its people being the world’s largest consumers of seafood. Anyone visiting Tokyo has to do two things: visit the Tsukiji fish market, the largest in the world with over 1,800 vendors, and travel on the subway, with its 282 stops and trains just minutes apart. The cities’ cleanliness far surpasses our standards, the trains are precisely on time, no tipping is permitted since providing good service is expected of everyone and everyone has a job to be useful in society. Conformity is the norm and those who don’t conform are outcasts.

Declining population creates challenges

One of the biggest challenges Japan faces is its aging population, exacerbated by extremely low immigration. The national population is declining and the fertility rate is 1.3 children per family, well below the replacement rate of 2.1. By 2020, 25 per cent of the population will be over 65, raising significant concerns about the capacity of the workers to support the elderly. Currently, 60 per cent of men 60-69 years old still work, as do a quarter of men over 75. The Japanese work ethic is renowned, with routine 10-14 hour days, forcing most women with children to stay at home. One wonders whether the next generation will be similarly inclined to work such long hours or whether they will have to accept a decline in their standard of living. Working smarter, not harder, may be their only choice.

The trip left me marveling at the focus Japanese apply to their work, schooling and pastimes. It is a highly structured society, although there are signs of trouble, including alienation, depression and high suicide rates. Japanese local government seems to be very efficient and able to build infrastructure, industries and buildings quickly. What is it about our society that holds us back? Is it our multicultural makeup and our penchant for tolerance and compromise? Or is it the wealth from Canada’s natural resources that keeps our standards of living high and buffers us from economic pressures that other countries face? Will it continue to benefit all Canadians without making us really sharpen our focus and learn from others? If everything global is also local, what can we do to enhance our competitiveness as local governments? There are lessons for us in Japan.

* * *

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Co-operation, collaboration and camaraderie - the 2007 JETAA International Meeting proves to be a resounding success

Amy Schindler/ JETAA Toronto President

JETAA ACTIVITIES

Organizing an International Meeting was not something that JETAA Toronto had ever planned to do. In fact, before 2005, when we submitted our first bid, most of the people on the JETAA Toronto executive didn't even know there was an international executive representing JET Programme alumni around the world.

Coincidentally, in 2005, one of the goals of JETAA Toronto was to increase the profile of the organization within the Japanese-Canadian community in Toronto and also amongst our members. Hosting an International Meeting fit perfectly into that mandate. That is how we began the long journey of organizing the 2007 JETAA International Meeting.

An emergency executive meeting was called to discuss the pros and cons of hosting such a large-scale event in our spare time. We wondered about what would make Toronto the perfect venue: Perhaps the multiculturalism and variety the city had to offer, and what might undermine our bid, the weather.

Traditionally, International Meetings have been held in November. We would have to hold it in a warmer month. We also had to get the agreement of the Japanese governmental bodies that would be funding the conference; MOFA representatives at the Consulate General of Japan in Toronto and CLAIR representatives in New York and Toronto.

It took a bit of persuasion and negotiation, but finally all parties agreed that this was a great opportunity for JETAA Toronto to showcase its amazing members and the incredible city that we live in.

We e-mailed our bid to the international executive and waited to hear the outcome of the voting. Finally, the reply came with disappointing news. We were unsuccessful. Sydney, Australia would be hosting the 2006 JETAA

International Conference.

In 2006, the international executive asked if we would submit another bid to host the 2007 meeting. Again, we went through the process of discussing our plans with all the right people. We improved our bid from 2005 and sent it off to be rated by the world. At least this time we knew what to expect.

Our competition was Germany, a great option, but in the end, the world decided JETAA Toronto was the place to be in September 2007.

Immediately, the planning began. The conference was seven months away but if we were going to successfully fly 30 people to Toronto from around the world and organize the amazing conference we had described in our bid, we needed to get organized fast.

We contacted MOFA and CLAIR to secure funding for the conference, recruited two JET alumni members to act as conference coordinators and began planning.

From February to September, e-mails flew around the world as receptions were planned, meeting rooms were booked, conference agendas were confirmed and hotels were inspected. In February, the actual conference date seemed so far away, but soon enough, we were only two weeks away from the conference we had been thinking about for two years.

On September 12, 2007, the first delegate flew into Toronto and arrived safely at the hotel. Soon, 21 international representatives had arrived, two members of CLAIR New York, four members of MOFA and four members of CLAIR Tokyo. We were so excited to welcome them to our city and our home!

During the conference, delegates discussed how to

strengthen JETAA chapters around the world, learned about different member services and events offered by different chapters and brainstormed about how to improve communications both within individual chapters and around the world.

