



# JLGC NEWS LETTER

Japan Local Government Center ( CLAIR, New York )  
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ICMA INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE  
AT MIYAGI PREFECTURE GOVT.

## ISSUE NO.73 JULY 2012

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## *A Greeting from the New Executive Director*

My name is Takaaki Ogata, the New Executive Director of Japan Local Government Center (JLGC), CLAIR New York. I am originally from the City of Kobe, and was dispatched from the government of Hyogo Prefecture to take over from my predecessor, Mr. Masaaki Akagi, starting from April of this year.



First of all, I would like to take this occasion to express, on behalf of all of us here at JLGC, our sincere gratitude for your continued support for and cooperation with our office. I believe that strong, close friendships between nations can generate peace, development, and prosperity on both sides, and I look forward to establishing and strengthening closer relationships between Japanese communities and their counterparts in the US and Canada. I will do my best to achieve these goals during my time as Executive Director of JLGC, and would greatly appreciate your kind understanding and cooperation.

We mainly have three core missions at JLGC: Firstly, to strengthen grass-roots relationships and cooperation by state/provincial/local governments between North America and Japan; secondly, to support the activities and research carried out by Japanese local authorities in the US and Canada; and thirdly, to support the Japan Exchange & Teaching Program (JET) and the JET Alumni Association.

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Until this March I worked to promote community-to-community and government-to-government relations & exchanges at the local level as the director of the International Relations Division for Hyogo Prefecture. I was also in charge of JET Program matters, supporting Assistant Language Teachers in local areas and working with Coordinators for International Relations in my office in Kobe, so I love JET members and know the importance of the JET Alumni Association (JETAA) and the JET network very well. The activities of JETAA have been highly evaluated by so many people, and I, too, think the organization is a living treasure for Japan and for the US and Canada.

These days the world is facing so many problems – recession, terrorism, piracy, civil war, unusual weather, natural disasters – but, working together, the US, Canada and Japan can take the lead in addressing these. And I think that we here at JLGC can, in our own small way, contribute to these efforts at the local level.



With Mayors at the USCM Annual Conference 2012

I love world history. History gives us dreams, hopes and knowledge, and often shows us the way we should act and how to build better relationships among people. I would like to learn more about the history and culture of the US and Canada by visiting a lot of historic sites – cities, towns, parks and places with beautiful scenery and nature. I hope to encounter great experiences and make new friends. In return, I would also like to share Japanese culture and spirit with the people I meet.

The year 2011 was an extremely hard time for Japan, owing to the triple disasters on March 11. However, the Tohoku region has begun the long road to its revival, thanks in part to generous support from the US and Canada, as well as from the JET alumni in both countries. I truly appreciate your support for Japan, and I'd like you to visit beautiful Japan again, and especially the Tohoku area, with its abundant culture, history, food and excellent scenery, to see the progress that's been made.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the friends, supporters of CLAIR, and JETAA members, for your invaluable contributions as we work together to strengthen ties between North America and Japan.

With warmest regards,

*Takaaki Ogata*

Takaaki Ogata

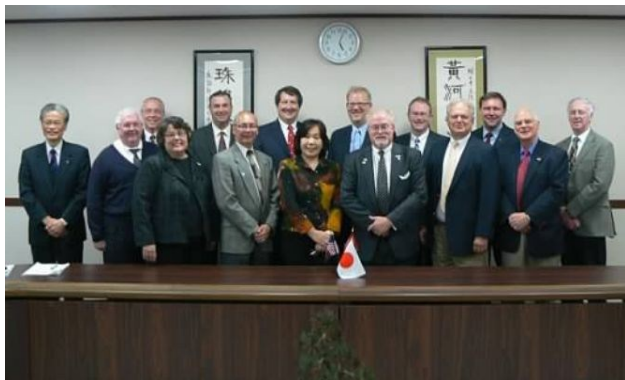
Executive Director of Japan Local Government Center (CLAIR, New York)

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## *Comments from ICMA International Committee's Japan Tour Participants*



The International City/County Manager Association (ICMA) International Committee met in Tokyo, Japan and toured Miyagi prefecture from April 16 to 20, 2012. It was the first time that an ICMA Committee met in a nation which doesn't have a partner organization similar to ICMA.

The decision to visit Japan centered around a desire to learn about the newest systems of local government in Japan and to observe the recovery of areas which were huge damaged by the earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011. It's also important to remember that ICMA and JLGC have a long lasting relationship with each other.

