ON THE MOVE!

THE JAPAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT CENTER RELOCATES TO PARK AVENUE

Since it was established twenty years ago, the Japan Local Government Center has known only two locations to conduct its business; office space in 1988 at the World Trade Center which was destroyed by the tragedy of September 11th 2001, and for nearly twenty years in the heart of Manhattan at 666 5th Avenue.

On December 18th, 2008 the Japan Local Government Center (JLGC) relocated to its new home on the 20th floor of an impressive building located at 3 Park Avenue. The building is easily recognizable as it was built at a forty-five degree angle to the street. Situated between 33rd and 34th streets, the red brick building is conveniently located just south of Grand Central Terminal and within close proximity to the local buses and subway. It is close to the Empire State building and within viewing distance of the Independence Day fireworks display.

Moving to a new location is no easy chore and the process began almost two years ago when JLGC staff began researching the New York City commercial real estate market. After interviewing several real estate brokerage companies, JLGC in 2007 selected the firm of CB Richard Ellis (CBRE). In May 2008, after being shown several property locations with available office space, JLGC management chose its new location at 3 Park Avenue.

Remodeling began in October 2008. With a firm move in date set, JLGC staff questioned whether two months was sufficient time to complete the transition, considering the amount of preparation and work that still needed to be done. It certainly would have been easier in Japan where all the details, planning and preparation are completed prior to the projects commencement. In the United States, however the process is starkly different. The client, JLGC works closely with its lawyer and architect on a daily basis during the remodeling cycle.

Fortunately, JLGC had its own resident architect as a member of its staff in the person of Sho Nakazono from Salai City. Living and working in the United States for the past two years, Sho handled ably all the minute details that make up an office move. Perhaps, it was the defining moment that allowed him to practice his craft. He certainly enjoyed the valuable experience in negotiating, planning and preparing the office relocation project.

The management and staff at the Japan Local Government Center would like to take this opportunity to extend our invitation to you to visit our new office. For information on the Japan Local Government Center, please visit our web site at www.jlgc.org
An Important Milestone for JETAA

RYAN HART / JETAA COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVE

As an organization, JETAA witnessed a very important milestone in our history this past September. Located on the campus of Cité Université located in the south of Paris, the Maison du Japon has been bringing together university students from around the world who share a common interest in Japanese language and culture since 1929, either through full language immersion at the residence or through the many activities and programs hosted at the Maison. Befittingly, CLAIR and JETAA France chose to host the 2008 JETAA International Conference there, bringing together JETAA officers from around the world who also share a common interest in the support of the JET Program and promotion of cultural understanding between Japan and their respective countries. This conference in Paris was the first outside of Japan to be hosted in a country where English isn’t the first language.

Challenges

The language barrier presented a number of challenges in the facilitation of the conference. Traditionally, English serves as the lingua franca for all JETAA meetings and conferences. As a result, there were concerns over conference communications and documentation. Would delegates be able to navigate transportation to the conference given the language barriers? Worries aside, through the hard work and dedication of everyone at CLAIR, the Embassy of Japan and JETAA France, the 2008 JETAA International Conference in Paris was a overwhelming success on all levels.

Precedent

This conference did set some important precedents for JETAA International. Given our shared understanding of the JET Program and living in Japan, this conference demonstrated that there is no limit in engaging and expanding our network of international chapters to all countries participating in the JET Program. Further, the common understanding of living in Japan on the JET Program and of Japanese culture proved to be stronger than any obstacle presented by language.

This conference also served as a great example in energizing our typically smaller chapters in countries where English isn’t the first language.

Delegates from Germany and Korea were in attendance at the conference. Strengthening our outreach to chapters in Korea, China, Thailand and India were also part of discussions.

Other highlights from the conference included ways to improve efficiencies and communications at the international level, upcoming changes to chapter budgets, release of the new online membership community (CMS), and promotion and JETAA sponsorship of Room to Read (http://www.roomtoread.org) in our global charity efforts.

