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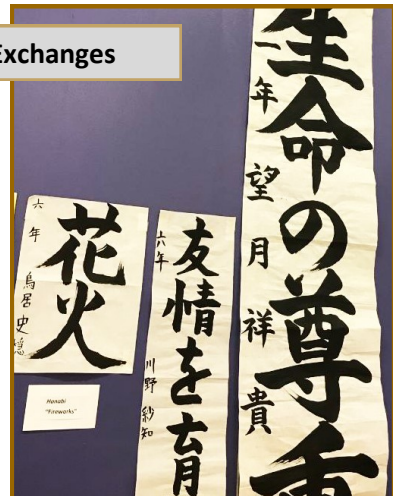
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Art Exchanges



Youth & Adult Exchanges

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



Marathon Exchanges



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

Board Members

- Nora Smith
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Upcoming Events

Student Delegation from Izumi City

August 8-21, 2018

25th Anniversary Celebration

Thursday, August 16, 2018

Obon Festival

Sunday, August 19, 2018

Twin Cities Marathon (Japanese Delegation)

Sunday, October 7, 2018

Japanese Word of the
Newsletter

(いきがい)

Ikigai 生き甲斐 - One's reason for being.
(EE-KEE-GUY)

Perspectives: Senshu Marathon Runner, Jenna Mitchler

Jenna and her partner, Andrew after the Senshu Marathon.



“What do you eat for breakfast?” Mitsue, my amazingly welcoming host, asked me. “I usually eat cereal and sometimes I have eggs and toast,” I responded, “but I’m happy to eat anything, really.” From the first morning I was in Izumi, Japan, to the end of my stay in the country, I seemed to have infinite opportunities to experience things that were other than “normal” for me. Fish was a staple at each meal. Miso soup was nutrition for recovery after the marathon. Being aware of each moment, and one’s place within it, was a way

I’ve often heard it said that experiencing new things helps us to grow. Through participating in the Bloomington Sister Cities Organization marathon exchange, I was challenged as a runner, as a Minnesotan, and as a representative of Bloomington in way that changed my life.

One of the highlights of the trip was visiting Tomiaki Junior High school where Dustin, our travel companions, and I participated in physical education classes and shared lunch with the students. The students’ courage and effort to speak English with us was incredibly admirable and their excitement to meet new people was energizing. We also toured shrines, including the Kusunoha Inari Shrine, and temples, and had dinner with several city officials who were eager to learn about Bloomington and share about Izumi. The Izumi sister cities organizers also planned a trip that included a tour of Kyoto, a city with rich with natural beauty, amazing food, and amazing historical sites.



Group photo at the Senshu Marathon

Truly, intercultural exchange provides participants opportunities to engage in the world in a more mindful and purposeful way by stepping outside of daily routines and contemplating what is “normal.” Bloomington Sister Cities Organization generously allowed Dustin and I that opportunity and has colored the way I see both Japanese and American culture in a way that, likely, no other experience could.

I’m incredibly honored and grateful to have been able to participate in this exchange program and look forward to bringing what I’ve learned back to Bloomington.



Perspectives: Senshu Marathon Runner, Dustin Harford

The four of us arrived sleep deprived at the Kansai International Airport looking up at signs to try and find out where we should be going. Luckily, Jenna, my fellow sister city runner, was looking for people rather than signs. She noticed Ayumi and Shigi in the waiting area. As they approached, they pulled out a large paper banner, and Ayumi had her work camera ready, which she would carry around her neck for the duration of our visit. Ayumi represents IIEA (Human Rights and International Affairs Division Izumi City). Her dedication and work ethic during our stay was humbling. She even spent the race day watching Jenna and I run rather than her husband, who was running his first marathon. The next day we were welcomed by Izumi City Officials, staff, and members of IIEA. Everyone was very easy-going, friendly, and excited to see how we would do in the marathon. Friendly competition is just as important in Japanese culture as it is in American culture!

We had a full itinerary, so I had some idea what we would be doing each day before we arrived in Japan. As we traveled around the city, chasing our schedule full of sites and activities, I realized how much effort the IIEA staff and volunteers had put into creating a positive and enriching experience in their city and the Kansai Region. Each activity was curated and enhanced by the staff, interpreters, and volunteers. It was humbling to



be treated so well— especially when neither Jenna nor I possessed much knowledge of the Japanese language beyond the most basic elements.

The pleasant demeanor of everyone we met did not stop when we entered the chilly corridors of Tomiaki Junior High. Little did we know that we were about to endure the competition of chasing 8th graders around a dirt track. With a two-minute handicap, the kids who barely moved during warmup seemed out of reach as we ran after them. After unsuccessful chasing efforts on the track, we were invited to join the students for lunch in their classroom. They organized the room, served food, and giggled as they watched us eat quite tasty and impressive “hot lunch” food. Before we left, they presented my father and I with amazing, brightly colored origami gifts made by the students.

The KIX Senshu International Marathon was much more than a race. The Race welcome reception hosted at the airport was full of Members of the Race committee, City Officials, sponsors, and cameras, and there was even a buffet table laden with all kinds of different Japanese food. It was an impressive ceremony, leading up to a race boasting a challenge people like to call, the “monster bridge.”

Naoya Hatta, one of our host family members also ran the marathon that day. Naoya and his wife Miki were friendly and welcoming hosts, and I was pleasantly surprised by their flexibility, and calm disposition, as well as their interest in our schedule of events. They attended two of our daytime trips during which we enjoyed discussing the different aspects of their culture and outdoor activities in relation to our own. They treated us like we were special guests.



Dustin and his father, John after the Ssenshu Marathon.

