



Scott D. Weaver/The Examiner

Independence City Council Member Don Reimal passes out lapel pins to representatives of Independence's Japanese sister city, Higashimurayama. The guests were welcomed at the City Council meeting and at Glendale Elementary School.

Japanese guests get acquainted

By Rebecca Shelton
The Examiner

Dressed in blue "happy coats," students at Glendale Elementary School anxiously awaited their visitors from Japan — a 10-member delegation from Independence's sister city Higashimurayama. They were due to arrive any minute on Monday afternoon.

The 35 students belonged to the Japanese Club. And one of their sponsors, third grade teacher Sue Hammett, was giving last-minute instructions.

She tied a sash around the waist of one boy who would be the main character in a play. But first, he needed to refold the front of his happy coat. And Hammett reminded them all, "The only time you tie the left over the right is when they bury you, or cremate you."

Studying ancient Japanese customs was just a small part of the curriculum studied by the club this year. They also learned about Japanese culture, and the school and home lives of the children attending their sister

school Magurita.

Glendale has been a sister school since 1988. Since then, some 650 Japanese people have passed through.

The students also learned a few words of Japanese. This they showed off by singing "It's A Small World," and several other songs in Japanese, during which the 10 Japanese visitors could not help but join in.

"They are wonderful. Their Japanese is almost perfect," said Toshiharu Kobayashi. "We were surprised. Knowing each other is important."

After the singing, Avanti Dumas, 11, played the role of the mother in a Kabuki, or traditional Japanese drama. She painted her face white and wore a kimono.

She said the best part about the club was making new Japanese friends.

"I learned how to speak Japanese so that people who come here can understand you and we can understand them," she said.

Dumas said she joined the club to boost her chances of getting a scholarship in high school

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RACHEL MALLICOAT
Glendale Elementary School student

to visit Japan. But this year, she has also learned the art of origami, the art of paper folding, and the hardest thing — to count in Japanese. She discovered that Japanese people are similar to Americans in the way they dress and play sports, "But you don't get to sit in a chair when you eat dinner," she said.

Stacy Baze, 11, said she joined the club to learn more about the Japanese.

"I like their ceremonies," Baze said. After the children performed, the Japanese visitors demonstrated a simplified version of a tea ceremony. The children took off their shoes and

kneeled on a mat on the floor and then tried to follow the rituals such as turning the cup three times in the hands before taking three sips. Though, some of the children grimaced after tasting the sweet green tea.

Jessica Scott, 11, was in the club last year and stayed with it this year. Meeting the Japanese delegation gave her a chance to see and practice in real life what she had learned.

"I wanted to learn more about it. I learned to say a few things, like 'orgato,' " she said, which translated means "thank you."

And Rachel Mallicoat, 11, said she discovered that the Japanese have many similarities with Americans.

"They are the same as us. They have the same personalities as us," she said.

After dinner of pizza, strawberries and soft drinks, the delegation went to a City Council meeting to talk with council members about an exchange trip in 1998, marking the 20th anniversary of the sister city agreement.