Lessons for JETAA USA

Much like our international chapters in JETAA, JETAA USA sees renewed energy and strength going into 2009. Our goals for the upcoming year serve to strengthen and centralize roles and responsibilities to allow local chapters throughout the United States to focus on membership recruitment and retention, as well as support for the JET Program and the local community. With the addition of our newest chapter in Nashville, Tennessee (Music City JETAA), JETAA USA will add a third country representative to our national structure. This will allow the country representatives for JETAA to dedicate new resources to consolidation and improvement of lines of communication, budgetary oversight, as well as get more involvement in the planning and execution of our annual national conference - our biggest event each year. In all aspects, 2009 is shaping up to be yet another year of growth for JETAA USA!
Dear All JETAA members,

On April 3, 2008 my first day working at the Japan Local Government Center (JLGC), I was informed by my superiors that I would be responsible for managing the JETAA America program. Immediately, I began to worry incessantly about whether I could accomplish this task because my English language ability was poor and I knew very little about how to manage the JETAA Program. With the support of my colleagues and a hefty amount of cramming, I can say with confidence that the job as liaison is both challenging and enjoyable.

Currently, there are 51 JETAA chapters of which 19 (about 40%) are classified as JETAA USA chapters. It is therefore understandable that handling JETAA USA would demand considerable work and attention. Also, in 2008, we would be gearing up for the opening of a new chapter established in Nashville aptly named the Music City chapter. In addition to the 19 JETAA USA chapters, more than 13 sub chapters are located throughout the United States actively engaged in promoting Japanese culture and serving as good will ambassadors at the grassroots level.

My main responsibility as liaison to JETAA USA is to coordinate and monitor grant in aid funding which supports each chapter’s activities. I also serve as the contact person between the JETAA USA chapters and the Embassy of Japan and its many consulates located throughout the United States.

Looking back over the last year much has been accomplished:

April to March: Grant-in Aid proposals submitted, reviewed, approved and allocated.

June 2008: A pre-departure seminar and farewell reception was held successfully in New York City.

July 2008: A seminar was held to promote the JET Program at universities in Denver, CO.

August 2008: Participation in the JETAA America national conference in Seattle, WA.

September 2008: Co-hosting the JETAA New York Softball tournament in New York City.

October 2008: A whirlwind promotion of the JET Program in Washington D.C., Philadelphia and New York City. Arranged a welcome reception for JET’s returning from Japan held in New York City.

November 2008: Attended the reception celebrating the opening of the Music City JETAA chapter in Nashville TN.

Reminiscing over the last few months, I have come to understand that everything I have encountered has been a valuable experience for me. I was able to meet and network with an assortment of diverse people at these events. The JETAA America national conference in Seattle was the most memorable event for me. At the JETAA America national conference representatives from all the chapters gather annually, to share their knowledge, information and experiences and to discuss planning their future activities. Since the year 2008 is the 20th anniversary of JETAA America, representatives of all the sub chapters attended this conference enhancing the scale and scope of the conference proceedings. As the JLGC delegate to the national conference, my introduction was greeted with thunderous applause. I was touched by the response given to me and the hardships I initially experienced as liaison to JETAA USA melted away.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge and thank all the JETAA members for their support and my special thanks to country representatives Ryan Hart and Shannon Quinn and former country representative Shannan Spisak.

Arigatou Gozaimashita!
Taichi Hanzawa
Introducing Local Government in Japan

Twelve Japanese Local Authorities have established their offices in the United States. The Japan Local Government Center serves Hokkaido, Okayama, Hyogo, Saga, Aichi prefecture which has its American office in San Francisco, Shiga prefecture which has its American office in the state of Michigan, and the remaining eight prefectures which have their American offices in the state of Ohio.

AICHI Prefecture in Japan!

Aichi Prefecture, located in Central Japan, is best known as the country’s industrial heartland and home to unparalleled traditional and modern craftsmanship. Global companies such as Toyota Motors and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries produce pioneering products alongside skilled artisans carrying on centuries-old traditions such as pottery, tie-dying and doll making.