<The itinerary included>

- Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications
- Tokyo Metropolitan Government
- Japan Association of City Mayors
- Council of Local Authorities International Relations
- Miyagi Prefecture Government
- Sendai Airport (observation)
- Yuriage district, Natori city (observation)



Mr. Mark S. Watson  
ICMA International Committee Chairman  
City Manager  
City of Oak Ridge, TN

The International Committee meeting in Japan was insightful. A model of good planning and implementation. Upon visiting one of the tsunami impact sites in Miyagi Prefecture, I was struck by the utter destruction. Ten thousand souls were lost, land structures underwater and tons of debris. Yet, I found hope in the exemplary enthusiasm of Japanese public servants to recover quickly and efficiently. A ten-year plan, with benchmarks and processes was readily identified by national, prefecture, and local governments to assist with the recovery. Free-taxation zones were established to encourage immediate development of jobs. Local governments examined new ways to plan parks and open space where re-building was not feasible. I was impressed with their desire to learn from this event, which was epitomized by the Sendai International Airport Director stating that he was collecting thoughts and directives about the airport's experience and sharing it with every major airport in the world! This disaster even affected our sister city of Naka, nearly 35 kilometers from the coast, where they were without water systems and roads for two weeks after the earthquake. A 200-year-old local sake brewery shared their spring water with the local townsfolk until the system was repaired. Truly, Japan has resilient people with ultra-abilities to respond to the worst of disasters!

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## *Comments from ICMA International Committee's Japan Tour Participants*



Mr. Peter Agh  
ICMA International Committee Vice Chairman  
ICMA Vice President  
City Manager  
City of Nove Zamky,  
Nove Zamky, Slovakia

The International Committee of the ICMA has for a number of years promoted international cooperation and strengthened the relations between managers worldwide. Its recent Spring meeting in Japan and study tour of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake area showed how managers from other parts of the world can face similar experiences and learn from each other. There was much to learn from our Japanese counterparts who were forced to come up with new ideas and new ways of dealing with this disaster in just hours and days. It was when I learned that over 250,000 people were relocated in 30 minutes time between the earthquake and the tsunami and only 10,000 were lost in this tragedy in Miyagi, that struck me as remarkable. My appreciation of Japanese people is great for their discipline as they face tragedies resiliently and like the ancient Phoenix, rise from ashes every time. My last two days I spent in Hiroshima, where the day after the bomb was dropped, citizens were hooking up electrical power lines. The third day after, the streetcar service started and two weeks after the bombing, the first city council meeting was held in the destroyed city hall building. Today, some 67 years later, it is a beautiful lively city with almost 2 million inhabitants. Also an excellent example of the Japanese strong will.



Mr. Jim Toye  
CAMA (Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators)  
President

The International Committee meeting / study tour was informative and interesting. I would like to thank Ross Hoff and the Japanese Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (New York) for planning the event. It is well known that Japan is a major economic power in the world and although there was a minor downturn after the tsunami and the Fukushima Nuclear Plant shut-down, the economy is back on track. With the implementation of a variety of incentives, tax reductions and an aggressive marketing campaign, a number of new businesses are being constructed or are being re-established.

Japan has been a leader in climate change initiatives and the presentation of the Tokyo Climate Change Strategy by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government officials was insightful. Similar programs are evident throughout the country. Reducing energy is an important issue as Japan reviews their future use of nuclear power. On our visit to Sendai and Miyagi Prefecture, it became evident the extent of the decimation and damage the tsunami caused in the area. On a positive note, it was apparent in the hard work and determination of the various levels of government and the people, in general, that this area was getting back to normal within a year of the catastrophic event. We were informed that professional staff from all levels of government and prefectures from across the country helped with the initial clean-up and the recovery and re-construction plans of the damaged areas. A true team spirit in a time of need. The reuse and recycling project in Miyagi Prefecture was also impressive and well planned. Thank you for the opportunity to attend this event.



## *Comments from ICMA International Committee's Japan Tour Participants*

### **Ultraland Japan: Resilience in the face of ultrachallenges**

By Clay Pearson and Bill Hammon

Three years ago, co-author, Clay Pearson visited Japan to learn to the country's local government structure and community-building activities. His impressions focused in Japan as a land of ultras: ultraclean, ultrasafe, ultraprompt, ultratasty, and ultracohesive.

A return to Japan with the ICMA International Committee in April 2012 for a work study and meeting did nothing to diminish that characterization, even following the epic earthquake and tsunami disasters and subsequent Fukushima nuclear reactor problems of March 2011. We heard how the Japanese planned for and cope with significant widespread disaster. The prefectures of Japan have developed individual ten-year plans to recover, rebuild, and improve because ten years is a realistic timeframe.

