

PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT
For Immediate Release

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Shinzen USA Nikkei Youth Goodwill Players Return From Japan

San Francisco (August 24, 2007) – On July 27, 2007, over 100 participants (22 players, their families and staff) departed San Francisco International Airport for Osaka on Japan Airlines as participants of the 2007 Shinzen USA Nikkei Youth Goodwill Program primarily in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the San Francisco-Osaka Sister City Relationship with visits to Hiroshima and Kobe.



This was a unique and special journey for many of the families who chose to take this trip together, some bringing along siblings, and others bringing grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.

As the participants became acclimated to the time change and warmth of Japan during the summer, the first day of the trip was a leisurely half day tour of Osaka which included visits to the Osaka Castle and Museum of History followed by an *okonomiyaki* lunch, an Osaka favorite - - grilled pancake, in the Namba area.

On Monday, July 30, the group traveled by Shinkansen to Hiroshima, taking a few hours to enjoy the sights on Miyajima Island, one of the three most beautiful sights in Japan. The group also made a poignant visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum to learn about the tragedy that happened on August 6, 1945, and the story of some of the survivors. The youth then walked over to the Cenotaph to pay their respects to the A-bomb victims before presenting their 1,000 cranes at the Sadako Peace Monument.



Photo courtesy of Mike Lem

After returning to the Sheraton Miyako Hotel Osaka, “home” for the remainder of the trip, the youth were able to expend some energy on the court, with two games against the Osaka YMCA and a Friendship Tournament with players from Shinzen USA and Japan mixing to create fun teams. The Shinzen USA girls’ team outscored their counterparts to win two games, while the Shinzen USA boys’ team came across a very well coached and disciplined team to come up even in one game and lose the other.

On Tuesday, August 2, in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the San Francisco-Osaka Sister City Relationship, the players and coaches were invited as representatives from San Francisco to Osaka City Hall to meet with the honorable Mayor Junichi Seki. Kelly Lem presented Mayor Seki with a letter from Mayor Gavin Newsom and gave her speech in Japanese thanking the Mayor for inviting the group to City Hall. Keith Inokuchi shared his thoughts on returning to Osaka and pledged to continue his Shinzen spirit by creating friendships while *“looking forward to participating with my new friends from the Osaka YMCA in an inter-cultural activity in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of our two sister cities.”* The Mayor was pleased to receive a Major League Baseball All-Star jacket and told the Shinzen players that he would wear his new jacket when he comes to San Francisco in September. He then presented them all with a beautiful medallion embossed with a picture of Osaka Castle.



After the visit with Mayor Seki, the players went to the Tennoji Sports Center where they worked with the Osaka YMCA players and staff to create a “friendship banner” that would be their



contribution to the celebration of the anniversary of our two cities. They were asked to choose and decorate two banners that would eventually be joined with icons from our two cities. Although the Golden Gate Bridge and Osaka Castle were unique items for our two cities, we share a link with crab and are both known for great food! It

was a fun and interesting learning experience for everyone.

The Shinzen youth volunteered to keep a journal to post their daily thoughts during their trip to Japan. At first they expressed their exhaustion, commented on the long travel day and the extremely hot weather, but after their first day their thoughts then began to turn to their actual experience. Following are excerpts from their journal writings during the trip:



Jared Wong, whose family originated from Hiroshima, was overwhelmed by the visit to Hiroshima stating that, *“Going to the Hiroshima Peace Museum and the Sadako Memorial Statue was life-changing. The museum showed me how devastating a single act could be and how it could have been prevented. Those two monuments taught me that the relationships we were building with the Japanese kids were actually really important as we grow up and take more control of our surroundings.”*



“When I met my Osaka host family for the first time, I was nervous. I was worried that I would do the wrong thing and insult them or embarrass myself. They welcomed me into their home and made it clear that I could feel comfortable because I was now a part of their family. They were sweet and generous, and we had a lot of fun. Even though it was hard to communicate at times, it was one of the best experiences I have ever had in my life,

and I cannot wait until I have the opportunity to see my host family again.” Katie Gong, San Francisco

“The most memorable experience was with my Osaka homestay. From going to the public bathhouse to riding bikes and doing fireworks, I realized that friendships could be made even though speaking the same language is a challenge. Fun is fun in any language. I also realized that they wanted to develop a friendship with me and made a lot of effort to make sure I felt comfortable and that my homestay experience was memorable.” Drew Mametsuka, San Francisco.

These are just a few thoughts from the players and we hope to share more photos and stories soon. These memorable moments would not be possible without the support of many other organizations, donors and countless volunteers who have continued to give to this Program over the years. The 2007 Shinzen Program would like to especially thank the following for their continued contributions and generosity: Consulate General of Japan in San Francisco, The Henri and Tomoye Takahashi Charitable Foundation, Japan Airlines, Mayor Gavin Newsom and Mr. Mark Chandler of the City and County of San Francisco, Golden Gate Optimist Club, Ralphe Greene and Margie Yemoto, Yoshihiro Ito and Aitoh, Mr. Mits and Mrs. Sadame Kojimoto, NFL Alumni Association, Nikkei Lions Club and the San Francisco Drakes Organization.

About the Shinzen Program:

In 1995, the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California (JCCCNC) and the Office of the Consulate General of Japan in San Francisco agreed that although there were a substantial number of traditional, cultural and intellectual exchanges between the U.S. and Japan, there existed a greater need for meaningful dialogue between youth in Japan and Japanese American youth. Through these discussions was born the Shinzen (international goodwill or amity) USA Nikkei Youth Goodwill Program, formed to create a more dynamic and meaningful exchange between the youth and to provide unique opportunities for building a foundation for the exchange of ideas and important values of our young people today.

The Shinzen players work to achieve these goals with their peers by creating friendships on a grassroots level to help reinforce a future of global peace and goodwill. In its inaugural year (1997) in celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the San Francisco-Osaka Sister City Relationship, 20 youth and their families represented our community as goodwill ambassadors. Over the years over 250 Bay Area youth have participated in the Program and have shared their “shinzen” with their counterparts in Japan. Past Shinzen players continue to stay involved in community activities and many have taken a strong interest in learning more about Japan, its people and culture through subsequent trips to Japan as exchange students, JET program participants or leisure travel.

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About JCCCNC

Envisioned by the Japanese American community, JCCCNC will be an everlasting foundation of our Japanese American ancestry, cultural heritage, histories and traditions. The JCCCNC strives to meet the evolving needs of the Japanese American community through programs, affordable services and facility usage. The JCCCNC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit community center based in San Francisco.