

President's Message

Daryl Schuster



CLEARWATER, FLORIDA - NAGANO, JAPAN

Clearwater Sister Cities, Inc.

Greetings, the important news is that we had a successful junior high school exchange with 12 students and three adults from Nagano in October!

Please read the articles in the newsletter submitted by five host families. Their enthusiasm is really contagious and I believe it is a strong testimony to encourage you to apply to be a host family. My two teenagers have been requesting a Nagano teenager, though I am reluctant to give up the principal – but, we are willing to share him.

CSCI is ready to join the 21st century and has launched a **Facebook** account. Although I am not a fan, I understand and appreciate that social networking is extremely popular and is a great basis for maintaining tight social connections. There is also the likelihood of Nagano friends participating and cementing stronger relationships and ties. **Billi Taggart** has taken the lead on this activity,



and, once we have 25 friends, it will receive its own web page.

The CSCI Board has begun meeting at Clearwater High School with our meeting in November. The Board believed it was important to meet in the city proper and thanks Pinellas County schools for accommodating us.

I attended the Clearwater Sister Cities Advisory Board meeting on Thursday, October 27th. The application for the high school exchange was distributed for evaluation and feedback, along with increasing the awareness of the program in the community.

Linda Damsky, our representative from Pinellas County Schools, shared the excitement when *Safety Harbor* and *Palm Harbor Middle Schools* played host to the Nagano students and adults for their day-long visit.

Felicia Leonard, administrative manager for Pinellas County Parks and Recreation Department, commented that these are good opportunities to encourage families to host Nagano guests and build the community awareness that the program continually needs to stay

healthy.

I have contacted **David Stoner**, reference librarian, at the *Clearwater Main Library*, and it looks like we will have some shelf space to place some of the print materials that the City of Nagano and our homestays have shared with us. I am excited about having these resources available to the community.

The board investigated an opportunity to apply for a grant through the *Florida Humanities Council*. The idea of a Japanese film festival with a panel discussion appears to be the best prospect with the greatest public appeal. We welcome any suggestions from members, especially in the planning and development stages, and, of course, volunteering. The grant is for \$2000.00, and I feel confident that **Dr. Joseph Murphy**, Asian Studies professor at the *University of Florida*, would consider attending.

Host Families Share

Tomoya Yamaguchi, host Shanti Robinson, and Ikumi Tazaki meet at the airport and immediately “click”.



The Robinson Family

October 17th-21st, 2011 was our first experience as a host family. Two Japanese high school students, **Ikumi “Iku” Tazaki** and **Tomoya “Guchi” Yamaguchi**, came to stay with us. It was great! We only wish they had been able to stay longer! Because it was such a short trip, we wanted to share as much as possible with them in the brief time we had together.

At first we were all a little anxious, even though we had communicated by email before they arrived. The girls used Google Translate to communicate with us in English, but, in person, we had to interact through a combination of a little Japanese, a little English, mime, and a tremendous amount of shared good intentions. We found that doing activities together was easier to understand than trying to talk with language.

We had fun together doing things like playing basketball, painting each other’s fingernails, cooking together, and walking the dogs. We went places like the *Sponge Docks* in Tarpon Springs, *Anderson Park* to see Lake Tarpon, and *Howard Park Beach* at sunset – which was breathtaking even on a cloudy

night.

Of all the places we went, **Iku** and **Guchi** seemed to enjoy our trip to *Publix* the most. We went shopping for food to cook dinner, and Iku and Guchi were wide-eyed. They said everything was so “BIG”! Even American bananas are big! It made good memories for all of us. We’re already looking forward to hosting students again.

The Grutchfields

As we waited for the Nagano visitors to arrive at the airport, our entire family was a bit nervous about hosting **Ryo Koyama**, age 14. Knowing there would be some challenges communicating, we wondered how we would make sure Ryo enjoyed his visit to Clearwater and our home. The parents in our family wanted to make sure Ryo felt safe, comfortable and got enough to eat. The kids in our family also wanted Ryo to have fun and enjoyed hanging out with us.



Logan and Ali with Ryo Koyama playing putt-putt golf.

We need not have worried, and all agreed that Ryo’s visit to our home was a great experience for all of us. Sure, there were some challenges communicating, but they were easily overcome by speaking a bit more clearly, using a hand gesture, or enlisting help from Google’s translation application. A visit to the grocery store let us easily resolve our worries about making sure Ryo was well fed. Just like the **Grutchfield** kids, Ryo enjoyed donuts, bacon and juice for breakfast - with Oreo ice cream for a treat.

Ryo, Logan and **Ali** all enjoyed playing the Wii and learned that Wii Sports in Japan is a bit different than the America version. As the group played, the cheers and laughing from Ryo, Logan and Ali didn’t need translation – clearly the group was having fun. The three enjoyed playing mini golf and basketball, feeding baby alligators and visiting a local ice cream shop. Ryo was really well behaved and super courteous.