People and food were an underlying, yet fundamental theme throughout the trip, and it was enriching to experience the traditions that go along with them, but it was most rewarding to interact with the people. Their warmth and hospitality made a lasting impression on me and my father. I am honored to have represented Bloomington in the 2018 marathon exchange. It was a great privilege and a rare opportunity made possible by the sister city relationship between our communities.



Dustin and Jenna with Izumi City Mayor, Hiromichi Tsuji

2017-2018 Student Art Exchange

Every year, Bloomington and Izumi City students of various ages participate in an art exchange. In the Fall, BSCO collects artwork from local students and sends it to Izumi City for an art exhibit in November. This exhibit in Izumi City provides Bloomington students the unique opportunity to share their works halfway around the world for an international audience.



In the same way, Izumi City students sent artwork to Bloomington to be displayed.

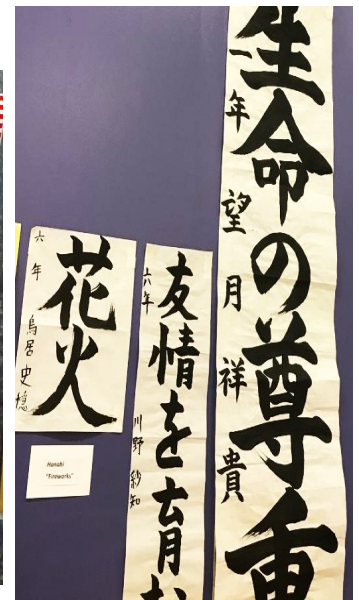
Both Oak Grove Elementary School and Indian Mounds Elementary School hosted exhibits for the artwork this spring. BSCO also had the opportunity to visit each school and give a short presentation about the artwork and encourage the students to participate in future art exchanges with Izumi City.

This past fall, 2017 Senshu Marathon runner, Elizabeth Plasynski's 4th grade class at Indian Mounds Elementary School created vibrant works of art— with the themes of *world peace* and *international friendship*. Some of the students' artwork received awards from Izumi City officials, including Mayor Hiromichi Tsuji.

This year, the art pieces from Japan were centered on similar themes as the works sent from Bloomington. The student artwork included class murals, vivid paintings of animals, and traditional Japanese calligraphy.

BSCO would like to thank both schools and their staff for hosting the exhibits and for their assistance with this exchange.

(Bottom left) Ms. Plasynski's 4th grade class holds the artwork they created for the Izumi City exhibit



Reflections: 25 Years of Friendship - Outgoing President, Nora Smith



Bloomington Mayor Neil Peterson and Izumi City Mayor Tadao Ikeda signing the Sister City Affiliation Agreement in 1993.

Many people use landmarks and milestones to map out their personal histories, and in our culture — **anniversaries** carry a special significance. We even have different (and extremely specific) gifts and symbols to denote which wedding anniversary year we are celebrating: Pearl, lace, paper...clocks...desk sets...? The list goes on. Typically, the 25th wedding anniversary is referred to as the “silver anniversary.” While BSCO is not necessarily celebrating a **wedding** anniversary, we are celebrating the uniting of two cities on opposite ends of the globe, as well as the countless relationships and connections that have been born through the sister city affiliation and the exchanges throughout the years.

The history of the sister city relationship between Bloomington and Izumi City began in 1993 when Bloomington Mayor Neil Peterson and Izumi City Mayor Tadao Ikeda signed an agreement between the two cities. This agreement was enacted to foster international understanding between the two

L to R: Ayumi Kurokawa from IIEA and BSCO President, Nora Smith.

Around that time, the Bloomington Sister City Organization was created to help facilitate the relationship through the exchange of people, information, and ideas.

BSCO has sponsored delegations to and from Izumi City, which have included different groups of people from each community. Some of these exchanges have included middle school student delegations, high school and college student delegations, marathon runner delegations, and adult delegations. On a few occasions, BSCO has helped the City of Bloomington to facilitate Mayoral delegations to and from Izumi City. In addition to fostering international cooperation, these exchanges have helped members from both communities to experience the *nichijou seikatsu* or the “everyday life” of someone living in Bloomington or Izumi City. In this way, these exchanges have been a markedly different experience than your average tourist’s trip to a different country.

One of the goals of BSCO has been to engage the Bloomington community and encourage the appreciation of Japanese culture. BSCO has done this through annual student art exchanges and through sponsoring local events such as Kite Day and the Taste of Japan fundraising event.



I am a testimony to the benefit that BSCO’s programs provide to the community, both local and abroad. As a budding artist, my first exposure to BSCO was through my high school art submission for the annual art exchange. However, my involvement with the organization truly began when I was able to be a part of the 2015 student delegation to Izumi City. Having loved Japanese culture from a young age, this was a dream come true. While that may sound cliché, the trip had a deeply profound impact on my life—so much so, that I decided to join the board that same year in order to help others to have a similar opportunity.

After becoming the President and chaperoning a student delegation to Izumi City in 2017, I was able to fully appreciate the dedication and hard work that all of BSCO’s volunteer board members put into executing the yearly programs. These experiences also exposed me to the kindness and diligence of the members of the Izumi International Exchange Association (IIEA).

The exchanges to and from Izumi City provide participants from each community that opportunity to experience and learn about the various cultural differences, but they truly underscore that **we are all more similar than we are different**. The kindness and warmth that I was shown and the connections that I made in Japan are things that I will cherish forever—even as I step down from BSCO.

To BSCO — Thank you for all that you have done throughout the past 25 years and continue to do to support these exchanges and programs, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to experience Japanese culture firsthand.

To Bloomington, Izumi City, BSCO, and IIEA—Congratulations (or *omedetou gozaimasu*) on reaching this milestone! Best wishes for the years to come!

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Torii gates at Fushimi Inari Shrine in Kyoto, Japan

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