



Sister City Journal



Summer 2009

"Dedicated to fostering global awareness and appreciation through cultural exchanges and shared experiences"

Teachers, students spend week in Hanamaki

On June 5, two area teachers and two students departed for Hanamaki, Japan. As recipients of Sister City Foundation scholarships, their travel expenses were covered, enabling them to make this life-changing trip.

Beth Stone, Jessieville library media specialist for grades 6 - 12, and Kristin White, Hot Springs Intermediate School

"Overall, it was probably the best week of my life."

*- Abby Brenneman,
Hot Springs High School*

language arts instructor, were the teacher recipients. Scott Carnahan, a student from Jessieville currently attending the Arkansas School of Mathematics, Sciences and the Arts,

and Hot Springs High School student Abby Brenneman were chosen to receive scholarships from a large pool of applicants.

This is the first year to award student scholarships, but plans are being made to make it an annual event.

The following accounts will reveal how the trip to Hanamaki affected each of the delegates.

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Above, Kristin White, Abby Brenneman, Beth Stone and Scott Carnahan pose with their guide and volunteers, who helped them learn the proper way to wear a kimono.

Hot Springs musicians to highlight Hanamaki Choral Festival



Deleen Davidson, left and Hee-Kyung Juhn, above.

Two very talented Hot Springs musical artists, Deleen Davidson and Hee-Kyung Juhn, have been invited to perform at Hanamaki's annual choral festival featuring the works of Kenji Miyazawa. Miyazawa (1896-1933), a well known poet and children's novelist from Hanamaki, was also an artist, amateur astronomer and teacher of agriculture. Performers come from all over Japan to participate in the festival, which celebrates Miyazawa's life and many works.

Two years ago, the event organizer, Mrs. Kiyoko Terui, visited Hot Springs as a member of a choral group. As a result of this trip, she made the decision to raise the necessary funds to bring Hot Springs musicians to Hanamaki to perform in the Miyazawa festival. All of the expenses of Ms. Davidson and Ms. Juhn will be provided by our friends in Hanamaki.

Ms. Davidson, a classically trained soprano from New Orleans, has performed in many venues across the United States and Europe. After

Hurricane Katrina destroyed her home in 2005, she relocated to Hot Springs, forming The Muses Creative Artistry Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving classical music and art. Ms. Juhn, an accomplished pianist, trained at Julliard and Indiana University, currently directs the Keyboard Studies Department at Henderson State University. She recently moved to Hot Springs. For more information about these two performers, please visit www.themusesproject.org. ♦



Amy Brenneman, left, and Scott Carnahan, right, are the first student scholarship recipients to travel to Hanamaki as part of the Hot Springs Sister City Foundation's student exchange program. Their trip was made possible through the generosity of Mrs. Dorothy Morris of the Morris Foundation, along with a grant from the Hot Springs Area Community Foundation.

Jizenka is the Japanese word for philanthropist; **Yujo** is the word for friend. Dorothy Morris certainly is a wonderful philanthropist and friend of the Sister City Program. Thanks to the generous gift from the Morris Foundation, two students were able to travel to Hanamaki this summer.

A long-time supporter of the Sister City Program, Mrs. Morris feels strongly about the many benefits of student travel to Hanamaki. She helped fund the Fountain Lake EASTLab student delegation that traveled to Hanamaki in 2006 to produce the award-winning documentary, *Hot Springs and Hanamaki: A Perfect Match.* After that trip, Mrs. Morris made a gift of \$1,000 to the Foundation for future student travel.

After the two students were chosen this spring and the Sister City Foundation received a grant from the Hot Springs Community Foundation, additional funds were still needed. Mrs. Morris increased her already generous gift, contributing a total of \$2,000 to make the trip a reality.

Many thanks to our **jizenka** for her belief in the program, her support of student exchanges and the difference that this trip made in the lives and futures of these two young people. If you would like one of the exchange program delegates to speak to your club or organization, contact Sister City Coordinator Mary Neilson, 545-6960. ♦



Caleb Washburne, a Jessieville 3rd grader, works on his carp kite, left. Above, all of the children display their kites. Below, teacher Sarah Riley demonstrates how to fold origami.



Children's Day, Japan style

On April 30, 40 children and their parents gathered at the Garland County Library to celebrate Children's Day, a Japanese holiday. This holiday honoring children is celebrated across Japan on May 5. Traditionally, kites shaped like carp (Japanese fish) are flown outside the home, one for each child who lives there.

