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Our Programs



Youth & Adult Exchanges



Art Exchanges



Marathon Exchanges

BSCO works to promote understanding, prosperity and goodwill through the exchange of education, commerce, and culture.

Newly-Elected Board President, Nora Smith



Please email bloomingtonsistercity@gmail.com to make a donation to support BSCO programs.

Calendar of Events

Obon Festival

Sunday, August 20

Twin Cities Marathon (Japanese Delegation)

Sunday, October 1

BSCO Board Meetings

- Tuesday, July 11
- Tuesday, August 1
- Monday, September 11
- Tuesday, October 3
- Tuesday, November 14
- Tuesday, December 5

BSCO Executive Meetings

- Tuesday, July 25
- Tuesday, August 15
- Tuesday, September 19
- Tuesday, October 17
- Tuesday, November 28
- Tuesday, December 19

Board Members

- Ben Jourdan, *Student Representative*
- Dave Murphy, *Marathon Coordinator*
- Billy Secord
- TJ Souphaphone
- Luminita Vollmer, *Treasurer*
- Kyle Wagner, *Vice President*
- Nora Smith, *President*

Japanese Word of the Newsletter: 祭り **Matsuri** (*mah-tsu-ree*): **n. Festival**
(まつり)

Perspectives: Senshu Marathon Runner, Elizabeth Plasynski



My name is Elizabeth Plasynski and this past February, I was honored to represent the BSCO and to travel to Izumi City, Japan to run in the Senshu International City Marathon. From the moment fellow-runner Derek and I arrived in Japan, our hosts and city guides were beyond amazing. I was welcomed into the home of Machiko and Kazuhito Hori and their two children, Natsume and Hidaka. Not only was this an amazing opportunity to connect with a family in Izumi, I highly enjoyed the family meals and seeing how a family in Izumi lives. I remain in touch with my host family and hope one day we will get to see each other again!

Our itinerary was very full and full of a variety of amazing experiences. We were taken on a tour of Izumi City, visited the Kuzunoha shrine, Satake Glass factory and the Kuboso Memorial Museum of Art. One of the most memorable parts of the trip was visiting Komyodai-kita Elementary School and getting to meet Ms. Keiko Furuie's fourth grade class. I am a fourth grade teacher myself and my students and I enjoyed exchanging emails and learning about Komyodai-kita Elementary both before and after my trip. I was beyond impressed with how the students served each other lunch and kept the school clean. Watching the students learning English was a very fun experience!

I was fortunate enough to extend my time in Japan for a week after the marathon. I traveled to Nara, Japan with my host family and then on to Kyoto and Tokyo. I immensely enjoyed every part of my trip. I am so grateful to have had this once in a lifetime experience. In addition to my own personal growth from this trip, the students in my class had a tremendous time learning more about the culture and people of Japan. In addition to communicating with Ms. Furuie's class, my students learned about time, money and distance conversions in Japan.

We read several books and articles on Japan and the students loved learning about the culture, history and famous places in Japan. I was able to post updates during my trip to help make my students a part of the experience. They also loved sampling some Japanese snacks I brought back and seeing photos from my trip. From this experience, many students in my class are now more interested in traveling the world (especially to Japan) and in running. I truly can't say enough about how much this trip benefitted my students and I. I am so thankful to the BSCO and the city of Izumi for making this possible! In one word, the experience was unforgettable!



Elizabeth with Natsume and Hidaka Hori.



Elizabeth with her host family, the Horis.

“In addition to my own personal growth from this trip, the students in my class had a tremendous time learning more about the culture and people of Japan.” -Elizabeth Plasynski

Perspectives: Senshu Marathon Runner, Derek Landseidel

In the weeks leading up to the trip, I was met with shock and awe:

“You’re going to Japan for what?” They would ask.

“Well, I’m going to run a marathon through a sister city exchange program.”

The rest of the conversation was usually the other person telling me how amazing that sounded and how lucky I was for being able to take part in such a great tradition; I definitely feel like one of the lucky ones for getting this opportunity. Of the many memories I have, I decided to share just a few.

During my visit to Komyodai-Kita Elementary school, I saw kids turn their classroom into a lunchroom - with placemats and everything - while other classmates retrieved their lunch for the day. Students served each other, respectfully came back for seconds if they wanted, and cleaned up their mess when they were done. Not only did they clean their mess in their classroom, the entire student body devotes part of their day to cleaning the entire school. I have rarely witnessed such a dedication to community well being in my life. This sense of community and respect for surroundings was something that I noticed throughout the city. As a teacher, I felt really proud to see the teachers and school workers teaching such a great lesson in Japanese schools.

In addition to our school visit, we had the opportunity to tour Satake Glass Factory. I wasn’t sure what exactly we would do there, but from the moment I entered the factory I was fascinated by the precision, care, and hard work of the people that I saw. I know the precision it requires, because I tried to make the glass beads for which they are so renowned and I failed pretty miserably. I suppose I had a few decent and semi-spherical glass beads at the end of the tour, but these people make dragons, boats, and flowers by melting and manipulating glass. It’s amazing! One of my most prized possessions and mementos from Japan comes from Satake Glass Factory, my Daruma Doll. I learned there that this doll is for luck and perseverance, something I would later need while finishing my marathon.