Aichi’s must-see destinations include museums showcasing the region’s proud crafts and manufacturing tradition, and the two ancient pottery towns of Seto and Tokoname. Other attractions include the Chita Peninsula which extends into the Pacific Ocean and provides Central Japan with miles of coastal beauty and a bounty of fresh seafood and the mountainous areas to the west that serve as a gateway to Shirakawa-go, a village of thatched roof homes that was declared a World Heritage Site in 1995. The three samurai rulers who are recognized as the founders of modern Japan all hail from the region, and their legacy is apparent in three breathtaking castles: the iconic Nagoya Castle; Inuyama Castle, the country’s oldest; and Okazaki Castle, which boasts over a thousand blossoming cherry trees in spring.

The capital city of Nagoya is Japan’s third-largest urban area and the hub of the entire Central Japan region. It’s rapidly growing skyline is distinguished by skyscrapers such as the JR Twin Towers at Nagoya Station, Midland Square, home to Toyota, and the spiraling Mode Gakuen building. Aichi hosted the World Expo in 2005, welcoming hundreds of thousands of visitors from throughout Japan and the world to experience the latest innovations in technology and celebrate cultural diversity.

Nagoya, Aichi, and the surrounding Central Japan region are served by Central Japan International Airport (Centrair). Air links and sophisticated rail and highway infrastructure connect the city to the region’s dynamic communities and major cities in Japan and abroad.


SHIGA Prefecture in Japan!

Hello! My name is Saeko Miyamura and I am a visiting government official from Shiga prefecture in Japan. I have been stationed in Lansing, Michigan since May 2008. Shiga prefecture and the state of Michigan have been sister states for 40 years! During this period of time Shiga prefecture has dispatched its government officials to Michigan to serve as liaison for the many sister-state activities and exchanges between the prefecture and the state. I have the distinction of serving as Shiga prefecture’s 18th visiting government official.

Shiga prefecture is located close to the center of Japan and is blessed with abundant riches of nature. Located near Kyoto, the nation’s former capital for more than 1,000 years. Shiga prefecture is served by an exemplary transportation network. Accordingly, the region has been the setting for many historic events over the centuries resulting in a great number of cultural assets that are still carefully maintained.

The jewel of Shiga prefecture is Lake Biwa, the largest lake in Japan and one of the oldest lakes in the world. The benefits received from Lake Biwa are numerous. Centrally positioned within the prefecture, Lake Biwa supplies drinking water for the 1.4 million inhabitants of Shiga prefecture. It also supports the lifestyles of 1.4 million people, as well as the cultural and industrial development in Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe and other areas in the region. Moreover, Lake Biwa and its environs are a treasure trove of valuable ecosystems. Water sports and leisure activities by the lake are popular summer attractions. In winter, the surrounding mountains offer some of the best skiing in Japan. Indeed, each of the four seasons offers wonderful scenic views of the lake.

The future of Shiga prefecture appears to be strong and prosperous. Shiga continues to grow as an inland industrial prefecture. Whereas the population of Japan is declining, Shiga is one of the few regions with notable population growth.

As evidenced by its long lasting relationship with Michigan, Shiga prefecture is dedicated to fostering international exchange and cooperation by actively broadening relationships with its overseas partners. For example, Shiga prefecture built in 1988 the Japan...
Center for Michigan Universities to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the sister state relationship. Every year, over 200 American university students visit the Japan Center for Michigan Universities to study Japanese language and culture.

Last year, the 40th anniversary of the sister state relationship featured a visit to Michigan from Shiga’s Goodwill Mission. This year, the Michigan Goodwill Mission will reciprocate by visiting Shiga. These alternate exchange visits are the hallmark of a successful and healthy sister-state relationship. The Goodwill Missions are a delegation of citizens passionate about furthering the promotion of internationalization. Many members are affiliated with local sister-city and friendship city organizations. In fact, there are 13 sister cities and 4 friendship cities between Michigan and Shiga and they continue to keep close ties through various and diverse partnership activities. These friendships and partnerships are a valuable resource to further globalize and to better understand the culture and people of Shiga Prefecture.

Come to Shiga, a region with much to offer!

GIFU Prefecture in Japan!

Geography, Climate, Tradition and Modernity: It’s all in Gifu Prefecture.

Gifu Prefecture is located at the center of the Japanese archipelago, and is one of the few “land-locked” prefectures in Japan. Blessed with a diverse topography; from the water-rich low lying Mino Region (0 meter above sea level) to the 3,000-meter-high mountainous Hida Region, Gifu residents enjoy four distinctive seasons in this unique, nature-rich environment.