Delegates attended a reception hosted by the Consul General of Japan, admired the Toronto skyline at night from the restaurant atop the CN Tower, rode on a streetcar and watched a Major League Baseball game with the New York Yankees star Japanese player, Hideki Matsui.

The conference went by so quickly. One minute we were saying our hellos and three days later we were hugging everyone good-bye. It was an exciting experience that JETAA Toronto wouldn't trade for the world.

Organizing this conference truly gave us a sense of how large the JET Programme community is and how far the bonds forged between alumni extend. From Russia to Jamaica to South Africa to Canada to every country in between, thousands of young adults have completed the JET Programme and come home with a greater appreciation for Japan and for the world.

The 2008 International Meeting will be held in Paris, France. We wish them all the luck in the world. Bon chance!





Remembrance for Dr. Wynne

Seth Benjamin/ JLGC Senior Researcher

I N M E M O R I A M



Dr. Wynne presenting certificates of achievement to Three Month Training Program participants in 2005

Dr. Wynne had been associated with the Japan Local Government Center in New York (JLGC) since its founding. First, with Mr. Minami, then Mr. Otaki, Mr. Ishida and Mr. Hida, all directors of the Center, he established a warm and friendly relationship between the Council of State Governments (CSG) and the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR); a relationship that gave rise to one of JLGC's most successful programmes, the Three-Month Training Programme for local government officials. Many cities and states across the United States have come to know Japanese government officials through this programme, enthusiastically welcoming them year after year. Dr. Wynne's energy and ebullience encouraged successive trainees to embrace and experience 'America'. His

sense of internationalism was reflected in the International Center, which he headed for many years in the CSG offices in Washington, D.C.

As somebody closely associated with CSG, Dr. Wynne encouraged also an institutional relationship with CLAIR. His vast experience, during his State Department career, of communicating to foreign governments and professionals was brought to bear on thinking of ways to increase the exchange of information between government officials in Japan and the United States. Such 'cross-fertilisation' of ideas is so important for innovative ways of administering services to our respective citizens.

Dr. Wynne had had a varied and exciting career. When JLGC got to know him, he had already retired from the State Department's United States

Information Agency (USIA) as a press official, and having retired from the Army reserve at the rank of colonel. He worked for many years with the Council of State Governments (CSG) and the American Public Transit Association. He was an indefatigable man.

So, it is with great sadness to report that Dr. Wynne passed away last November. Recently, The Japan Local Government Center paid its respects to him and his family at his funeral, which was held at the Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia, on 18th January 2008. JLGC was represented by Mr. Hiroshi Sasaki, executive director, and Dr. Seth B. Benjamin, senior researcher. We attended the interment of Dr. Wynne, together with Chris Whatley, director of international programmes, representing CSG, and Amy Robertson, programme officer at the International Center, with whom Dr. Wynne had worked very closely for many years.

Dr. Wynne was given a full military funeral, including a horse-drawn carriage, presentation of arms, military band and three-gun salute, before being laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery's Columbarium. At the funeral was Dr. Wynne's close friend and helpmate in the last few months of his life, Dr. Kishi, who had been introduced to Dr. Wynne by his late wife Harue Ishii.

JET Program Certificate of Participation

JLGC can provide a basic proof of participation in the JET Program for U.S. and Canadian citizens. If you would like to obtain this certificate, please fill out and submit the application form. You can find this form on the JLGC Web site. Please return this form to JLGC by email or by fax. You should also obtain proof of employment from your former contracting organization.





Japan's New Referendum Law

Matthew Gillam / JLGC Senior Researcher

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

The Japanese Diet passed a law on May 14, 2007, governing the conduct of referenda on constitutional amendments. The current Japanese constitution was written during the post-war occupation and was adopted in 1946. It then came into effect on May 3, 1947. Chapter IX outlines the process for amending the constitution, including a requirement that any amendment adopted by the Diet be submitted to the people for ratification. However, it left the Diet with responsibility for creating the laws governing the specific details of the amendment process, and no such laws were ever passed. This has left the country effectively unable to amend its constitution for the last 60 years. This has not necessarily been a problem, since the political climate in Japan in the post-war era made any discussion of constitutional change an extremely contentious topic and not politically viable. This only began to change after the collapse of the "1955 System", eliminating the Socialist Party's ability to block talk of change, and the deterioration in the security situation regarding North Korea.

