

Remarks of Jeff Wennberg, former Mayor of Rutland, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary dinner of the Hanamaki-Rutland sister city relationship.

In preparing these remarks I thought it might be appropriate to share some history as we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the sister city relationship.

In the summer of 1874, the American Board of Commissioners for Protestant Foreign Missions met at Grace Congregational Church where a young man from Japan stood to make an impassioned plea to raise the funds necessary for him to return to Japan to begin a school to train Christian missionaries. Joseph Hardy (Nijima) Nishima stood his ground until the grand sum of \$5,000 dollars was raised to send Mr. Nishima back to Japan. The Doshisha University in Kyoto today stands as one of the most significant private universities in all of Japan with 30,000 students.

Immediately after WW2, Rutlander Charlie Tuttle was assigned to Gen. Douglas MacArthur's staff to support the reconstruction effort. He was so impressed by the Japanese people and culture he dedicated his life to the publication of English language books on Japanese history, culture, art, language including many first translations of their great literature. In 1983, the Japanese government awarded Charlie the Order of the Sacred Treasure, for his contributions to the advancement of Japanese-American understanding. He was the first non-Japanese person to be so honored.

The sister city relationship began when Professor Jackson Bailey of Earlham College in Indiana responded to a request from Mayor Kojiro Seki of Ishidoriya, who was looking for sister city candidates for his community. Ishidoriya's isolation was about to end with the extension of the bullet train, and he wished to find an American community that would help his townspeople experience the world beyond the beautiful mountains that surrounded their valley. As luck would have it Mary Anne and Leonard Cadwallader of Wallingford had been Professor Bailey's students. He contacted them thinking Vermont had much in common with Iwate, and they suggested Rutland as a candidate. Mayor Seki and his wife travelled to the US on vacation in 1985 to scout the communities, and Mary Anne and Len made the introduction to Mayor Jack Daley. Despite the fact that the Sekis had yet to visit several other communities, the decision was made right then. The following year Mayor Seki led an official delegation to Rutland and the Sister City Agreement you see here was signed.

Less than six months later both mayors, choosing not to seek reelection, were replaced by successors – Gibun Otake in Ishidoriya, and me, here. So while our predecessors initiated the relationship, it fell to us to figure out what to do with it. That September Nancy and I led the return delegation to Japan. Mind you, I had never been further west than Ohio before that. After about 20 hours in transit we arrived at 11:00 PM local time and on the train platform were the mayor, dozens of officials, newspaper reporters, television cameras, you name it. Needless to say we did not exactly look our best as we stepped onto the train platform.

We were shuttled off to the Hanamaki Onsen and enjoyed a restful night's sleep. The next morning I woke up and looked out the window. I said "Nancy, come here, you have to see this!" There to my amazement was Mendon Mountain, Bald Mountain, the Taconics – half way around the world we had found a valley so similar to our home it was uncanny. I began to understand Mayor Seki's decision. We were home.

That night there was a huge welcome reception. Now I was 34 and Mayor Otake was the age I am now. He told me "we cannot end this visit without a commitment for what we will do next." Within the next half hour we hammered out the original design of the Rutland Ishidoriya Student Exchange, which started the following year. Would those who were members of the 1987 delegation who are here tonight please stand and be recognized.

I remember Mikiko Tanafugi, who waved an American flag from the balcony when our delegation visited her elementary school in 1987, visited Rutland as a RISE delegate around 1992, came back to live with the Hookers and attend Rutland High School and graduated from UVM in 2000. She is now married to Dan Ferraro, has a beautiful daughter and lives in El Paso, Texas. And on a personal note, our daughter Jillian, was a RISE delegate with Alexandra Louras in 2003.

And I must share this story from that trip. Brendan White was one of the delegates – his Mother and Father are here. While they were on the bus they observed a man training his dog by the side of the road. Brendan shouted with amazement, "Look! That dog understands Japanese!"

In 2001 Mayor Cassarino led a delegation back to Ishidoriya to honor the 15th anniversary. After a wonderful visit the attacks of September 11th delayed our return by several days. We will never be able to express our appreciation for the care and kindness shown to us by our hosts and even the people of Tokyo. I ask the members of that delegation who are here tonight to please stand and be recognized.

We have made many friends over these 30 years and I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to remember some of those who are no longer with us. Mayors Kojiro Seki and Jack Daley; Superintendents Akira Kawamura and Shozo Sugawara; Masanori Terui; Principal Seishi Goto; Mr. Kenetsu Kamada; Josh Christie, an early RISE delegate; Professor Jackson Bailey; Charlie and Reiko Tuttle; and at age 92 earlier this year, my friend, Cho-cho Gibun Otake.

Last night and this evening Patty Donnelly, Bob Steibly, Lou and Angie DiAngelo, Makoto Fujiwara and others who recall the early days are amazed to see how many lives in Rutland and Hanamaki have been touched by this relationship. Over 30 years it is now in the thousands.

When you plant a seed you can never be sure that it will someday bear fruit. Mayors Seki and Daley planted a seed in hope that their townspeople would discover the world beyond their beautiful mountains. I can almost see them smiling as we savor the sweet fruit of their vision.