Modern Gifu Prefecture was created in 1876 through the merger of Hida and Mino provinces. It has long held the distinction as being strategically positioned serving as a link between eastern and western Honshu as well as the Pacific and Sea of Japan coasts. Historically, this area was the sight of the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600 which established the hegemony of the Tokugawa shogunate.

Industrial activity, centered in the south is led by such manufacturers as textiles, clothing, ceramics, transportation equipment, pulp and paper. Gifu is also a leading producer of lumber.

The mountain scenery and historic villages and towns of the Hida region, notably Takayama, constitute Gifu’s outstanding tourist attractions. Cormorant fishing (ukai) also a major attraction is carried out on the Nagara River. This ancient and traditional fishing method, whose origin dates back to the 7th century is still practiced every night from May to October. A special summer feature performed throughout Gifu is Gujo dancing. People from all over Japan visit to join in the dancing which can last for as many as 30 nights!

From an architectural perspective, Shirakawa-go thatched roof houses in the Hida Region were designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995. Visitors can enjoy these traditional Japanese houses featuring distinctive, steeply gabled thatched roofs amidst a beautiful rural landscape.

Gifu Prefecture is also well-known for a number of famous hot springs; the Gero Hot Spring and the Okuhida Hot Spring Resorts. The Gero Hot Spring is reputed to be one of the three best hot springs in Japan. People can relax in open-air baths encircling by magnificent nature.

A variety of traditional festivals such as the Takayama Festival are held in many parts of Gifu Prefecture. In addition, exquisite art and craft work personified by Gifu’s artistic climate, have been well preserved and handed down for generations by local residents. Visitors have a rare opportunity to experience firsthand in Gifu Prefecture.

Located at the geographic center of Japan, Gifu City is the capital of Gifu Prefecture and is easy to get to by public transportation. A 100 minute ride on the Shinkansen bullet train to Nagoya plus a short hop on the local rapid transit line; or a one hour train ride from the Central Japan International Airport (Centrair) will place you in the heart of the city ready to join in the Gifu experience!

- Web site: http://www.pref.gifu.lg.jp/

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International Study Program

JAPANESE LOCAL OFFICIALS REFLECT ON THEIR EXPERIENCES

Short-term International Study Program

Annually, JLGC conducts a short-term international training program for Japanese local government officials. Originally, this program was for a period of three months. In 2008, JLGC launched a new intensive one-month international study program. There were 4 participants in the three-month program and 1 participant in the one-month program. They began training in New York City and visited many locations throughout the United States and Canada. JLGC would like to share with their readers what the trainees felt and learned while participating in these programs. JLGC hopes you enjoy reading their experiences.

Local government officials in the United States and Canada who are interested in hosting these training programs can reach us at jlgc@jlgc.org

MULTICULTURALISM AND TRAFFIC CONTROL MEASURES AND POLICIES IN THE UNITED STATES

— Shigusa Matsunami

Aichi prefecture contains the largest number of Brazilians and automobiles in Japan. Friction from cultural differences, traffic congestion and environmental pollution is inevitable so I participated in this training program to search for clues to solve these issues.

I visited municipalities in the United States to study their policies regarding immigrant services. While federal law offers financial assistance to local governments to provide services for immigrants such as English language and multi-lingual publications the municipal governments are also hiring foreign born bilingual staff. Superior in their English language abilities and highly-educated they often work reluctantly as public servants. Therefore, local governments have instituted programs such as a university scholarship system for those immigrants interested in a future career in government. I think we need such educational considerations as multiculturalism grows in Japan.

Environmental preservation and climate control are two important global issues. On the west coast of the United States cities are actively planning the reduction of greenhouse gases. I learned some of the advanced practices local governments are using to control traffic congestion and air pollution. Particularly interesting was how some cities are introducing public transportation systems that invigorate downtown areas while diverting traffic away from the city center thereby reducing congestion and CO2 emissions. LRT service where instituted remains a viable if not yet profitable way of achieving these goals, mainly thanks to public taxpayer support. In Japan’s Aichi Prefecture however, a new public transit system was built funded by Aichi Prefecture without their citizens’ approval and was later abandoned in 2006 due to an enormous financial deficit. Currently, Aichi residents in the Komaki area suffer from a dearth of punctual public transportation especially during the morning and evening commutes. My impression is that adopting the systems in San Francisco and Portland, we would avert wasteful spending on railroad construction and avoid causing inconvenience to the public.

