

FRIENDSHIP
NEWS

SHINZEN
TSUUSHIN

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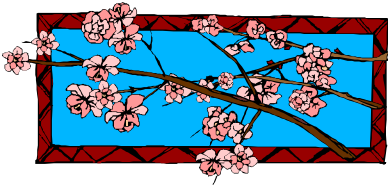


Now, today, I'll lose myself on a spring hill; If
evening falls, won't there be cherry blossoms to rest
under?

Sosei, c. 816-910 C.E. was a poet from the early Heian period. This poem, in the tanka form (thirty-one syllables, arranged in a pattern of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables) is from *From The Country of Eight Islands* translated and edited by Hiroaki Sato and Burton Watson. Columbia University

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While we are certainly glad for the arrival of Spring, in Japan the Vernal Equinox is especially

welcomed and is a national holiday (*Shunbun no hi*). It is the divide between the ending of winter cold and snow and the beginning of summer heat. Many Japanese visit their family tombs on this day in the middle of the week of *Higan* to pay their respects to their ancestors. People weed their family tombs, and leave flowers, incense and ohagi (sweet rice balls covered with red bean paste).

A quintessential sign of spring in Japan is the blooming of the Cherry trees. Beginning in Okinawa (the southern most part of Japan) and travelling up to Hokkaido (the northern most part) the progress of the cherry tree blossoming is followed closely. Beginning in early March the Japanese Weather Association publishes the annual Cherry Blossom Forecast (2010's forecast can be found at gojapan.about.com/library/special/bljapansakuraforecast2010).

Cherry blossom festivals and cherry blossom viewing parties (*hanami*) are among the most enjoyed and enjoyable social events in Japan.

Crowds of people - families, groups of friends, and groups from companies sit under the fully open cherry blossoms, usually on plastic tarps, and have a picnic celebration. The picnic fare consists of a wide variety of foods, snack foods, and sake (rice wine) or other drinks. The activities often include dancing and karaoke in addition to the cherry blossom viewing. In very popular places such as Ueno park and Aoyama Cemetery in Tokyo the competition for prime picnic spots is intense. Company groups and family members claim spots by arriving very early in the morning and sitting all day long until the real celebrations

beginning all day long to reserve space for the company celebration. (Not unlike the day of the Central Abilene Free Fair parade.)

In Japan, April is the beginning of the school year as well as the business financial year. Since the Heian Period (794-1185) flower-viewing parties were popular among the aristocracy. In the Azuchi Momoyama Period (1568-1600) the cherry blossom viewing spread out to the rest of the population.

はなめ is the hiragana spelling of hanami.

ha na mi

Cherry blossom viewing is easy: Simply enjoy the intensity of the many blossoms by looking at a single tree or a group of trees. From a distance, the trees appear as beautiful clouds, while the beauty of single blossoms can be enjoyed from a close distance.

In Japan cherry blossoms also symbolize clouds due to their nature of blooming *en masse*, besides being an enduring metaphor for the passing nature of life, an aspect of Japanese cultural tradition embodied in the concept of *mono no aware* (sensitivity or "ahh-ness" of things.) The transience of the blossoms, the extreme beauty and quick death, has often been associated with mortality; or this reason, cherry blossoms are richly symbolic, and have been utilized often in Japanese art, manga, anime and film.

A major Cherry Blossom festival is held in this country every year in Washington, D.C. To commemorate the 1912 gift of 3,000 flowering cherry trees (*sakura*) from the then major of Tokyo. Information on this years Festival can be found at www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org



Abilene Sister City Committee

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

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



To contact us

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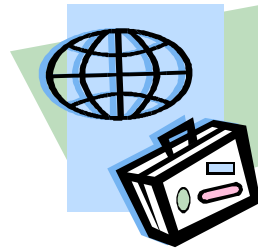
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CALL FOR REMINISCENCES AND

MEMORIES: If you are a recent or past delegate to Minori/Omitama, have hosted a visitor from our Sister City, have served as and English Teacher, 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.
Domo arigato gozaimasu.



