



# Sister City Journal



Spring 2009

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

## The Sister City Program's first hospitality delegation exchange *by Karla Nardi*

This was a journey of many firsts: the first time for me to travel as an instructor with three students; the first time for two of my students to fly; the first time for college students from National Park Community College to be involved in the Sister City Program; and the first time for me to be this far away from my husband Tony through 29 years of marriage.

I felt a strong sense of responsibility as we boarded our first flight to bring these students, Lee Brooks, Rick Davis and Matt Morrison, back to Hot Springs with a new outlook—changed forever by the opening of doors, minds, and hearts. I wanted them to discover the importance and strength that can be found through understanding and respect. This is Hot Springs' first culinary exchange delegation. I think a person can gain a better understanding of a culture by first exploring their cuisine. Japan has a fascinating and unique cuisine. Being a hospitality instructor, I knew that we would be given the tremendous opportunity to experience Hanamaki hospitality and bring that spirit back to Hot Springs.



*The Hot Springs National Park hospitality delegates, pictured with Hanamaki Mayor Mitsuo Oishi and the Hanamaki Deer Dancers.*

*- continued on page 3*



*Sissi Bennett, a member of the 2008 delegation, was invited to participate in the Hanamaki Festival parade.*

## The trip of a lifetime

The trip to Hanamaki for the Hanamaki Festival has been called "the trip of a lifetime" by past visitors. Those who have been part of citizen delegations have come home ready to go again. Some citizens have been so moved by their experiences in Hanamaki that they go repeatedly.

You can experience this same enthusiasm by being part of this year's citizen delegation to Hanamaki. This year, a delegation trip is tentatively scheduled from September 5 - 13.

The group will spend the first two nights in Tokyo, with a day tour to Kamakura. The following day, the delegation will travel by the world-famous bullet train to Hanamaki. While in Hanamaki, guides take the group to visit shrines, museums, and onsens, which are Japanese bathhouses. The highlight

of the trip will be the Hanamaki Festival, which will take place September 11—13. In years past, delegation members have even been invited to take part in festival parades.

The estimated travel cost is just over \$3,000, which includes airfare, transportation, lodging, tours, guides and many of the meals while in Hanamaki. The cost is kept so low because of the wonderful hospitality of our friends in Hanamaki, and the hard work of Janet Cheek, a Sister City Foundation board member who makes travel arrangements. Make plans to be part of this delegation by contacting Mary Neilson at 501-545-6960. Remember, the deadline for the initial deposit is **May 15**. ♦



Every few years in Japan, all government employees are rotated to a new position in a certain tradition called the “job shuffle.” This year, the job shuffle has affected a dear friend of the Sister City Program. Mr. Ichiro Fudai, who has been the section head of the International Lifelong Learning and International Exchange Division for more than 10 years, has received a new assignment. He will no longer coordinate Hanamaki’s sister city activities. He will still be extremely involved as a member of the Sister City Foundations in both Hanamaki and Hot Springs.

During his tenure, countless Hot Springs residents have experienced his hospitality, his genuine concern for those less fortunate, and his dedication to furthering the relationships between our cities. Some of his recent kindnesses included contributing to Kamo’s Kids in memory of a young Lake

Hamilton student who died as a result of an ATV accident; coordinating a fund to help those who had been forced to evacuate to Hot Springs after Hurricane Katrina; and personally contributing to and coordinating donations for the Rotary Club’s Zimbabwe Clean Water Initiative. These personal actions are not ones that Ichiro made public; he quietly became involved because of his fondness for Hot Springs and its residents. Most of all, he has touched the hearts of his friends here in his second hometown. Words cannot adequately describe Ichiro’s value to the Sister City Program and the progress made under his leadership. We thank him for many lessons learned, and for his continued friendship and support. ♦

## 2009 Hanamaki student delegation

January 10–14 was the date of this year’s educational delegation visit from Hanamaki. Nineteen students and four chaperones arrived in Hot Springs. They were greeted by Sister City Foundation members, volunteers, past teacher scholarship recipients, and ten different host families. The students attended area schools, participated in school events, ate American food, and “hung out” with their peers. The host families still communicate with the students via email and the online blogger, *Facebook*. The time spent by Japanese students with the host families was truly unforgettable.