INTEGRATING IMMIGRANTS INTO TORONTO SOCIETY

— Nobuhiro Takegawa

Dispatched by Hiroshima City to participate in this program, I visited numerous cities in the United States and Canada.

I was most impressed with the progressive policies of the city of Toronto, Canada.

I visited Toronto to learn how city government supports its immigrant population because Japanese municipalities, including Hiroshima city will face this challenge soon. Toronto established a plan to assist a growing number of immigrants by creating programs that enable the city to further integrate immigrants into its established multicultural society.

Toronto has many good programs, services and activities that allow immigrants to become “Torontonians”, citizens of Toronto. The Toronto school board provides immigrants and their children and parents the opportunity to learn English as second language, and how to acclimate to Toronto life. A non-profit organization provides multilingual telephone service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to help immigrants access programs and services. A new Light Rail Transit plan will enable immigrants living in isolated areas to access other parts of Toronto easily and affordably.

In Toronto, I learned about the importance of diversity; respecting other cultures, languages, religions and how a good integration policy removes obstacles so immigrants may feel comfortable and blend into society. Most Japanese have never experienced living in a multicultural society. I hope my newfound knowledge and experience concerning integration will help my city assist its foreign population.

THE DIARY OF TAKEFUMI HASHIMOTO

— Takefumi Hashimoto

I was apprehensive about participating in the comprehensive one-month overseas study program in the United States but I wanted to capture every moment so I made daily entries describing my experiences.

The first four days I endeavored to learn as much of the English language that was humanly possible. Six hours of one on one language training every day. It was an exhausting yet rewarding experience.

September 29th. I visited Lexington, Kentucky to meet with state and city officials to talk about my research. I toured city hall and the Toyota factory. I met the mayor of Lexington and learned that three important industries in the Commonwealth of Kentucky are:
thoroughbred horse racing, Kentucky bourbon, and the Toyota automobile.

October 6th. In Washington D.C., I visited the Small Business Administration, the District of Columbia Chamber of Commerce, Mtech and the Enterprise Development Group. The federal SBA offers credit guarantees to small businesses and guarantees bank funding to small companies. Mtech is what is referred to as an “incubator” business affiliated with Maryland University. It provides business entrepreneurs with support mechanisms such as educational training; rental subsidies; and/or office space where they can invent design and produce prototype products.

I visited the Business Resource Center in the D.C. Chamber of Commerce. The BRC supports small companies and not for profit corporations by helping them with their business plans and funding. The EDG is a not for profit corporation located in Virginia. It provides “micro loans” to businesses owned by immigrants.

October 14 to 17th - I am in Bozeman, Montana where the population is about 32,000. The City of Bozeman is a City Commission/City Manager form of government. The elected City Commissioners serve as policy makers, enacting laws and adopting a city budget. The City Manager is hired by the City Commission and serves as the city’s administrative leader. Japan does not have this form of government.

Bozeman is a dynamic, beautiful and growing community and a great place to visit!

BLENDING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION - US LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES

Shinichiro Sakaki

In today’s competitive environment, it is necessary for local governments to attract companies and nurture new industries that create jobs and stimulate the local economy. I visited several cities working to bolster their local economies. I discovered that successful cities incorporated a few important strategies.

First, successful local governments collaborate through partnerships or with existing local industries and higher education institutions. These public-private partnerships and industry-university-government cooperation, allow local governments to provide forms of financial support for advanced research conducted at universities. Another tool used by local governments is to subsidize financially existing local industries and businesses. These activities encourage new business growth attracting new companies looking for the best and brightest students with specific skill sets to work for them. Further, after relocation many of these companies can and frequently do partner with area universities to develop new innovative products.