ICMA International Committee members met in Tokyo for a series of meetings with the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR), and the National Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. Participating ICMA members from around the United States, Canada, and Slovakia attended with logistical support from ICMA. Each member underwrote their own attendance. ICMA President-elect Simon Farbrother, ICMA Vice President Peter Agh, and International Committee Chairman Mark Watson led the delegation. The ICMA Japan Tour was arranged and supported by CLAIR Headquarters in Tokyo and the Japan Local Government Center in New York, and CLAIR staff that liaised with our group during the entire stay.



Mr. Clay Pearson  
City Manager  
City of Novi, MI



Mr. Bill Hammon  
Assistant City Manager  
City of Alcoa, TN



Tokyo is a city of 13 million people that runs like clockwork. Trains, commerce, connections, and deliveries are ultra-smooth. The Tokyo government is a uni-government, functioning as a traditional state, county, and city. It works well. The vice governor for the consolidated Tokyo Metropolitan Government hosted us in its massive towered government offices; ultra-good hospitality and generosity remained a hallmark even at these high levels of government. We were additionally hosted for a series of meetings with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications and the Japan Association of City Mayors. The Japan Association of Mayors functions much as our U.S. National League of Cities, providing a forum for the elected Representatives of local governments to meet and confer.



### Ultra-hospitality and Ultra-efficiency

While the local government managers in our travel group marveled that every pavement striping and asphalt work looked like it had just been newly completed, the people of Tokyo moved with ultra-grace and welcomed us with ultra-hospitality. You can guess the adjective for the speed and efficiency of the *Shinkansen* bullet train that took us from Tokyo to Sendai City in Miyagi Prefecture -- yes, ultra-fast. The bullet train's two-hour ride (driving takes more than five hours) is part of a nationwide network that has operated for more than 50 years without incident. Trains leave on the appointed time, the cars glide across the countryside up to 180 miles per hour, and the carriages are clean, well-appointed, and well-served.

Zippping by parts of the country that represent the third largest economy in the world, one keeps in mind that all this has been achieved since rebuilding began in 1945. In just over 65 years, Japan has transformed itself from desolation and destruction to a leading democracy.



Japan's democracy is real; despite frequent changes in national leadership. There is lasting continuity in the public service sector, extending into the local governments.

There are no city managers in Japan. Public servants are part of a system with an elected mayor as chief executive officer, per the national constitution. The local officials tend to stay with their jurisdictions for their working careers, rotating amongst jobs in often large units of government.

The CLAIR program provides an opportunity for those local officials to work outside of Japan for up to three years, learning best practices at one of seven offices around the world. ICMA has a long, positive working relationship with the CLAIR office in New York. Many of the CLAIR staff members who have attended ICMA conferences were able to renew friendships during the International Committee visit.





### Setting Sights on Recovery

Sendai City is the capital of Miyagi Prefecture, which endured the greatest direct damage and suffering from the March 2011 tsunami. Even though Japan's emergency preparedness is considered "tops" in the world, the scale of the disaster was daunting, even as the recovery has accomplished so much.

One measure is the debris. There are mountainous piles of neatly sorted materials along the coastline. There is as much debris to dispose as the prefecture would normally produce in 23 years. There are an estimated 250,000 housing units to replace. Such scale would make most despair, but such is not the way with the Japanese.

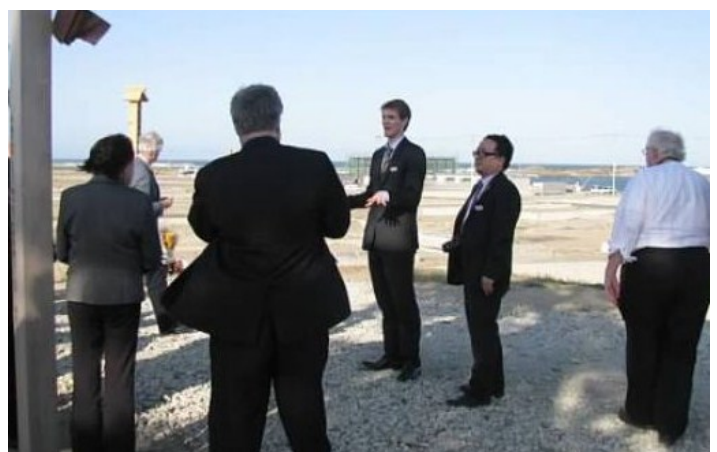
We met with Miyagi Prefecture officials who shared their 10-year recovery, reconstruction, and improvement plans. There was ultra-focus and ultra-cooperation. We realize that these official briefings are the packaging and planning. There are obviously going to be skirmishes between the local governments and the national government about resources and direction.