The celebration began as the children listened to "The Magic Fan," a book about a young Japanese boy. Akiko Maehana, a Japanese exchange student from Sapporo, Japan who is staying with a Mt. Ida family, shared her family remembrances of Children's Day. Next, the children created colorful origami kites with art teacher Sarah Riley of Lake Hamilton Primary School. She told the children how parents want their children to be strong like the carp fish, so they display carp kites. The event concluded with everyone enjoying a Japanese sweet treat. ♦

Abby Brenneman's story

While in the Nitobe Family Memorial Museum in Hanamaki, I started to truly feel how the country had altered from its original customs and modernized, but at the same time kept its distinct, beautiful, and unique culture. The splendor of Japan comes from the stories of Samurai, the kimonos, the Sakiori weaving and everything else combined with the modern society. To quote Inazo Nitobe's *Bushido*, "Bushido, the maker and product of Old Japan, is still the guiding principle of the transition and will prove the formative force of the new era." Visiting Japan has opened my eyes to the reality that this eastern land has one of the most dissimilar cultures that remains upon this earth.



Also, I keep in mind that our society is becoming international. Through foundations like ours, we are becoming more connected to the East. This globalization is a reality of the twenty-first century, and we must embrace it, or become ignorant of the world around us.

While in Japan, I think one of my most memorable experiences was a venture downstairs from my hotel room. The elevator doors opened to reveal the lobby, and I spotted my old friend Ryoka. Two years ago, I had hosted her when she journeyed to Hot Springs. I remember back when we said goodbye. I turned around to glimpse her wave (a Japanese custom) and yell "Bye, Abby." I thought I would probably never see my friend again, but I was wrong, and I'm glad!

When I got on the plane to Japan a few weeks ago, my travel buddy Mrs. Stone said, "You have a lot of firsts on this trip, don't you?" This flight would be my first ever, as well as my first view of the ocean, and my first almost-attack by a seagull. But these experiences weren't all I was nervous about. I was going to a completely different culture! I had spent time with Japanese school children before, but Japanese adults? I had no clue if my awkward sense of humor would go over, or fall straight through the tatami mat. Would they be consistently stern and formal? I was considering duct taping my outspoken mouth the entire time as to not make a fool of myself, but I soon discovered that wouldn't be necessary. Our guides were so easy to talk to. Of course, with them speaking good English and me comprehending three measly words of Japanese, we had no trouble communicating. My other travel buddy, Mrs. White, asked them, "So, do you know any good karaoke places?" One night, after collecting shells at the ocean, Makoto, the hard rock lover that always drove us around says bluntly, "Karaoke," and the next thing I knew we were in a karaoke room and he was singing "Sweet Child Of Mine," while pretending to strum out a guitar solo.

Overall, it was probably the best week of my life. I learned so much about the culture in Japan. I had a chance to catch up with old friends, meet some very interesting people, and make memories that will last a lifetime. ♦

Scott Carnahan's story

Our eight days in Japan were so packed with new and exciting people, places, foods, sights, and other unique experiences that it is nearly impossible to remember them all without looking at the pictures. We met new people and were welcomed in the warmest ways. We visited museums, schools, offices, and restaurants that had food we perhaps did not want to welcome so warmly. I left Japan with many wonderful, lifelong memories.

Chief amongst those memories and long-lasting feelings is that of the friendships created and strengthened. Upon arrival at the Hanamaki station, we were met by many of the people with whom we would spend the next week, and almost all of the students who have spent a week with my family in Hot Springs Village.

Abby and I spent a day with the Sato family: Nobu and her mother Michiko. We went to various shops, ate dinner, and stumbled our way through conversations. Interaction with these friends, first met in Arkansas and now in Japan, was delightful. By spending the day with Japanese friends, I was able to experience their culture as they do. This inspired me to further my learning of the Japanese language and continue relationships in Japan far into the future.

In the following days, we visited many museums featuring people from Kenji Miyazawa to Inazo Nitobe, and subjects like agriculture. I found the Nitobe museum particularly interesting. Nitobe was a Japanese man who wrote many books on Japan in English. I am currently working on a project for school in which I have to research the modernization of Japan, and in the museum I found a book on the problems and progress of Japan! It should prove to be an excellent source as I continue my research. This is an excellent example of how this trip will be so helpful, not only in the immediate future, but also in my schooling for years to come.