The new law provides for conducting the national referenda required for any proposed constitutional amendments, and includes several provisions pertaining to this. In brief:

- ▶ The legal age for voting will be lowered from 20 to 18, on the condition that the Diet can make the necessary changes to laws currently setting the age of eligibility for voting and the age of legal majority at 20.
- ▶ The referendum process created by this law can only be used for constitutional amendments.
- ▶ Any such referendum will be held within a period no less than 60 days and no more than 180 days after the adoption of an amendment proposal

by both houses of the Diet.

- ▶ Public notification and information will be handled by a National Referendum Public Information Committee, established by the Diet and made up of 10 Diet members.
- ▶ Civil servants and educators will be prohibited from using their positions to speak about any proposed amendments. This provision, however, requires that further changes to existing laws regarding freedom of expression and canvassing be completed within three years.
- ▶ Television and radio advertisements or other messages concerning proposed amendments will not be allowed during the 14 days immediately preceding voting day for the referendum.
- ▶ This referendum law will take effect three years after its adoption, and no amendments may be proposed nor investigations or research undertaken concerning possible amendments within those three years.
- ▶ An Amendment Investigation Committee will be established in each house of the Diet.
- ▶ Voting will be conducted by having voters circle either "Yes" or "No" for each item on the ballot, with a simple majority of those voting required for passage.

In 2005, as this law was being formulated, Japan Local Government Center, New York, was asked to conduct research on referendum processes in the United States and provide information on federal and state referenda. The CLAIR office in Paris was also asked to contribute research on France, Germany and Italy.

This referendum law was one of the signal accomplishments of the short-lived Abe government. However, with Prime Minister Abe's sudden resignation on

September 12th, 2007, all substantial movement stopped on debate over amending the constitution and the process for doing so, and the future is quite unclear. It certainly seems that for the short term the process has come to a stop, although long-term prospects are less certain. The Amendment Investigation Committees in each house have been formed, but selection of members has not occurred. And no changes to laws concerning freedom of expression or canvassing have been passed.

The reason the topic of amending the constitution is so controversial is, of course, because it is most commonly considered to refer to changing Article 9, which renounces war as a sovereign right of the nation. Given the changing environment Japan finds itself in, there is increasing, although still strongly contested, support for clearly recognizing a right to maintain military capability for collective self defense. The government has deemed this unconstitutional under the current wording.

Beyond this, however, political parties across the spectrum have proposed other changes to the constitution they would like to see. These mainly include new rights to be enumerated, including the right to privacy, to a clean environment, to life, to life-long learning, and rights for victims of crimes. There is also a call for including duties and obligations of citizens.

Constitutional amendment is never an easy or uncontroversial process, and it remains to be seen whether Japan remains wary of it or embraces the chance to update its constitution, after having made no changes to it in the last 60 years. However, until the remaining legal pieces are put in place, we will not have an opportunity to find out.



A Special Summer Holiday for Kanie Kids - A Homestay in Marion

Shinya Bando / Assistant Director

SPECIAL FEATURE

Ironically when Kanie Town, located in Aichi Prefecture was searching for an American city that would accept eight junior high school students and two teachers to experience life in the United States for four days in August, the city of Marion, Illinois was actively looking to start a relationship with a city in Japan, preferably in Aichi Prefecture.

The story begins when the Honorable Robert L. Butler, Mayor of Marion wrote a letter to the Japan Local Government Center seeking its assistance in finding such a city. Knowing of Kanie Town's interest, JLGC introduced Mayor Butler to the Honorable Junichi Yokoe, Mayor of Kanie Town. Mayor Yokoe was enthusiastic about the possibility, but as they say, seeing is believing and so the mayor, the superintendent of education and the director of planning and information decided to visit the city of Marion. Staff at the Japan Local Government Center would support their mission during their stay in Illinois.

Marion City is growing rapidly. It is the home for several famous brand name companies and boasts the largest Wal-Mart in the world which opened in 2006. There is also a Pepsi-Cola distribution center and Aisin, MFG, LLC, a Japanese auto parts company.



Downtown Marion

Mayor Yokoe and the small entourage visited the City of Marion on January 8th, 2008. The first stop was Aisin MFG, LLC, where the President and Department Manager of General Administration greeted them. After explaining why Aisin, MFG chose Marion for its business location, Kanie Town officials inquired into whether Aisin could help locate host families for its visiting students and teachers. Aisin's president gladly offered his assistance. Aisin officials then accompanied our group as we

visited the local board of education, library, and city hall.

At Marion Community Unit School District No. 2, we were met by the School Improvement Facilitator. She offered to facilitate the visit to the school district and plan sightseeing tours for the students and teachers from Kanie Town as well as try to find home stays for them.