One just gets the sense that selfless cooperation will make this recovery work. Sendai City, a city of more than 1 million people, has its center several miles inland, is bright and bustling. The city is quite large and does have coastal areas, but the central business district was directly unaffected by the encroachment of sea water.

The chilling site visit included a trip to the Sendai Airport. The airport was one of the countless tsunami videos made public in the wake of the disaster. The airport is just a couple of miles from the seacoast and images showed the mass of water and debris sweeping across it. Yet, the airport reopened within four days for relief flights and then commercial flight resumed within about one month. Many times there was appreciation expressed for the support of the United States citizens from the beginning of the disaster, especially the U.S. military's work at Sendai Airport to assist Japanese forces.

There was great assistance from the U.S. military for that airport recovery, an effort that was recognized and appreciated with respect from Tokyo throughout Miyagi Prefecture. While the airport is refurbished and ramping back up to pre-disaster levels, the former residential areas are laid level.

Where there were housing and shops, there is cleared open land and an occasional wrecked fishing boat. There are no definitive decisions yet, but rebuilding housing this close to the coastline is not likely in the future. Whatever gets done, you know it will be ultra-right.



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## *The New York Times Travel Show features Japan's Tohoku Region (March 2-4 at the Javits Center)*

At the New York Times Travel Show 2012 (NYTTS), the Japan Local Government Center set up its JLGC booth with "Learn About Beautiful Tohoku and Visit" as the theme after the March 11, 2011 disaster in Japan.

At the Exhibit booth volunteers handed out brochures, and administrated a Quiz of Tohoku\*, so visitor could learn about sightseeing spots, access, and the recovery situation after the earthquake. We conducted demonstrations of Japanese calligraphy and ken-dama to promote Japanese culture.



\*[Quiz of Tohoku \(You can try!!\)](#)  
> [Answers of the Quiz are here](#)



At the NYTTS, we received substantial contributions from JET Alumni Association of New York (JETAANY). The nine members who were working in Tohoku region (for example: Hiraizumi-cho (Iwate), Siogama city (Miyagi) and Iwaki city (Fukushima)) joined the event to support our booth as volunteers.

They promoted the attractive areas of Tohoku by using their experience and knowledge. Thanks to their help, we distributed 5,500 brochures and assembled 675 answers on the Quiz of Tohoku.

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*Comments from JETAA members who volunteered at the JLGC booth  
in the New York Times Travel Show 2012*



Mr. Owen Rosa

Iwate Prefecture 1999-2002

The New York Time Travel Show was a great opportunity to demonstrate to the people of New York that the Tohoku area is still safe and one of the most beautiful areas of Japan to visit. Although some people showed concerned about the safety of the area after the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Disaster I found most did not care and hardly asked any questions about the March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011 Great Earthquake and Tsunami. People at the show were interested in visiting the more traditional Japan and wanted to experience Hot Springs and the outdoors, which was why the Tohoku booth was so popular. I was happy to share my experiences in Iwate and Tohoku with so many people and hope JLGC continues to promote Tohoku. Thank you.



Ms. Alexei Esikoff

Fukushima Prefecture 2001-2002

The travel show was a bright, colorful, and hectic event. We JET alums talked about how beautiful the Tohoku region is. People were eager to take the Tohoku quiz JLGC had prepared, especially kids, who wanted little Akabekos of their own as prizes.



Mr. Sam Frank

Hiraizumi-Cho, Iwate Prefecture  
2002-2004

Volunteering at the New York Times Travel Show was a wonderful opportunity for me to reconnect with one the most impactful experiences in my life, living in the Tohoku region of Japan. Working alongside JLGC staff, I got to share stories about all the wonderful food, kind people, and beautiful landscapes that Iwate Prefecture has to offer. While most Americans associate Tokyo and Osaka with Japan, the New York Times Travel show put a spotlight on one of Japan's best kept secrets, and it was an honor to share it with everybody. Yokoso!



Mr. Dominic Abordo

Akita Prefecture 2008-2011

I felt blessed to be able to volunteer at the NY Times Travel Show as a JET Program alumni. Not only did it allow me to share the many beauties of Japan and my life-changing experiences with eager individuals, but it also enabled me to help others realize that traveling to the Tohoku Region – where I worked for three years – is both safe and worthwhile despite the aftermath of the March 11 natural disasters. There are many beautiful things to see and experience in northern Japan, and I hope that future visitors will take the time to witness these for themselves.

