

**Mayor's column for  
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*This is the second part of a two-part series about the Mayor's trip to Hekinan, Japan.*

Monday was spent at the 2005 World Exposition in Aichi. We were there for only six hours, and I believe it would take three full days to have seen it all. Once again the weather cooperated and we all have sunburns to show for the day. The Japanese Gardens were incredible; we went inside the world's largest kaleidoscope, and we walked for miles and miles as we took in the beauty, charm, and history that surrounded us. And of course, like all World's Fairs, we saw the future. When we boarded the bus to go back to Hekinan, we shared stories of what we all had seen during the day. The only common experience we had was going in as a group to see the woolly mammoth that had been discovered recently in Siberia. Fortunately, we had reservations or we would have waited hours to get in.

Monday night, Chief Stern and I and our wives were picked up and driven to have dinner in downtown Hekinan with Mayor Nagashima and several staff members in one of the mayor's favorite restaurants. We were treated to a nine-course dinner of Japanese cuisine. Like everything else on this trip, it was first class. Never in my wildest imagination did I think that I'd be eating seaweed, bamboo, and raw fish . . . and liking it! It was great fun to get to know the mayor on a personal level.

On Tuesday, we toured Hekinan City Hall, and the mayor and I planted a dogwood tree as a commemorative gesture of our delegations visit. However, planting the dogwood tree was only one of many activities that we crammed into our schedule that day. We started out at the city's main fire station where we were "treated" to a ride, if you will, in an earthquake simulator. The level of the tremor we felt was 7.0 on the Richter scale. Suffice it to say that I don't want to feel anything like that ever again. Then came the simulated typhoon with its accompanying winds. We stopped disaster drills before the "tsunami drill" came into play. Then, those who wanted to went up to the top of the 100-foot ladder truck. The view was awesome!

Next we toured a soy factory. It was a high-end factory that catered to a more affluent user. What struck me most was the second-generation owner's community-service attitude. He wanted his employees to protect their environment, learn a good work ethic, and do community service, and he backed it all up with his own actions. I saw a picture on a wall of a young man in a wheelchair wearing a Seattle Mariners hat, and I asked if he was an employee. I was told that he was a former employee who was hurt badly on his way to work. The owner of the company felt responsible for the young man and has been keeping him on the payroll ever since the accident, even though he can't work anymore.

We then visited the library, where I was chastised in Japanese for talking too loud! After that we visited their arts and cultural center where we were treated to several piano solos by a very talented pianist who was "just practicing." Then it was on to the largest elementary school in Hekinan where we were very invited to just go "where ever we wanted." So I did. The kids were warned that we were coming and still treated us like royalty—in one case, even locking the door and forming a human chain to keep me from leaving their room. It was great visiting with them in spite of the language barrier.

Next up was the aforementioned tree-planting at Hekinan City Hall. A pink dogwood was chosen because it was brought to Japan by Americans. As we drove up in our bus in front of City

Hall, there were dozens of dignitaries waiting for us, along with a TV news crew. As I stepped off the bus, followed by the rest of the delegation, we were greeted with applause. Mayor Nagashima and I then threw the first shovel of dirt on the already-planted tree, a gesture repeated by Police Chief Stern and Shiva Riddell, Sister City chairwoman. A large white post with Japanese writing indicated that the Mayor of Edmonds, Gary Haakenson, had planted the tree on April 19, 2005. I was overwhelmed.

A tour of city hall and several officials' offices followed, and then it was on to the police station. We were given a couple of very up-close demonstrations of some martial arts skills employed by their police officers. I was in awe. It would take another whole column to explain the difference in government and policing that we witnessed. Suffice it to say that they are a lot more regimented!

That night we were given a "Friendship Party," and we met many of the Sister City delegates and more city officials. We were showered with gifts and had our pictures taken again and again.

The rains came on our last full day there, and we took a three-hour bus ride to the temple city of Kyoto. But it was worth it as we saw so much of Japan's history. The temples were beautiful. We even got to spend a little time shopping before we returned to the bus. Dinner that evening was in a restaurant on the way back to Hekinan, and the owner presented us with sake boxes as gifts. It was a nice gesture, and typical of the kindness we were shown throughout the trip by everyone we came into contact with.

Thursday morning came too soon, and it was time to head for the airport and the long day of flying that awaited us. It was hard to say goodbye to everyone as they gathered at the hotel. As we pulled away in the bus, it was almost surreal to think we were actually leaving. The week had flown by and we truly had been treated like royalty.

The flights home were uneventful, although turbulence over the Aleutian Islands made us think we were back in the earthquake simulator at the fire station. We left Japan at 12:35 Thursday afternoon and arrived at SeaTac at 8 a.m. the same day. With the time change, it was a really, really long Thursday. It did work out well for Chief Stern, though, since it was his birthday!

We have a sister city in order that we can learn about each other's cultures. We have a sister city to make friends and build goodwill with those in another part of the world. From those two perspectives alone, the trip was a success.