



BLOOMINGTON/NORMAL ILLINOIS U.S.A • ASAHIKAWA HOKKAIDO JAPAN

From Committee Chairman Rich Strle

My theme for this year's newsletter is service. Members of the Committee give their time because we believe in the relationships we have created for 51 years with our friends in Asahikawa, Japan through cultural and student exchange programs.

We have a great group of committee members. We work well together, we get things done, and we have fun doing it. Our job is to promote friendship with Asahikawa, Japan. We do that primarily by sending and receiving Jr. High and High School Exchange Students and taking care of the Japanese Garden on the Constitution Trail.

Many hands make light work and we could use more hands. We are funded by the City of Bloomington and the Town of Normal. Because we are funded with taxpayer money our accounting needs to be top notch. Because we deal with students and families our procedures need to be spot on. In order to receive Japanese High School Exchange Students, we have to know the travel rules for international students. We enroll those students in our local high schools so we need to know school requirements and work with administrators. When we host Jr. High Students from Asahikawa, on perhaps their only trip to America we need to provide a great experience for the students that come here. When our students go to Asahikawa they are given experiences in kind.

We use The Pantagraph, Facebook and this newsletter to connect with you, the public, students, parents, and teachers. This all takes time. We could use your help. If you have an interest in helping us out please contact us and we'll find a place for you.



Several committee members pose for a holiday photo at Bloomington Airport.

Committee Members

Teddy Amoloza
Bob Clary, Treasurer
Sanae Ferrier
Cindy Hansen
Robert Harrison
Mike McKnight
Leticia Montesdeoca
Don Necessary
Toyoka Nishihara
Ken Ota, Secretary
Joe Reid
Darren Sampson
Mary Anne Schierman
Harriett Steinbach, Vice Chair
Rich Strle, Chair
Akiko Wilson

High School Exchange from Asahikawa

We welcomed Kana Oikobu in August, 2013. Kana is attending Normal Community High School. She has been an excellent student. She is taking a full course load and is currently enjoying her gym class which is focused at present on dance. Kana has had several opportunities to represent Sister Cities and has participated in parades; attending local Sister Cities events and attending a dinner in Peoria with kids interested in student travel to Japan. She has built numerous friendships in school.

Kana has stayed with the Fan-Dong family and is currently staying with the Fulling family. If you are interested in hosting a high school student, please contact us.



Kana (second on the left) poses with friends before going to the Homecoming

High School Exchange To Asahikawa

Our exchange student this year is Anna Sekiguchi who is a sophomore at Normal Community High School studying at Asahikawa Commercial High School. Below is summary of reports on her experience in Asahikawa so far.

I am amazed of how fast time can fly by! I'm also amazed at the culture and life I would have never been able to experience without the sister city committee. I am living out the "Japanese half of myself". Clichés aside, this trip has changed my life. For the first time in my life I can understand my father and his culture and way of thinking. I'm glad I can experience the Japanese side of life. Of course there are the "material" experiences like visiting Sapporo or enjoying the glamorous shopping in downtown but there are more important experiences like having my first conversation with a band mate or cooking with my host mom.

Every day seems to be an adventure. Some days are difficult and some days are filled with victories but all adventurers need some bad days to appreciate the good ones. Some of my victories include completing the listening part of the N5 practice test with no mistakes the first time I tried it, becoming more responsible in general (money smarts, washing my dishes, and being places on time), and making all the friendships I've made. Now, I wonder how I could have lived without all my new friends. Even though the school hours are longer and harder physically, the school and people in it are less stressful and more motivating. Speaking of friends I found out my best friend Nagisa will be representing Asahikawa next year. I know she will make a great representative and I can't wait to show her around Bloomington-Normal.



Anna (right) posing with a new friend.

Winter break in Japan is a lot longer than American winter break. I get most of the month off. I've spent time cooking with my host mom. We've made a variety of foods including tons of mochi, gyoza, and my mom's rum cake. On winter break I was invited to go the AFS Christmas party. At the party we played a bunch of games in Japanese. One of the games was a game I had played in warm ups in band so I didn't completely fail at that one, but when we played telephone in Japanese, I had a really hard time repeating the message so the message took a really long time. To my surprise, the other team also had trouble with that game, so we ended up winning. At the party we also did a gift exchange and ate tons of food and Christmas cake. There was a fondue fountain there and I ate lots of chocolate cover strawberries.