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## *Comments from JETAA members who volunteered at the JLGC booth in the New York Times Travel Show 2012*



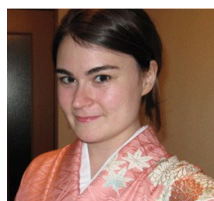
Mr. Rashaad Jorden

Yamagata Prefecture 2008-2010

When I learned about the opportunity to volunteer at the New York Times Travel Show earlier this year, I quickly jumped on it. Little did I know how much fun the day would be. Decked in a happi coat, I manned the Japan desk with several fellow former JETs and others. I was unsure about how many visitors would stop by our desk because in general, Japan seems to be an unknown country for many people.

But my worries were quickly dispelled. We were bombarded with folks eager to take the nice little quiz on the Tohoku region we prepared for them. Of course, they were motivated in large part to take the quiz so they could receive some goodies, including an onigiri pin.

The most rewarding aspect of the day was seeing more people learn about Japan, especially the Tohoku region, as a tourist destination. I had the honor of living in Yamagata Prefecture and meeting so many wonderful people there. Japan is a special place, and one people will love once they get the opportunity to explore it.



Ms. Alma Jennings

Fukushima Prefecture 2008-2010

I'm so glad I got the chance to promote Tohoku! I hope that by talking to the Travel Show visitors, we were able to share our wonderful memories and inspire other travelers to explore the north. If they go, they will not only experience one of the most beautiful areas of Japan but also help the people living there by bringing business to the many incredible hotels, restaurants, and attractions that have been struggling. Ganbappe, Tohoku!



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## *Introduction of JLGC New Staff*



### **Keiko Washioka, Assistant Director Representative of Wakayama Prefecture**

Hello, my name is Keiko Washioka from Wakayama prefecture, Japan.

Wakayama is famous for its delicious fruits and produces the largest amount of mandarin oranges, persimmons and plums in Japan. Wakayama Castle, the world heritage site of Koya and Kumano as well as the beautiful beaches are well known tourist attractions.

During my stay at New York's Japan local Government Center, I shall be in charge of the CLAIR Fellowship Exchange Program. This unique program affords senior state and local government officials from Canada and the United States the opportunity to visit Japan and experience firsthand Japanese public administration. I helped with last year's program in Miyagi Prefecture where participants observed the damage caused by the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami.



Seigantoji Temple and Nachi Falls  
(the world heritage site)

### **Ayuko Ono, Assistant Director Representative of Sakai City**

Do you know Sakai City in Osaka Prefecture? My home town, Sakai City has been a groundbreaker and a trendsetter throughout its history, achieving remarkable development from its early day's right up to the modern era. It was an important hub for overseas trade in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and developed into a city with a spirit of liberty and self-governance. People said "everything comes first to Sakai". The moats that encircled Sakai at that time caused one foreign missionary to say the city was "just like Venice". As a result, people called Sakai "the Venice of the East". This prosperous history provides a solid foundation for Sakai's ongoing efforts to forge a bright, hopeful future.



Sakai is famous for Japanese knives, so I tried making one for myself!!

Please check: <http://www.facebook.com/SakaiKnives#>



## *JLGC New Staff visited Novi, Michigan*

JLGC new assistant directors visited the city of Novi, Michigan with the director, Takashi Sonohara on May 16-20, 2012.

The city of Novi is located in southeastern Michigan and has a population of about 55,000.

Every year, the city of Novi is kind enough to accept our staff to let us learn about American local government.

Following are their impressions of Novi.

### **Keiko's Comment**

I recently travelled to the city of Novi in the state of Michigan to learn about American local government administration. Novi has approximately 2,500 community members and 65 Japanese-owned businesses. The relationship between Novi and Japan has developed into a long lasting friendship. The city manager affectionately refers to the city of Novi as Japan's 48<sup>th</sup> prefecture. I was pleased to know that such a friendly and rewarding partnership exists between Novi and my country.



Keiko Washioka, Takashi Sonohara and Ayuko Ono (from left)



Japanese craft (Origami) class in Novi public library

### **Ayuko's Comment**

This was my first trip outside New York to visit a local authority, and I was impressed by the hospitality and teamwork of city officials in the City of Novi. I witnessed many citizens participating in volunteer activities at city hall, the library, the schools, the fire stations, the senior center and many other places. People communicated with each other and exchanged their opinions. I believe that active public engagement makes the city very unique and attractive. People in Novi are open to cultural diversity and cherish friendships with foreign visitors. My colleagues and I felt relaxed and at home. Novi is like a second Sakai City for me.

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