Visiting with school officials at Marion Community Unit School District No.2

Next we visited Southern Illinois University at Carbondale to talk about the English education program for the teachers accompanying the students from Kanie Town. We met the Associate Dean of Academic Programs, Teacher Education, Student Services and Retention who introduced us to the ESL director at SIUC. The ESL Director accepted our offer to have two Japanese teachers register for courses at SIUC. She also agreed to arrange a campus tour for them.



The Student Center at Southern Illinois University Carbondale

We also visited Marion Carnegie Library, and met the Director and staff. They held a reception for us in Japanese and English arranged by a library staff person fluent in Japanese. Mayor Yokoe then gave a presentation about Kanie Town.

The Japanese program in Marion Carnegie Library started in 2005 funded by the Aisin Company as part of a cultural exchange between Japan and Marion. Currently, the library has a collection of about 800 Japanese books and 400 digital video disks. Mayor Yokoe was impressed and promised to add to the collection Japanese books from Kanie Town when they visit Marion in August.



Marion Carnegie Library

Our last stop was City Hall to meet Mayor Butler and two of his Commissioners. The mayor told us that he was willing to assist the home stay program and make it successful. The mayor invited us to dinner where we continued our conversations and exchanged stories about Kanie and Marion. Our time in Marion came to an end but Mayors Yokoe and Butler promised to meet again in August.



Marion City Hall

My impressions of Marion were that it was not a big city but a developing city with huge potential and possibilities. The people of Marion are gracious and extremely hospitable and everyone was supportive of the future visit of students and teachers from Kanie Town. Mayor Butler and all the officials we were introduced to were helpful, kind and understanding allowing for a comfortable experience. There are some challenges that remain such as finding host families for the ten visitors but I left Marion feeling that it was a wonderful place to visit and experience American culture and I was confident that the enthusiasm exhibited by Marion officials would translate into a successful endeavor.

Kanie Town



1. Population: 36,914(2007)
2. Land Area: 11.10km²
3. Major Industry: Pot chrysanthemum, Fig, Aoki Supermarket

City of Marion



1. Population: 17,011(2006)
2. Land Area: 35km²
3. Major Industry: Aisin Mfg, LLC, Blue Cross-Blue Shield of Illinois, Marion Pepsi Cola



International City of Peace and Culture: HIROSHIMA

By Toru Mukaikubo / Director of Japan Local Government Center (Representative of the City of Hiroshima)

DESIGNATED CITY

The history of Hiroshima begins in 1589. This was the year that Terumoto Mori, grandson of Motonari Mori and lord of most of the Chugoku Region, began building a new castle and castle town on the Ota River delta. He named the area Hiroshima (lit. "wide island"), and two years later, when



Hiroshima Castle

the new castle was completed, he moved in. During the Tokugawa Era, the Mori family was forced to retreat to Suo and Nagato. Hiroshima Castle was taken over briefly by Masanori Fukushima, then by Nagaakira Asano. The Asano clan ruled for 12 generations (250 years) until the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Throughout, they lived in the beautiful "Carp Castle." Hiroshima Castle, Shukkeien Garden, Fudoin and Mitaki temples speak eloquently of the past and are much loved by residents and visitors alike.

On August 6, 1945, the world's first atomic bomb exploded over the city of Hiroshima. That single bomb instantaneously crushed and burned most of the city's buildings, taking hundreds of thousands of lives. The reality of the Hiroshima tragedy must be passed on forever in an effort to



Shukkeien Garden

prevent the repetition of such suffering and achieve lasting world peace. The place to go for all visitors to Hiroshima is the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Built in 1955 to preserve and convey to future generations the facts about the unprecedented tragedy, it collects, stores,



Mitaki Temple

and displays artifacts from the atomic bombing and other materials that speak of the tragic events of that day. Millions of people come from around the world to see it. Children on school field trips listen in the museum and in the park to the vivid personal stories of the atomic bomb survivors. Peace Memorial Park, with the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and Hiroshima National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims, was constructed by the City of Hiroshima as an appeal for lasting world peace and the abolition of nuclear weapons. The extensive park grounds are filled with monuments, including the Cenotaph for the A-bomb Victims, the Flame of Peace, the Children's Peace Monument, and the Fountain of Prayer.

One of Hiroshima's great attractions is its large number of art museums and public galleries, plus the zoo, botanical garden, and many other facilities for public education. The Hiroshima Museum of Art, with works by Cezanne, van Gogh, and Renoir, has one of the largest and finest collections of French impressionist paintings in the world. The Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art is among the very few public museums of contemporary art anywhere in the world. Its wide-ranging collection includes works by the most talented Japanese and foreign contemporary artists from Henry Moore and Andy Warhol to Masuo



Atomic Bomb Dome

Ikeda. The Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum is among the largest art museums in Western Japan. It boasts a collection of works by Ikuko Hirayama, Genso Okuda, Kunzo Minami and other renowned artists of this area. The Hiroshima Botanical Garden has the largest greenhouse in Japan, and the Hiroshima Asa Zoological Park effectively uses its enormous property to allow the animals to live and play in comfort. The Hiroshima City Transportation Museum offers a unique look at vehicles that tell the history of transportation.