It was great to see that, despite living across the globe, Ryo was a lot like our American friends. More importantly, Ryo’s visit reminded us that, even with 7 billion other people on the planet, on an individual basis we are all more alike than different.

The Salm Family Letter

We were unexpectedly asked to be a host family for the Sister Cities of Clearwater Exchange program from some friends of ours. We had never heard of the program prior to being asked to be a host family. What we did know was that the family who asked us had had the wonderful

Their Experiences

privilege of sending their daughter over to Japan a few years back. After discussing the opportunity, we, as a family, embraced the idea. We submitted our application, were approved, and the next thing we knew we were at the Long Center getting our itinerary for the week. We were to host a 15 year boy from Nagano, Japan! We met as a group at the Tampa International Airport and waited for the arrival of our new Japanese friends!

The anticipation of it all was exciting for everyone involved. We had so many questions. Does our host Japanese student, **Fumito**, speak any English? We definitely don't speak Japanese. How will we communicate? What does he want to do? What should we do with him? Although we had a tentative plan, would that make him happy? As it turned out, it was a wonderful experience.

Although he didn't speak much English, we were able to communicate and get our thoughts across to each other. We had a great time! We took Fumito to everything that we would have done that week in our routine of things and then some. It was an action packed week introducing Fumito to everything we could think of, but not overwhelm him or exhaust him. We laughed, we played games,

we ate, we shared pictures, family stories and taught each other about our cultures. It was an experience that I would recommend to everyone.

Opening our home and our hearts to our new Japanese friends was one of the best things we have done as a family. It taught us how to be understanding and respectful of another culture. The friendship that was created between our children and our Japanese friends is priceless and we hope it will continue on for years to come.

Luke, age 12, will remember his *"...amazing experience with unforgettable memories."*

Fourteen year old **Stephanie** shared that she *"...enjoyed making new friends from another country."*

Parents **Sue & Brian** feel that hosting Fumito *"...was an honor."*

Emily Spaulding on Her Home Stay Visitor

When my family and I first decided to host a student, I never expected a friendship like the one I have with my visiting student, **Reika**.

Although we corresponded for many months, there was nothing quite like our first meeting at

Tampa International Airport. Although we had little more than our imaginations to picture each other, I could identify Reika the moment I saw her, and it was clear she knew me. This must summarize the goal of the Sister Cities program: *To maintain a connection that is even greater than the deep cultures and activities exchanged.*

I already eagerly anticipated my June 2012 trip to Japan, and now I am even more prepared and excited than before. Now that I have hosted Reika, I cannot wait to make the experience full circle.

On behalf of everyone who has experienced the power of the program, I would like to extend a huge thank you to the people who continue to make Sister Cities possible. The program provided an opportunity for me to become internationally and completely tolerant and understanding.

Conner Bright's Home Stay Experience

Having an exchange student was a truly great experience. I was so excited to finally meet **Sotaro** or Sota on that night in October, but a bit nervous too. When the day finally came, my room was all ready for our guest to stay. I had a volleyball game that night so I couldn't actually go to get him from the airport but, he was there right when I got home.

From the beginning I knew that it might be a challenge to communicate with Sota. After finding a program on Google and using his translator, we figured it



Host families greet their Japanese guests and pose with them for the traditional picture at Tampa International Airport.

Host Stories

out. He seemed to really like American food, so, on the first night we took him to *Steak n' Shake* and he really liked his cheeseburger and chocolate milkshake. My dad cooked steak because he wanted to try it; and he really liked that too. Sota ate everything we put in front of him. One evening he cooked us dinner, which was cool. He brought everything from Japan.

On Wednesday I got to take Sota to Safety Harbor Middle, where he was a HUGE hit. All the Safety Harbor students wanted autographs and to hugs exchange students. There was a constant mob around them all day. Even on the bus ride home, people were all around him! He really liked the bus because it was different to him. Overall, I absolutely loved having a Japanese student stay with me and I hope we will get another one soon.

Friend Us!



Facebook isn't just for kids! **Billi Taggart**, our page administrator, designed a wonderful

page where we can upload pictures and "Friend" our Japanese visitors as well as communicate with our members here. We can upload pictures of our trips and share the excitement of our homestays and our travels. Cyberspace, once again, removes the space between people and puts us in immediate personal contact.

In order to qualify for a URL (separate page address) we need 25 people to "Like" us on our site. So, please help us reach this goal quickly by logging on to <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Clearwater-Sister-Cities-Inc/204441592911279> and clicking "Like".

