

INDEPENDENCE -- HIGASHIMURAYAMA

Sister Cities Since 1978

A. How it got started:

In 1974 Mr. Hajimei Ishizu, a Japanese business man, came to Independence to establish contact with an Independence educator he had met in Japan. Unable to locate his party he sought help from the city officials who introduced him to Mrs. Lana White a well known native of Japan. During their search, Mrs. White gave Mr. Ishizu a complete tour of the city which included many points of interest to tourists (such as the President Truman home and Library Museum). Lana even invited Ishizu to stay at their home. The business man was so impressed by both the hospitality of the White family and the friendliness of Independence that when he returned to his home in Higashimurayama, Japan, he began a correspondence. The sister city relationship grew out of that friendship. In early January 1978 a delegation arrived from Japan with a charter which the two mayors(Richard King and Reiji Kumaki) signed on January 26, 1978, thereby establishing a wonderful friendship association between our two cities dedicated to promotion of mutual understanding, respect, and friendship through cultural, academic, economic and other exchanges on a people-to-people basis. Each city council appoints a commission of volunteers to carry out this program year after year. The commission consists of sixteen members who elect officers to serve for two year periods, (president, vice president, secretary/treasurer and historian).



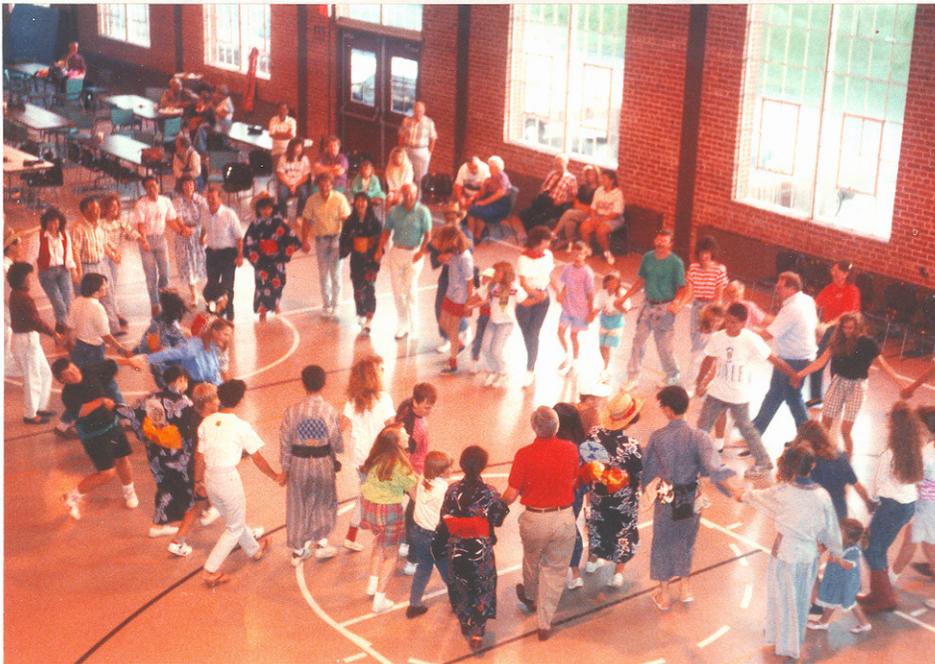
Mayors Reiji Kumaki of Higashimurayama and Richard King of Independence meet for the first time with Ms. Lana White, Interpreter, January 26, 1978.



First Japanese Delegation to visit Independence gets a taste of early American Dress, January 27, 1978.

B. The Student Exchange Program:

Each year, except in Anniversary Years, 10 students from Independence are chosen to be Student Ambassadors for a 3-week exchange and home stay with students of our sister city, Higashimurayama. Candidates must be good students, with high personal standards of good conduct and earn the recommendation of school officials. The students selected have about ten months to prepare for the trip by attending classes in Japanese culture, language, customs, traditions, foods etc. They must also provide about half of the cost of their visit. The commission provides the remainder of the funding plus all of the funding for one adult escort. More than 200 student ambassadors have successfully completed the program since its beginning. In return, 10 students from Higashimurayama, along with their escort, visit Independence in mid-summer for a three week exchange and home stay with families in our city. Many lasting family-style friendships have developed over the years due to these student exchanges.



Students join in early American dancing at Western Party at the Sermon Community Center in Independence, July 1991



Japanese students receive cowboy hats at Western party, July 1995



Japanese visit historic Ft. Osage, August 1994

C. The Adult Exchange Program:

Early in the program, the two cities agreed to include adult group exchanges to be held on anniversary years (5-year intervals). Adult groups would be limited to 40 members for a five day home stay, followed by an additional one or two weeks of travel for sightseeing in selected parts of the country. As a result, many of the exchanges developed deep, personal, family-like friendships. Consequently, many families were able to visit their counterparts in their sister city on special occasions. In the first 25 years, well over 200 family adult exchanges were accomplished, and their bonds of friendship continued to grow and expand.