Abilene Delegation News

After the disappointment of having the summer 2009 trip to Abilene's Sister City, Omitama, Japan canceled because of caution surrounding the H1N1 Flu epidemic, the delegates and adult sponsors are now gearing up to travel this July. The Abilene delegation leaves from the Wichita airport on July 19 and returns July 29. They will arrive and leave Japan via Narita airport.

Though five of the original delegation were unable to re-arrange their schedules, the majority of those slated to travel in '09 are set to travel this year. During the next several months they will be preparing by learning some basic Japanese and by studying about some of the customs of Japan. In addition, some of those traveling will be engaging in personal fund raising efforts.

Youths delegates are: Luke Wright, Jeffery Haaga, David Anderson, Brandon Rein, Cale Harrington, Sarah Zey, Laurel Kolacny, Alexandria Ryland, Colleen Harrington, Taylor McDowell, Michayla Rose, Shania Bartee, and Kylie Martin.

Adult sponsors are: Ron Rein, Mary Zey, Linda Kolacny, Corina Ryland, Neshia Bailey-Mason, and Donna Reynolds.

Group meetings are being held at the Convention and Visitors Center on 2nd street. The next delegates' meeting is scheduled for Sunday, April 25 beginning at 6:00 p.m.



Omitama City Flower—
Cosmos

Planted all around the city, they grow bright and strong, etymology (cosmos = universe, world harmony). An appropriate flower symbolizing peaceful development of the city of Omitama.

Assistant English Teacher (AET)

Program . . . For 13 years one of the quieter works of the Abilene-Omitama Sister City Committee has been the selection and recommendation to Omitama of an Assistant English Teacher (AET). This term, which is used by the Ministry of Education, local Boards of Education (BOEs) and schools in Japan refers to English language speakers who assist with the teaching of English in elementary, junior high, and high schools.

The AET from Abilene serves in the Omitama schools system under the contract and supervision of the Omitama Board of Education and works primarily in the elementary and junior high schools as assigned. While a bachelors degree is required, teaching experience and credentials, while helpful, are not. Our AET serves an initial one year period, with the possibility of extensions based upon the evaluation of the Omitama BOE and the AET's own experience and desire.

Since 1991, the inaugural year for our sending AETs to Omitama, the following persons have served:

1991-1992	Paula Stein Peterson
1992-1995	Robert (Bob) Johnson
1995-1998	Elizabeth Smalley-Shimabuku
1998-2000	Brian Hartman
2000-2002	Eric Anderson
2002-2003	No AET assigned
2003-2005	Ann Foltz
2005-2006	Jake Holt
2006-2007	Megan Barbur
2007-2008	Ty Martin
2008-2010	Jason Gibson (Please see Jason's recent report on p. 5)



In March the Sister Committee and the Abilene Japan Club say a sad good bye to the Sexton Family—

Daniel, Keiko, Timothy, Tabatha and Tryphena. Daniel and Keiko, who have served as Christian missionaries to Japan for a number of years, have returned to Japan to continue their work. They will be living in Haga-machi in Tochigi Prefecture which borders Ibaraki to the west. Daniel has shared his experience and expertise in the Japanese language customs as a member of the Sister City Committee and a sponsor of the Japan Club. His wife, Keiko, shared her gifts of Japanese cooking with the members of Japan Club, and their three children were an energetic addition to Japan Club meetings. They will be sorely missed and their return in four years or so eagerly awaited. Sayonara. Domo arigato gozaimashita. どもありがとうございました。

(Word has been received that Dan, Kieko and the children have arrived safely and are settling in nicely.)



News from Omitama

On March 27 the people of Omitama gathered at the Ogawa Cultural Center Ogawa to celebrate **Omitama Citizen's Day**. This is a day to recall the history of the homeland, to celebrate love and understanding for the hometown of Omitama, and to foster a sense of unity as a people proud to be citizens dedicated to help build a richer and more attractive Omitama. 2010 is the fourth anniversary of the founding of Omitama.

April 11 will be election day for a new Mayor of Omitama. We wish all the best to the citizens of our Sister City on this important occasion.