A bird's-eye view of the city

In 1945, Hiroshima was reduced to rubble by the atomic bomb, but after the war its citizens achieved an amazing recovery. Today, it is the largest, most vital city in the Chugoku-Shikoku Region. With modern buildings lining Aioi Avenue, elegant shops and restaurants in the Motomachi CRED, and the outdoor café on the Motoyasu River, downtown Hiroshima is a popular destination for both residents and tourists.

► For more information:
<http://www.hiroshima-navi.or.jp>





Welcome to “Japan Night”!

Kaz Tanaka / JLGC Assistant Director, Satoru Kimura / JLGC Assistant Director, Takashi Daito / JLGC Assistant Director

JLGC UPDATE

Over the past 18 years, the Japan Local Government Center (JLGC) has participated in various conferences relating to public administration and American state and local government. JLGC's mission, indeed its purpose is to promote mutual understanding and where it already exists strengthen the partnerships between American and Japanese local governments and their respective leaders. Since 2006, the JLGC has hosted “Japan Night” receptions as a vehicle for American government officials to learn more about Japanese policies and practices as well as providing an opportunity to make new friends and build upon established relationships. An added bonus is the event allows for Japanese staff to acquaint themselves with former CLAIR Fellows. Last year in 2007, we held three Japan Nights at the annual conferences of the Council of State Governments (CSG) the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and the National Association of Counties (NACo). Just in case your curiosity has been piqued, the following paragraphs describe in a little more detail what went on at these unique receptions.



NACo: Sultry Richmond, Virginia was the setting for the 2007 NACo Annual Conference and the Japan Night event was well attended by people interested in learning about Japan and the Japan Local Government Center. Joining the party

were NACo Vice President Valerie Brown, NACo Executive Director Larry Naake and Deputy Executive Director Edward Ferguson as well as many elected county leaders and NACo staff.

The NACo Annual Conference is always enjoyable and staffs at the Japan Local Government Center learn about the role and importance of counties in the American local government system. The conference affords us the opportunity to network with government professionals and share with them best practices and experiences. The Japan Night event naturally fit into the program and was well received. Maybe the sushi, finger foods, wine and beer helped a little.

ICMA: It was a very successful night at the Westin Convention Center, in the City of Pittsburgh where the 2007 ICMA Annual Conference was held. Although initially concerned about how many people would attend, our fears were abated as over one hundred people joined the festivities. Former CLAIR fellowship participants shared their remembrances and wonderful experience of Japan with us and we felt strongly that they would always remain a part of JLGC's legacy. The new people we met were interested in the traditional blue jackets that we were wearing known as “happi”. This interest spurred lively conversations amongst the guests about the differences between cultures and local government systems. Everyone appeared satisfied and enjoyed the sushi and finger foods and some even left with Japanese souvenirs they drew from the grab bag.

Japan does not presently have a council manager form of government yet the ICMA conference provides valuable information about the city/county manager profession. We have been fortunate over the years to have been introduced to city and county managers and they have shared some very interesting stories about their jobs and

about the American local government experience.



CSG: JLGC has worked closely with CSG for 18 years and to celebrate this relationship, we hosted a reception for members of the CSG family called “Japan Night”.

This special reception took place at the CSG Annual State Trends and Leadership Forum in Oklahoma City on November 12, 2007. International committee members and staff of CSG's organization gathered in one of the convention center's party rooms. At the front counter, every attendee won a Japanese gift such as furoshiki (traditional Japanese wrapping cloth) or sensu (Japanese folding fan) in a lottery. During the reception, Mr. Sasaki, Executive Director and Dr. Benjamin, Senior Researcher, acted as hosts. Throughout the evening we exchanged views on trends in local governments in both countries with our guests. Of course, we also engaged in various pleasantries and stimulating conversation! We also had the great pleasure of receiving walk-in guests from South Korean local governments which enhanced the international atmosphere.

We intend to expand our Japan Night receptions adding a fourth event at next years National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) event. We shall continue with Japan Night events at the NACo, ICMA, and CSG annual conferences. We hope that you can join us! If you would like to obtain the schedule of 2008 Japan Nights, please contact us.