If you have pictures and/or information from the visitation of dignitaries from Nagano in 2010 and/or our last member's party, please send them to billitaggart@aol.com. Photos should be sent as downloads, not embedded in the text for easier uploading. We are also looking for photos from last year's member party, the 50 year celebrations in Nagano and Clearwater, and any other events that you wish to share. Billi welcomes administrative

Host Family Help

Our greatest obstacle to making a smooth exchange is finding suitable host families. **Sister Cities** is compiling a list of families willing to host either students or adults.

Depending upon the exchange arrangement, hosting could be as short as a few days or as long as two weeks. Host families are expected to make arrangements for their guest to be dropped off and picked up according to a preplanned schedule. This seems to be the greatest challenge for our families, so if you have contemplated hosting a student or adult, please allow us to see *how we may assist you*. Many times a student may attend the same school as your child. Don't forget your neighbors. You may be surprised to discover that they are either willing to help with transportation or interested in becoming a host family themselves.



Please consider exploring this opportunity and sharing our need with others. For additional information please contact **Felicia Leonard** at 562-4852 .

International Bazaar

Sister Cities International Bazaar is scheduled for the Spring. We will offer a wide range of international items at great prices. Last year's proceeds were donated to help victims of the disaster in Japan.

Please help us gather saleable items from other countries to insure that this bazaar is a success. It takes everyone working together to make an event successful.



assistance, so if you are interested, please let her know and she will add you. However, you must have a Facebook page for this to happen.

Please help us develop a list of potential host families for both students and adults.

Our Japanese guests take time out for a picture at Palm Harbor Middle School where a huge sun proclaims that Florida is the “Sunshine State”.



*Palm Harbor Middle School principal **Victoria Hawkins** escorts principal **Masaru Shimada** on a tour of the campus.*



*Clearwater mayor **Frank Hibbard** and **Nina Maran** join our guests, homestay families, and others at Countryside Recreation Center for our traditional Sayonara party.*

***Mr. Shimada** joined students from the Palm Harbor Middle School Rocket Club and its advisor **John Mackiewicz** for a demonstration of their latest project.*



Our Japanese visitors always devise a wonderful performance for our Sayonara Parties. Students here added to the festivity by dressing in their Happi coats.

Clearwater Sister Cities, Inc.

Annual Membership Social

Sunday, January 29, 2012

1:30 PM - 5:00 PM

CABANA CLUB

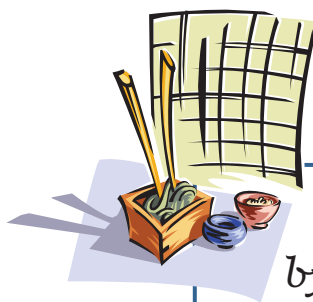
1582 Gulf Boulevard
Sand Key

Party will be on the patio outdoors, weather permitting.

Casual Dress

This is your party,
DO NOT BRING ANYTHING
except

a friend



R.S.V.P

by Wednesday, January 25, 2012

chays1@tampabay.rr.com

Guests are requested to park in the unmarked spaces in front of the building.

CLEARWATER SISTER CITIES, Inc.

Membership or Renewal Application

Dear Members of Clearwater Sister Cities, Inc. and those who receive our newsletter,
Clearwater Sister Cities, Inc. wishes everyone a happy and healthy **2012** New Year.

This is our annual new membership drive and renewal time. We have wonderful quarterly newsletters emailed to each member and many activities. Through Sister Cities, many students have the opportunity to visit our sister city, Nagano, Japan, to experience a homestay and travel through Japan with their chaperones. A big thank you to the members who hosted our Japanese teachers and students from Nagano; you gave them a wonderful homestay and American experience. Your contributions and membership fees help us attain all of these events.

We are a 501(c)3 Corporation so your contributions are tax deductible.

The Board of Directors has maintained the membership dues. It's easy to join or renew your support of our program and the organization. Just fill in the form below and return with your check made out to "Clearwater Sister Cities, Inc". Renewals, please update your information so we may continue to keep you informed of all our Sister Cities activities.

We look forward to seeing you at the **Membership Gathering** on Sunday, January 29th - 1:30 to 5 pm.

Thank you, **Candy Hays** - Membership Chair

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

Name(s): _____ Home Phone: _____

ADDRESS: _____ Fax _____

CITY: _____ ZIP _____ Business Phone: _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____

Please consider hosting a Japanese exchange guest. Yes

MEMBERSHIP OPTIONS: (Check One)

\$15 Individual (1 year)

\$25 Family (1 year)

\$150 Lifetime (Individual)

\$250 Corporate (1 year)

Please make checks payable to: "**Clearwater Sister Cities, Inc.**"

MAIL TO: **Candy Hays, Treasurer CSCI**
2664 Augusta Drive North
Clearwater, FL 33761

Dues are payable January 1st of each year