The following is what a couple of host families had to say about their experiences:

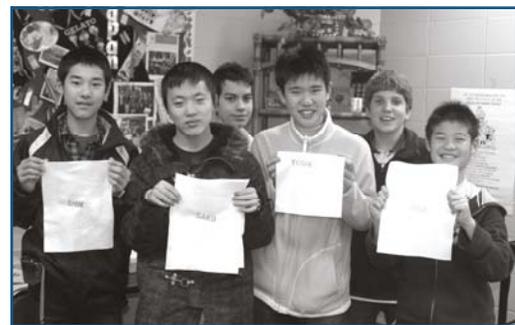
*We've made friends with our students, and kept those friendships for years. In addition, the cultural experience is invaluable for us and our children. Nothing stretches your cultural boundaries like trying to communicate across the language barrier, but kids do speak a universal language, and my children anticipate this time of year like it was Christmas! It is a fantastic program.*

*- The Schaffer Family (Greg, Kate, Isaac and Jenna)*

*This was our second year as a host family. It was our privilege to host Yuri Kimura and Mami Sasaki this year. All of the students who have stayed with us have been very anxious to please and extremely polite. They also seem very eager to learn as much as they can about our culture. We toured the city with them, shopped and took them to school and church. They seemed to enjoy our campfire event, when we roasted hot dogs and made Smores. Yuri wanted to cook one night, so we bought some macaroni and cheese. We put aprons on and had a blast teaching them about American food (Yuri bought several boxes of macaroni and cheese to take home to Japan). They taught us some simple Japanese phrases, and showed us how to make origami. We recommend that anyone who has a chance to host a Japanese student should not hesitate to sign up. We have developed strong bonds, and maintain communication with them and their families through the Internet.*

*- The Payne Family (Larry, Debbie, Ty and Krystle)*

*Being a first-time host family, we weren't quite sure what to expect. It was the one of the most exhausting and exhilarating adventures we have experienced! My girls enjoyed being exposed to the Japanese culture, but also enjoyed seeing that teenagers are the same all around the globe. My oldest daughter celebrated her birthday during the exchange, and we had a traditional sleep-over with cake and ice cream. I think this is now one of her favorite birthday memories. We hope we're fortunate enough to be part of next year!* - The Eisenhower Family (Ike, Sonya, Caroline and Camille)



Zach Seresinhe and Simon Jordan pose with students from their sister school who are showing what they made in HSMS sewing class.



Principal Frank Janaskie exchanges gifts with students Yuri Kimura and Mami Sasaki.



Jenna Schaffer is pictured with Yuya Terui, whom the Schaffer family hosted.



Donna Casparian  
Sister City  
Foundation President

We are so excited to finally move forward on sending high school students from Hot Springs to Hanamaki. In June of this year, the two teachers we select to visit Hanamaki will also accompany Hot Springs High School Student Abby Brenneman and ASMSA student Scott Carnahan (formerly of Jessieville High School). Their travel expenses will, in large part, be met by generous grants from the Morris Foundation and the Hot Springs Area Community Foundation. We continue to welcome any donations from the community to our student scholarship fund (All donations are tax exempt).

The Foundation bids a wistful “sayonara” to Ichiro Fudai, who has moved from the international division with Hanamaki city government to the tax division (This is an interesting phenomenon in Japan: no city official, including school principals, stays in one position for more than a few years). However, Mr. Fudai will continue to be an active part of the Sister City Program, and will also remain as our “in absentia” representative on our foundation board. We wish him well in his new job, and

welcome the new Hanamaki representative in the international division who will be working with us on future projects. ♦

## A running exchange

The March 15 Little Rock Half-Marathon included one runner from Hanamaki, Japan, who participated as a direct result of Hanamaki's sister city relationship with Hot Springs.