I must finally comment on the people of Izumi that made this trip both possible and beautiful. So many people worked tirelessly to make sure that two non-Japanese speaking Americans had a successful and unforgettable trip to their city and they accomplished that goal. The Mizokawas, my host family, showed compassion for a complete stranger and came to see me after my marathon, my parent’s host family, the Fujiwaras, was right at the finish line cheering Liz and I on, Mayor Tsuji for his gift and kind words, the interpreters for all their help, guidance, and laughs, and all the people in the Sister City Organization who never ceased to impress me with all their attention to detail and caring. It will be these faces and actions that I truly remember in the years to come.



Oh yeah, and I also ran a marathon. Sore calves, blistering toes, and dehydration; that was what coursed through my mind as I was reaching the apex of the notorious Monster Bridge of the Senshu Marathon. While I ran with my new Australian running mate, I mustered up all my strength to finish the race. We talked about, what else, politics and current events. It was a helpful conversation to take my mind off the aforementioned ailes. Moments later, I heard a familiar voice behind me. Liz, my counterpart and fellow teacher, had caught up to me and was cruising along seemingly as though she hadn’t even been running 25 miles before I saw her. I decided to take my mind off any nagging muscles and finish with her. It was a beautiful thing to accomplish together and I feel so fortunate to have been a part of such an amazing program.



Half of the Mizokawas, Hiroko and Yasuaki, with Derek after the marathon.

“So many people worked tirelessly to make sure that two non-Japanese speaking Americans had a successful and unforgettable trip to their city and they accomplished that goal.” - Derek Landseidel

Perspectives: 2017 Bloomington Delegate, Felix Hastings

The Bloomington Delegation in front of Osaka Castle



On the way to Japan, I was incredibly nervous. Not only was it my first trip without my family, we were heading halfway across the world, to somewhere I didn't understand the language and didn't know anyone. I hardly even knew the people I was going on the trip with.

And when I got there, I was going off to stay with a family I'd never met before, in their own home. I was more nervous than I'd ever been, and I'm not exaggerating. Still, somehow, through that anxiety, I still managed to try to be positive. It was a whole new situation, and while that was scary, it was also exciting.

Most aspects of going to Japan that I was afraid of were just as scary as they were things I was looking forward to. The key example being staying with a host family. This was what I was most worried about- what if they barely spoke any English? What if they just didn't like me?

L to R: Felix, Aidan, Skylar, Clara, Umamah, and Natsumi.



But at the same time, it was what I was most looking forward to about the trip. I've always hated feeling like a tourist- I'd rather just experience a culture like those who live in it would, rather than marveling at it from the outside. I was definitely looking forward to living the way a normal Japanese family would for a few weeks, and to see how it was different than the way I live. My host family was also different than mine in ways other than cultural. It would be new and different to me to have two little brothers, while I only have a younger sister.

I was also afraid of the food, being quite the picky eater, but I was also excited to push myself to try new things. And what almost anyone might be afraid of was the language barrier. Still, I was hopeful that the experience would help me learn a little more Japanese, or at least how to navigate in places where I don't speak the language. While I was trying to be optimistic, I didn't exactly expect all of these things to really happen as I wanted. At most, I was realistically expecting to come home with a little more knowledge and some cool souvenirs.

I couldn't have been more wrong. Only a few days into the trip, it had already exceeded all of my expectations. Not only did I manage to find friends in our

delegation, but my host family had already become a second family to me. My host parents treated me like their own child throughout my whole stay, and honestly I'd never eaten better in my life. My host mom was an amazing cook, and I tried so many things I'd never eaten before, even things like octopus. I found myself excited to try new foods every day, when it had been a thing I dreaded only a week or two before.

I also learned way more Japanese than I ever imagined I would, enough to understand pretty basic questions and answers in Japanese, which was much more than I had come to Japan knowing. Probably one of my best teachers was my 3 year old host brother, who didn't quite understand language barriers enough to stop constantly talking to me in Japanese. I learned as much from him and his family as he did from me, and it was fun to watch us both learn together.

All in all, my expectations for the trip totally shattered, but in a better way than I could have ever imagined. By the end of the trip, I couldn't believe all the things I'd seen, done, tasted, and experienced. I still can't quite fathom how great the entire trip was. It was better than any of the trips I've ever went on, and I don't think I'll ever, ever forget my experience there or what all the people I met in Izumi did for me.

“ Only a few days into the trip, it had already exceeded all of my expectations. Not only did I manage to find friends in our delegation, but my host family had already become a second family to me. ” - Felix Hastings

Perspectives: 2017 Bloomington Delegates

“While at times there was awkwardness and uncertainty of the trip, overall it was better than I expected and I’m forever changed by it”
- Brad Lamberson



“I plan to visit Japan again someday and keep traveling and expanding my perspective thanks to this trip.”
- Aaliyah Young

“This trip really helped me understand how important it is to learn about other countries and cultures”
- Clara Coyle

“This trip was the best trip I have ever been on and it will forever be a great memory for me to look back on.”
- Matthew Gasser



“Some of the things I enjoyed most on the trip were seeing Mt. Koya, going to Namba, making the magatama, and spending time with my host family.”
- Skylar Volden



“Something I didn’t expect would be such a memorable part of the trip for me turned out to be the beauty of the landscape and architecture in the places we visited.”
- Umaimah Ahmed

Bloomington Sister City Organization

5123 W. 98th Street #199

Bloomington, MN 55437

Non-profit 501(c)3 Corporation

BloomingtonSisterCity@gmail.com

www.bloomington-izumi.org

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