As you can see my days are long but filled with adventure making every step worth the journey.

Jr. High To Asahikawa by Sanae Ferrier

Four junior high students and I took an adventure to Asahikawa in June. Our adventure was challenging because of language and culture differences. But because of those challenges, our adventure was an unforgettable event. For me, it was great to see the adventurers' eyes beaming when they experienced new and interesting things; even when it was difficult to understand the differences between the cultures.

We hiked Asahidake (active volcano), which was still snow covered. A sky car took us from the base of the mountain to the beginning of our hike. It was a bit foggy that day, but the weather was warm. We were able to climb to a safe place on the mountain where we could see the volcanic steam vents. This was a first-time experience for many of us.

Then, we visited to Haboro Elementary School and interacted with the students who were curious to learn from Jr. High Students from America. Our students gave a presentation about the school life, American pop culture and history of Bloomington/Normal. They also attended an English class and Japanese Calligraphy class. The students ate lunch together and laughed together. By the



time we left, all of them had great smiles on their faces.

These young ambassadors also visited some interesting museums to learn the history of Asahikawa and culture. There were also opportunities to make artificial flower arrangements, weavings and wood crafts unique to the area.

There were many opportunities to sample the foods of Japan. The students made their own sushi, sampled rice balls and even had REAL ramen noodles (not the cup-of-ramen you find in the stores). The students could definitely tell the difference when eating the fresh noodles. Cup of ramen will never be the same.

Most importantly, we had a chance to meet wonderfully caring people throughout this trip. Host families, hosts and the Asahikawa Committee members who have a

long-time friendship with Bloomington/Normal made this trip memorable. They were willing to help us adapt to the customs and culture and laugh with us along the way. The host families we stayed with were patient, generous and kind. We look forward to staying in contact with them as our sister cities relationship grows.

Support the Junior High Exchange Program to Asahikawa

It is approximately \$2500 for a junior high student to participate in the summer exchange program, a two week visit to Asahikawa. Most of the cost is due to the expense of plane tickets. The trip includes transportation to and from Asahikawa, transportation throughout Japan, most meals, admittance into museums, activities, etc., and hotel stay during travel. The cost also covers several pre-trip orientation meetings and food tastings. The committee in Asahikawa organizes fun and educational activities for the students. They visit schools and serve as ambassadors of Bloomington-Normal. They stay with host families and get a sense of everyday life in Japan. This is a tremendous experience for the students. However, it is an expensive experience and we know cost prohibits some students from participating.

We are asking you to consider making a donation this year to off-set the cost of the junior trip. All donations will be used to reduce the out of pocket cost for the junior high student. Your donation may give a student the opportunity to experience a cultural they otherwise would not experience. In advance, thank you for your consideration.

Donations can be mailed to:

Japanese Sister Cities Committee
c/o Bob Clary
3211 Winchester Drive
Bloomington IL 61704



27 Lone Oak Ct.
Bloomington, IL 61705

Contact Us
Website: www.bnsistercities.org
Facebook: Bloomington Normal Asahikawa
Sister Cities Committee
Email: contactus@bnsistercities.org

Japanese Garden

Our Garden was blessed with early rains in the spring which helped the Miniature Cherry Tree (a 50th Anniversary gift from Asahikawa) bear fruit this year! The blossoms were stunning on every tree and flower. Everything that had been planted last year came back to life thanks to adequate rainfall. The Garden attracts many visitors off the Constitution Trail. They especially enjoy the shade of the Tea House (our 50th Anniversary commemoration). The Committee is responsible for maintaining the Garden. This year we spent a day removing pine needles from the rock garden. Next year we hope to add smaller rocks that can be replaced quickly. We also would like to up-date the sign to reflect the Sister Cities relationship which is now 51+ years old. We enjoy working in our Garden and we receive many compliments from people passing by.



Strategic Planning

This year the Committee engaged in strategic planning to focus our efforts and grow and develop the organization intentionally. We utilized Illinois Wesleyan University intern Kasia Tomaszynska to assist in the process. With her help, the Committee identified four priorities to focus our effort in 2014: public relations and marketing; committee membership; fundraising; Junior High Exchange Program to Asahikawa.