More than a decade ago, as former section head of Hanamaki's International Relations Office, Ryuji Sato (pictured, right rear) supervised sister city exchanges with Hot Springs. While in that capacity, he met Janet Cheek (pictured, front left), a Sister City Foundation board member and member of the Spa Pacers, a local running club. Since both are avid runners as well as Sister City Program leaders, they and their families developed a deep friendship over the years. In Little Rock, Sato ran with the Spa Pacers. He is considering organizing a group of runners to travel together from Hanamaki to participate in next year's half-marathon.



- Hospitality, from page 1

This trip was grueling, exhilarating, nerve-wracking, humorous, heart-pounding, moving, and truly amazing. We participated in five culinary exchanges ranging from the top chefs in the region, who impressed us with the care and precision with which they presented their culinary offerings, to the Hanamaki MAMAs who are keeping healthy Japanese traditional dishes alive through classes for young mothers.

We prepared our Southern dishes of barbecue ribs, savory cheese grits, chicken pot pie, duck gumbo with corn bread, bread pudding, and apple cobbler on two different occasions. It was well received, and I was very proud of the professionalism that my students displayed. We were assisted by some phenomenal chefs and our team of translators.

We stayed in two different hotels, and dined at numerous restaurants, which gave us a chance to experience the service aspect of our industry. We were completely amazed by the spirit of service and hospitality that we felt from people going that extra mile to do the little things to assure that the experience we had would be nothing less than perfect.

We learned about the rich history of Hanamaki through our visits to museums, temples, shrines, and discussions with our host families. We learned about the culture and cuisine of the

region through our visits to farmers' markets and grocery stores. There were lifelong friendships made, and we felt a tug on our heartstrings, waving out the window as we flew over Hanamaki on our way home. We knew full well that all the wonderful people we met there were waving back at us, as they had promised they would until our plane was out of sight. We felt so appreciative that we had Ichiro, Yosie, Koichi, and our host families as our guides and friends. Be assured that we will continue to exchange emails with these wonderful individuals.

We want to thank everyone who supported us, encouraged us, assisted us financially, and helped to organize this first culinary exchange between Hot Springs and Hanamaki. We traveled back home safely, our suitcases stuffed with souvenirs and hearts full of memories. We will never forget Hanamaki and the gracious and generous hospitality that we received there.

A simple "thank you" seems too trivial for what I feel in my heart. "Grateful" seems too minimal to describe how appreciative I am to have been given the opportunity to be a part of the Sister City Program. I am truly humbled by this once-in-a-lifetime experience. ♦



# Sister City Journal

## Hot Springs Sister City Program

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**A tribute to  
Ichiro Fudai**  
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*“Dedicated to fostering global awareness and appreciation through cultural exchanges and shared experiences”*

## Upcoming Events

**April 30, 4:30 p.m.**

Children’s Day celebration  
at Garland County Library

**May 15**

Deposit deadline for  
September delegation trip  
to Hanamaki

**September 5 –13**

Hot Springs delegation  
visits Hanamaki

## SISTER SCHOOL NEWS

### Congratulations to Hanamaki Higashi High School

Hanamaki Higashi High School, sister school of Lakeside High School, recently traveled to the National Finals for High School Baseball.



*Kikuchi’s final  
ERA after 40  
innings was a  
miniscule 0.68.*

Under gorgeous, blue spring skies and perfect conditions for baseball, Nagasaki’s Seiho High School and #1 pitcher Takeru Imamaura beat Higashi High School and their ace pitcher Yusei Kikuchi 1-0 in the duel everybody expected. ♦



## Sister City Journal

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## Children’s Day at Garland County Library

On Thursday, April 30 at 4:30 p.m., all elementary school children are invited to a Sister City celebration of the Japanese holiday, Children’s Day. We will read a book by a Japanese writer. Sarah Riley, a 2007 teacher scholarship recipient who teaches art at Lake Hamilton Primary School, will help the children make a craft. Akiko Maehana, who is an exchange student from Sapporo, Japan staying with a Mt. Ida family, will share how her family celebrated Children’s Day. Children will enjoy Poki sticks, which are a Japanese sweet treat, for their snack. Please call the Garland County library at 623-4161 to reserve your spot. ♦