Mr. Koyama introduces his Festival Wagon Group to the Independence Delegation. Delegates Bill and Joanne Shaw get a free ride! October 1980



Replica of Friendship Garden on float in Truman Centennial Parade, May 1984



Mayor Kumaki receives hand-carved Coy (Carp) from Dr. John Killip, Independence artist, which was presented to the Higashimurayama International Club, 1998



Mayor Kumaki and Chairman Hammett break ground for planting trees as a gift to the Higashimurayama International Friendship Club, 1988



Commemoration Plaque honoring the 15th Anniversary of a highly successful Sister City relationship with Higashimurayama, 1993



Japanese Delegation attends the annual Truman Public Service Award Ceremony honoring former President Gerald Ford in front of the Truman Presidential Library in Independence, 1988

D. Friendship Garden:

In 1984, the Higashimurayama Friendship Club presented Independence with a lovely Japanese Garden and provided eight gardeners to supervise its construction. With the help of the Independence Park Department, along with numerous individual and corporate gifts, the garden was built in five days at the southeast corner of the City Hall. In 1985, Mayor Ichikawa, Mayor Potts and a delegation of citizens from both cities dedicated the Garden to lasting friendship and enduring peace. Later, the City of Independence renamed a street near the City Hall in honor of our sister city, Higashimurayama Drive.



Higashimurayama Delegate Seiki and Independence City Council Member Millie Nesbitt turn the first earth to begin construction of the new Friendship Garden, June 1984



Japanese Gardeners building the Friendship Garden adjacent to the Independence City Hall, September 1984



Friendship Garden nine years after construction, June 1993



Mayor Ichikawa and Gardener Delegation in front of the street sign honoring our Sister City as Higashimurayama Drive, May 1988



Mr. Ohno (seated) leads Japanese Delegation in visit to Friendship Garden, April 1993

E. Cherry Blossom Festival:

In April 1983, the Japanese Sister City Commission initiated a one day festival highlighting Japanese arts, crafts and food. The event is held biannually at the Sermon Community Center. The Festival enables the public to meet students who have been in the exchange program and helps younger students learn details of the program. The festival also can be a useful tool for finding potential Student Ambassadors for the next year's exchange visit.

Proceeds from the festival go to exchange student scholarships.



Mary Hancock, President of the Ikebana Ho Shi Kai Club, demonstrates arranging in the Sogetsu School of Ikebana, April 203



Independence Ikebana Ho Sho Kai Members prepare examples of the Sogetsu School of flower arranging. They are from left to right; Cheryl Coffman Melva Lanigan, Loretta Hanson, Wanda Anderson and Nancy Volskay, April 2003



Dr. Tsubaki, University of Kansas Professor, teaches martial arts to Cherry Blossom Festival crowd, April 2003



Students present Taiko Drum performance for Cherry Blossom Festival audience April 2003



Glendale students perform in Japanese traditional theater art, April 2003

F. Sister City School:

During the Sister City's 10th anniversary, our Glendale Elementary School established a Sister School cultural exchange program with Megurita Elementary School in Higashimurayama. To further promote this relationship the school sponsored a Japan Culture Club as a part of the regular school activities. The objective is to provide opportunity for 4th and 5th graders to learn about Japan in an interesting manner. Among the cultural lessons are ikebana, origami, sushi tasting and tea ceremony. More recently they have added Taiko Drumming and acting in plays of Japanese children's short stories. The Japan Club has become an important step in the early training of our students for service as student ambassadors later when they reach high school age. The Glendale/Megurita elementary program has generated the exchange of many gifts of art work, such as wood block prints, dolls, quilts and clothing. The gifts are available for viewing in a special display cabinet in the school. During each sister city exchange, a delegation of students or adults pay a special visit to their sister school. At such times the host school provides welcome ceremonies along with traditional gifts and a display of their country's culture, such as singing, dancing, music or play acting.



Megurita students welcome 25th Anniversary Delegates, September 2014



Japan Club sings traditional Japanese songs to welcome the Higashimurayama Delegation, October 1988



Glendale students honoring Japanese Anniversary delegation with flags of both nations, May 1998



City Manager Larry Blick presents Independence City Flag to Principal of Sister School Megurita during 2004 adult visit to Higashimurayama



Delegation Member Bill Anderson and American student Bill Hamm receive an exuberant reception from Megurita students, June 1998

G. Special Anniversary Events:

During each five-year period, the two cities plan Special Anniversary Events which include an exchange of adult groups (20 to 40 members) with home stays for five to seven days. City officials provide special receptions for their guests and present numerous gifts, representing their particular cultures. Also, guided tours emphasizing historical and cultural events in the host city are provided.



25th Anniversary Japanese Delegation at the Hilton Hotel, Independence attending reception and banquet, October 2003. Front row members are (L to R) Mr. Ohno, Consul General Shibata, Mayor Hosobushi and Mr. Seiki.



Independence Sister City Commission Members celebrate the 25th Anniversary of our Sister City relationship with Higashimurayama, January 2003. Members (L to R) are Bill Anderson, Chairman Jana Waits, Major Hammett, Randy Vest, Lana White, Sharon Wilson, Gerald Hancock and Bill Shaw.



Independence Student Delegation Escorts for the exchange program through the years, January 2003. They are (L to R) back row: Ann Sunderland, Mary Ann Potter, Ron Milner, Kathy Vest and Terry Price; front row: Joann Wyman, Sue LaVota, Jeanne Hays, Nikki Kramer and Paul Atkins.



Lana White with public display of Japanese cultural memorabilia, January 2003



Professional Taiko Drummers perform at Higashimurayama's 25th Anniversary Celebration, September 2004



Mr. Ohno leads (4th from the Left) adult delegation in a dance to celebrate Higashimurayama's 20th Anniversary Visit to Independence, May 1998



Mayor Hosobushi presents Mayor Ron Stewart with gifts of Japanese lanterns at 25th Anniversary Banquet in Independence, October 2003