Second, local governments give preferential treatment in the form of tax breaks or abatements and rent subsidies for companies as incentives to relocate or remain. Also, local governments collaborate with institutions of education to promote lifelong learning opportunities.

In Japan, the majority of large companies tend to have their offices in big cities. It will become important for smaller Japanese local governments to provide regional business incubation opportunities while marketing to attract new businesses and companies to relocate within their municipal boundaries.

The flip side of promoting economic development is to preserve the environment. I chose to research the efforts made by several American local governments to recycle used products. Local governments that created simple and easy to understand programs and instructions explaining trash separation were rewarded with public support for the recycling program and made considerable headway in reducing their waste streams.

PORTLAND IMPRESSIONS:
“A BRIEF BUT MEMORABLE VISIT”

Natsuko Kudo

During my three month study trip to the United States, I had the good fortune of spending two weeks in Portland, Oregon. While in Portland, I interned at the Multnomah County office to observe how city government operates. I had the opportunity to assist several county employees in performing some of their duties and was invited to attend various department and staff meetings. I was able to visit the International School where Japanese classes are offered and was impressed by many of the student’s proficiency in Japanese. I discovered that the city of Portland’s Japanese population is comparatively larger than other cities in the United States. I stayed with a Japanese-American family and the host-father told me about the Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center which preserves and shares Japanese American history and culture. I was delighted to find many connections between the United States and Japan.

One of the more interesting connections between the cities of Portland and Sapporo is the brewing of beer. Many parts of Oregon are well suited to grow hops and good hops make good beer. Numerous microbreweries have become popular haunts for local residents and tourists to relax and enjoy a tasty brew. I learned that the city of Portland gave Benson Bubblers to the city of Sapporo as a sign of their friendship. Benson Bubblers are the elegant bronze drinking fountains you see everywhere in downtown Portland. Simon Benson, a noted businessman and philanthropist, gave the city of Portland $10,000 to install them in 1912.

In any event, this is just one aspect of a fruitful and thriving sister-city relationship which commenced in 1959. This year, the cities of Portland and Sapporo will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of their sister-city relationship.
Okazaki City Hall is certainly impressive. If you stand in a certain spot on the seventh floor you can look down and see the entire building. In the month of July, with the summer sun pouring through the building’s immense skylights, it is a wonderful sight.

I often find myself standing at that spot during my lunch break, and today as I looked down across the building my attention was drawn to the Brazilian help desk on the second floor. For some reason I was fascinated by watching people approach the desk, discuss their concerns, and leave after receiving help with their problems. I have been interested in problem solving for a long time, and even studied fields related to it as an undergraduate.

As I learned in my game theory courses, all conflicts are not zero-sum games and it is sometimes possible to find conflict resolutions which benefit all parties.

Doing so usually requires an understanding of each party’s interests, and as I soon found through my studies at Okazaki City Hall the Brazilian help desk was committed to understanding the needs of the local Brazilian population and creating solutions that benefit both them and the city. This inclusive approach to problem solving was the main reason behind my fascination with the help desk.

However, I soon learned this approach to problem solving is not limited to the help desk, and even extends to the city’s International Affairs Division where I interned this summer. Throughout my time there, the division continually made strides to improve relations with minority organizations within the city and use these relationships to learn more about the needs of minority communities.

Once understood, the International Affairs Division realigned their activities to address these needs while maintaining their focus on providing outcomes that benefited both minority communities and the city.

I am very thankful to Okazaki City Hall for giving me the opportunity to work in a department that takes such an innovative and inclusive approach to problem solving, and look forward to building upon the knowledge I gained there in my future studies. I wish all of Okazaki city the best of luck, and hope to visit again soon.

JLGC Summer internship Program

Inaugurated in 1992, the program extends to select students interested in Japanese local government the opportunity to spend a summer in Japan. Working side by side with local government officials in either a prefecture or municipal office, students not only gain firsthand exposure to Japanese management in the public sector but are also able to improve their Japanese language skills.

Forty seven people have participated in this program from 1992 to 2008. JLGC extends a participation qualification to not only the graduate students but also the 3 or 4 grade undergraduate students. If you are interested in the Summer Internship in Japan, please access our WEB site; http://www.jlgc.org