

August 2009

# Shinzen Tsuushin



## Friendship News

This is the inaugural edition of the twice yearly Newsletter for the Abilene-Omitama Sister City Committee. It is sponsored by the Abilene Sister City Committee and is intended to keep the Friends of the Sister City, delegates, former delegates, and other interested persons up to date on the relationship between our city and Omitama, Japan. In addition to news, announcements and updates, there will also be information of a more general nature relating to the culture and people of Japan, in particular of Omitama, as well as occasional reminiscences, and reports from members of the Sister City Committee and our delegates as they return from visits to Omitama. Questions and feed back may be made to the members of the Committee at the phone numbers or email addresses listed under "Contact Us."



**How it all began ...** The relationship between Abilene and Minori, Japan (later Omitama) dates to the sale of three dairy cows to a farmer from Minori by Harold and Kathryn Scanlon. That Japanese dairyman was Mitsuo Tonouchi, who was later elected as mayor of Minori.

Mr. Tonouchi, impressed by the kindness shown by the Scanlons and others in Abilene, heard about a program, started by President Dwight Eisenhower in 1956, called People to People, out of which the Sister Cities International Program grew. Mr. Tonouchi approached the then mayor of Abilene, Mr. Asling, about establishing a Sister City relationship between Abilene and Minori. Work was begun in 1984, and in 1988, the first delegation from Minori visited Abilene. In 1990 the first delegation from Abilene traveled to Minori, and since that time we have visited each others cities on an every other year basis. In 2001, the Sister City Committee became an official Abilene City Board. Since the beginning of exchange visits there have been only two “hiccups” - In 2003 the Minori visit was cancelled due to the SARS epidemic in Asia, and in 2009, Abilene’s visit was cancelled due to the H1N1 Flu pandemic.

**So, what happened to Minori?** On March 27, 2006, three Japanese communities—**Ogawa**, **Minori**, and **Tamari** were merged into a new city—Omitama. The name combines the initial characters from the names of each of the three traditional communities. In Kanji (the Japanese system of writing based on Chinese symbols) the “O” from Ogawa represents a little stream, the “Mi” of Minori is the character for beauty and the “Tama” of Tamari is a ball symbolizing prosperity.

Together they paint a word picture of a gentle stream flowing through a beautiful natural setting, forming a sphere of prosperity.

On October 3, 2006, a signing ceremony was held at the Eisenhower Library to establish our sister city relationship with the new formed city. Representing Omitama was Mayor Joichi Shimada (the former Mayor of Minori), Mr. Tsuneo Endo, and Mr. John Okajima. Representing Abilene was Mayor Devin Karraker, and the city commissioners Diane Miller, Judy Leyerzapf, John Zutavern, and Lynn Peterson.



#### Seal of the City of Omitama

The design incorporates the patterns that suggest the alphabet letters O, M, and T, representing the constituent parts of the city’s name.

The three buoyant lines express the energy and unity of the three traditional communities. The colors represent the white of opportunity, the green of nature and the blue of Lake Kasumigaura.

#### **Update on Abilene Delegation ...**

Out of an abundance of caution, the 2009 Abilene delegation trip to Omitama was cancelled. (We were not the only ones, by the way. The delegation from Kansas City to their Sister City of Kurashiki, Japan was also cancelled this year as well as many trips of Japanese school groups within Japan itself.) After negotiating with the Omitama Committee and Continental Airlines, arrangements have been made for our Abilene group to travel to Omitama in 2010. So the Abilene delegates will continue in their fundraising efforts, and now have extra time to learn a little more language and a little more about the customs and traditions in preparation for their visit next summer.

## Abilene Sister City Committee

Donna Reynolds, Chair  
Ron Rein, Vice-chair  
Jackie Bisnette, Treasurer  
Connie Rein, Secretary  
Corina Ryland  
Jerry Rankin  
Ann Strunk  
Dan Sexton  
Jim Price

Meetings of the Sister City Committee are held the fourth Tuesday of each month starting at 7:30 p.m. Meetings are held in the conference room of the Convention and Visitor's Bureau (use west entrance).



To contact us with questions, comments, for information or requests:

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785-263-4169

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785-263-7317

### CALL FOR REMINISCENCES AND

**MEMORIES:** If you are a recent or past delegate to Minori/Omitama, have hosted a visitor from our Sister City, or have been involved in building up our Sister City program and you have an interesting story, memory, anecdote or experience to share, we would really like to hear from you so that we might share your story through the pages of this Newsletter. Simply mail your memory to Jerry Rankin, 406 Hillside, Abilene, KS 67420 or email it to [jdrankin@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jdrankin@sbcglobal.net). Domo arigato gozaimasu.

**A Brief Overview of Japan** . . . Japan, an island country located off the coast of northeastern Asia in the Pacific Ocean, is a picturesque land covered with forests, hills, and mountains. Thousands of small streams flow down the mountainsides, and nestled among the volcanic peaks and rocky gorges are clear mountain lakes. There are about 67 active volcanoes. Mountains cover about 75% of the country.