Japan Club of Abilene

The last regular meeting of the Japan Club was held Sunday, March 28 beginning at 3:00 p.m. Because of a schedule conflict at the Community Center, the club met the fourth instead of the third Sunday.

This meeting included the opportunity for those present to experience writing haiku, a Japanese form of poetry.

We have had another good year and we thank all who took part in the club activities. We will not meet in April, but you are encouraged to attend the Central Kansas Japan Festival held in the Student Union at Kansas State University on Saturday, April 17.

See you again in September! Ja matta ne. じゃまたね。

From our AET—Jason Gibson

Greetings from Omitama! Things are going well here as the school year comes to a close at the end of March. Spring is on the way and the kids are pretty excited about it. The days are getting longer, the weather warmer, and the teachers busier. I'll be sad to see the 3rd graders go, but I'm proud of what they've been able to do and I know that they'll go on to achieve great things in High School.

As far as my job goes, things seem likely to change a bit in the coming year. Since the government changed the curriculum to have English be mandatory from 5th grade, I no longer teach in elementary school. But I've been spending a morning or two per month at the local kindergarten, and that seems to be continuing (and possibly becoming more frequent) into next school year. The officials at the city office here in Omitama have also expressed a desire for more cultural exchange, so I'll be writing a monthly column for their city newsletter and taking a field trip or two per month to visit some local points of interest. Exciting times seem in store!

The officials here are also really looking forward to having delegates from our Sister City program visit this summer. Planning is under way to make it the best visit that it can be. And it will sure be nice to talk to some people from home, I must say!

That's about all the news from Omitama for the time being. Hope that winter ends soon and spring is nice and warm for you all!

Upcoming Events . . .

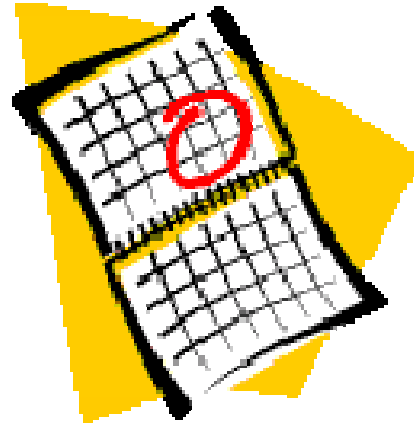
April 8: A Lecture on Japanese Gardens Worldwide at Kansas City's Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Date & Time: Thursday, April 8, 6:00 - 7:00 PM

Karesansui garden at Tofuku-ji in Kyoto

Place: Atkins Auditorium
The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art
4525 Oak Street
Kansas City, Missouri 64111

FREE! (tickets required)



April 17: Central Kansas Japanese Festival

Date & Time: Saturday, April 11, doors open at 11:00 AM
First activity: Bon-odori (Bon dance)

Place: Student Union @ Kansas State University
Manhattan, Kansas

Admission is free. Activities run throughout the day.

Upcoming Holidays—Golden Week

The end of April through around May 5th is called "Golden Week" in Japan since there are many Japanese National Holidays during this period. Many Japanese offices close for about a week to 10 days, depending on the calendar. People take a vacation and travel around the country or abroad, so tourist attractions in Japan are very crowded during Golden Week. Also, airports and train stations in Japan are overflowing with people. It is hard to get reservations for accommodations and transportation during Golden Week.

The first national holiday during Golden Week is April 29, which was the birthday of the former emperor Showa. Now, this day is called showa-no-hi (Showa Day). The second holiday is kenpou-kinen-bi (Constitution Memorial Day), May 3. The new Japanese constitution was put into effect on May 3, 1947. Then, May 4 is called midori-no-hi (Greenery Day) during which appreciation for nature is expressed..

The last holiday during Golden Week is kodomono-hi (Children's Day) on May 5th. On this day, we pray for the healthy growth of children. Children's Day is also called tangono-sekku. It's Japanese boy's festival and is traditionally the day to celebrate and pray for the health of boys. Japanese families with boys hang up carp streamers (koinobori) outside because carps are believed to symbolize successes in children's lives. Also, samurai dolls called gogatsu ningyo are displayed in their houses.