My dining experiences in Japan varied from traditional Japanese fare to a noodle eating contest. Not being an adventurous eater, I was surprised at how much I enjoyed the different foods that were presented to us. From fresh sushi at the ocean's edge, to Japanese Italian, to the formal dinner with city officials, my taste buds never lacked for new adventure.

I definitely grew in my willingness to try new things. Eating in Japan was a tasty adventure from beginning to end. More than that, the entire experience was an adventure I will never forget. ♦



Beth Stone's story

The Japan trip was, to me, the trip of a lifetime. I felt like royalty the entire time I was in Japan. From the time we arrived to the time we departed, our guides, dignitaries, hosts and hostesses were so professional, gracious and kind. They were so nice that I almost felt guilty some of the time.



Mrs. Junko Miyazawa (descendant of Kenji Miyazawa), Beth Stone, Kristin White, Abby Brenneman, and Mrs. Mutsuko Takumi following Japanese tea and a museum tour.

Visiting the museums, cultural exhibits and teacher/student facilities gave me a glimpse into the history of Japan and its people. My favorite tour was of Hanamaki Kita High School and, of course, the library. The students and teachers were quiet and shy, yet friendly. They did not seem to mind our intrusion into their learning place. We were able to ask them questions, and they asked us questions as well.

There were some similarities in the students' choices of music, books, and fashion. The world might be a better place if we allowed our young people to be the ambassadors instead of politicians.

While in Japan, I took many photos and videos to share with Jessieville staff, students, and community. As soon as I returned to the school, I made a display of items purchased, brochures, my beloved "happy coat," and more. It will be in the high school library for all to see when everyone arrives in August. I am currently making a slideshow to share with the Jessieville community and school. I have been asked to share my experiences with my church, a local chapter of Alpha Delta Kappa, and the Jessieville 2nd graders when they study Japan. Other upcoming activities include an interview by one of the Web designers for placement on the Jessieville Web site; coordination with EastLab students for a related project; teaching my 6th graders about formal research using the Japan trip as the theme; and media lessons for English classes based on this trip.

My trip of a lifetime was wonderful. I appreciate the Sister City Foundation for allowing me to be part of the first group to take students to Hanamaki. Teaching and nurturing students is a vital part of my life, and I am so thankful that I was given this opportunity. I know that the students and educators of future groups will feel just as blessed as I do. ♦

Kristin White's story

I was amazed at how like Arkansas Japan is. Being a gardener, I loved the fact that most houses in Hanamaki had decorative entry gardens, while they also had a rice field to tend, and some had vegetable gardens as well. It seemed that I always saw someone working in a yard, pruning, or tending to the rice field. The plants there are mostly what we have here. I commented to them about the dogwoods, hydrangeas, iris, and the Japanese maples, which of course, they just call maples.

It became apparent early on that food would be a large part of this trip. I was open-minded about trying certain new dishes, but I learned that I am not a big fan of sushi. I did try some exotic fare, such as jellyfish salad and fried cuttlefish, which, by the way, was delicious. I became used to using chopsticks at every meal. Our last meal was served with chopsticks, and we all commented on how we had grown accustomed to using them. I found out that tempura, their fried food, was my favorite dish. It is a lighter way of frying food.

The places we visited were amazing. The samurai mud house, where the gardeners hand pruned the trees, the beach, with its huge rock formations, and the Golden Palace, with hand carved temples and 20-foot Buddha were awe inspiring. I felt honored to experience the Japanese traditions of taking a hot springs bath, wearing a kimono, and learning calligraphy.

I loved the fact that our guides tried to make us as comfortable as possible. They would pick up on little things we would say, and then they would take us to a place we might like, or order some food that we might enjoy. I went on this trip prepared to meet strangers, and left with several new friends. ♦



Old friends, together again in Hanamaki.



New Sister City officials in Hanamaki

The above picture was taken during the June delegation visit to Hanamaki, the first under the International Relations Department's new leadership. Pictured, front row, left, are Ms. Megumi Tamayama, staff, Hanamaki International Association; Mr. Ken Kamezawa, Director, Policy Promotion Department, City of Hanamaki; Abby Brenneman, Scott Carnahan, Kristin White, Beth Stone; Yoshie Kato, Chief, Office of International Relations.

Second row, left: Mr. Kazuaki Obara, staff, Office of International Relations; Principal Mitsuhiro Takahashi of Hanamaki Kita High School; Mr. Makoto Fujiwara, Assistant Manager, Office of International Relations; Superintendent Nobuo Oikawa, Mrs. Kumiko Obara, Deputy Manager, Office of International Relations; Mr. Joji Takahashi, Manager, Office of International Relations; and Ms. Kaori Ito, staff, Hanamaki International Association.