There are about 127 million people living in Japan. Booming cities, mountain villages, and small farms found along the coastlines are all part of this densely populated country which is just smaller than the state of California.

The country itself is made up of four large islands and over 3,000 smaller ones. Tokyo is the capital and largest city. The four large islands are further divided into Prefectures (similar to states).

The climate is warm to moderate, similar to the weather we find along the eastern coast of the United States. The summers are usually hot and humid. Winters in the north can get so cold that the sea freezes. Occasional storms, typhoons, earthquakes, tremors, and tidal waves are all a part of the Japanese experience. The people call their country Nippon or Nihon, meaning the "source of the sun" or "land of the rising sun." One half of the arable land is planted in rice.

Japan is a thoroughly modern country—Western food, books, clothing, music, sports and entertainment are enjoyed— but at the same time rich in centuries old customs and traditions expressed in a culture of respect, politeness, love of beauty, appreciation of simplicity, and an enjoyment of nature.

Omitama, a city of 52,947, is 50 miles northeast of central Tokyo, in the geographic center of Ibaraki prefecture. It is 12.5 miles south of Mito, the prefectural capital, and 12.5 miles northeast of Tsukuba Science City. The land is flat and covered by the rich loam layer common to the greater Kantoplain. Agriculture plays an important part in Omitama. Also there are companies and various factories in the city. The southern part of Omitama reaches the shores of Lake Kasumigaura.

The incorporated land area of Omitama is 87.63 square miles. The JR Train Joban Line, Joban Expressway and Route 6 pass through the western half of the city, and the Kashima Tetsudo Train Line and Route 355 pass through the southern part. The Japan Air Self Defence Force Hyakuri Air Base is located in the eastern section of Omitama. Development plans for the city are bright thanks to new Route construction scheduled for the region and plans to provide commercial airport service at Hyakuri Air Base.



## Japan Club Of Abilene

The Japan Club of Abilene, hosted by the Sister City Committee and the Friends of Sister City, held its first meeting in September of 2008 with 28 youths

Grades 3 through High School in attendance. Meeting on the third Sunday of each month (with a couple of exceptions) attendance varied between 20 and 28 youths and adults. In addition to Japanese language lessons, led by Daniel and Kieko Sexton, members of the Club also learned a little Japanese cooking (sushi and Okonomiyaki (a kind of Japanese pancake) taught by Naho Nagai and Mao Meyer who visited from Manhattan. There were chopstick races, anime movies, origami, and in April members attended the Central Kansas Japan Festival held in the Student Union at K-state. It was a first good year. AND . . . . .

### Japan Club starts up again

**September 2009** ... For those who are able to attend, the Greater Kansas City Japan Festival will take place on Saturday, September 19th. This festival, held annually on the campus of Johnson County Community College, is a day long celebration of Japanese culture with workshops, displays, foods, and music. More information can be found at <http://kcjapanfestival.org>.

Beginning Sunday, September 20th in October we will resume our third Sunday of the month meetings at the Community Recreation Center from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. New foods, language instruction, new movies! More to learn and enjoy! See the last page of this newsletter for more information.



## Friends of Sister City

In 2001, the Sister City Committee became an official Abilene City Board. With this change and the need for an extended base of support, the **Friends of Sister City** organization was begun.

Its purpose is twofold: First, The Friends provide an avenue for those with an interest and love for the Japanese people and culture to learn more about Japan through the sharing of that interest with others. Second, at the same time, Friends help to enable the youth of our community to experience and explore something of the wider world by providing support in a variety of ways for the activities and programs of the Sister City Committee.

In addition to offering financial support through the payment of modest membership dues (\$5.00 individual or \$10.00 family/year), members of the Friends are encouraged to help our delegates in various fund raising efforts held in the years that Abilene travels to Omitama, are invited to help during meetings of the Japan Club, are welcomed at special events held when Abilene hosts delegates from Omitama, and, in the past, Friends have traveled to Omitama as adult sponsors of our Abilene delegation.

If you would like to know more about the Friends of Sister City, or would like to join this important support group, simply call Gwen Johnson at 263- 3118.

**ABILENE JAPAN CLUB**  
KICKS OFF THE NEW SEASON:  
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20 FROM 3:00 P.M.—5:00 P.M.  
AT THE COMMUNITY RECREATION CENTER.  
BUT, FIRST YOU ARE ENCOURAGED  
TO ATTEND

**2009**  
**GREATER KANSAS CITY**  
**JAPAN FESTIVAL**

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19  
10:00 A.M.—9:00 P.M.  
THE CARSON CENTER  
JOHNSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
12345 COLLEGE BLVD., OVERLAND PARK, KS

Workshops  
Food  
Performances  
Demonstrations  
Exhibits

Members of Japan Club, their family and friends are encouraged to attend this fun festival of all things Japanese. It is held in the Carson Center of Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, Kansas.

Cost:

Adults \$7.00

Students: \$4.00

Plus money for food and other incidentals.

For additional information, including a complete schedule of events,  
go to:

<http://kcjapanfestival.org/>