Mr. Makoto Fujiwara and Mrs. Kumiko Obara are the new officials in the International Relations office responsible for Sister City coordination in Hanamaki. Mrs. Yoshie Kato, who has been involved with the Sister City Program in the past, is now our primary contact. We extend a warm welcome and best wishes to all of the new officials, and look forward to continuing the close sister city relationship we have enjoyed for the past 16 years. ♦

Sister City economic exchange

Mr. Hideichiro "Hiro" Chikahiro, a top economic development official from Hanamaki, and his family visited Hot Springs on a family vacation in May. While in Hot Springs, he set aside time to meet with City Director Carroll Weatherford and an interested investor to discuss economic and cultural exchange opportunities between our sister cities. Sake production using hot springs water and rice grown in Arkansas was a potential project discussed at length. Steps are being taken towards a feasibility study on producing sake. Cultural exchange opportunities discussed included a modern art exchange and student exchanges between baseball and softball teams. Mr. Chikahiro also made additional suggestions of ways to encourage tourism between Hanamaki and Hot Springs. ♦

Japanese language classes

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We had a pleasant O-Hisashiburi evening after a month-long break. (O-Hisashiburi means, "It's been a long time.") We had suspended classes during the month of June to give ourselves time to enjoy the Hot Springs Music Festival. We studied together for two months before that and decided that after our break, we'd review the basics. Language learning can stand up to quite a bit of revision; the fun part is coming up with different approaches.

It also helps to have a group that has settled into a comfortable team space. The range of ages, interests and talents makes for a very stimulating challenge for a teacher: we have poets, artists, Japanese pop culture aficionados, world travelers and, dare I say...more? We don't have any illusions about the time requirements for mastering a new language, but we are certainly going to enjoy ourselves along the way. It's not too late to join us; we can make a space around the table for more.

The Sister Cities Basic Japanese Language Class meets Thursday evenings at the National Park Medical Center Outpatient Pavilion on the southern end of the complex. Monthly tuition is \$20.00 per person. For more information, call (501) 545-6960. ♦

- Joel Railsback, instructor



Donna Casparian
Sister City
Foundation
President

Well, my tenure as Foundation chairperson will be ending this month. I certainly have enjoyed being "at the helm." Mr. Ron Luckow, current Foundation Vice President, has been nominated as chair for next year. He teaches world history at ASMSA and was one of our teacher grant recipients to Hanamaki three years ago. Motivated by his visit to Japan, he spent the next summer studying in Korea. I know that his students have surely benefited from his broader understanding of East Asian culture.

The Foundation was so excited this summer to extend its Hanamaki exchange program to two high school students, Abby Brenneman (Hot Springs High School) and Scott Carnahan (ASMSA and formerly from Jessville High School). We are deeply indebted to the Morris Foundation and the Hot Springs Area Community Foundation for funding the travel for these young people. The teacher/student trip was a bit of a challenge this year, due to the outbreak of H1N1 influenza worldwide this spring, just as we were making our travel plans. We were not sure how this outbreak would affect our ability to send the teachers and students abroad. Even though the agenda had to be modified, the trip was successfully accomplished, with the help and cooperation of the Hanamaki international offices.

I hope this will be the start of more student travel from Hot Springs to Hanamaki. We have worked hard to foster a solid relationship with Hanamaki and its officials over these past several years. ♦



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Performing in Hanamaki
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Upcoming Events

Every Thursday at 6:30 p.m.
Japanese Language classes at National Park Medical Center

1st and 3rd Fridays of each month at 9:30 a.m.
Japanese dance classes at McAuley Center in Hot Springs Village

September 5 through 13
Hot Springs delegation travels to Hanamaki

September 6
Deleen Davidson and Hee-Kyung Juhn perform at Kenji Miyazawa Annual Choral Festival

There’s a place for everyone

If you would like to be more involved in Sister City Program activities in any capacity, please call or email. Whether your talents lie in education, fundraising, hospitality, event coordination, or organization, there’s a place for you.

If you are a member of a club or civic organization and would like your group to learn more about the activities of the Hot Springs Sister City Program, please contact me. I, along with teachers, students and others that have traveled to Hanamaki, would be happy to share information about the program and the many opportunities for citizen involvement. There’s truly a place for everyone in the Sister City Program. ♦

- Mary Neilson
Sister City Program Coordinator



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