

Message from Consul-General of Japan, Takako Ito

April, 2018

While people say the arrival of spring this year in Toronto is later than usual, as we enter April I am certainly starting to feel the sunlight growing warmer. The cityscape has also become bright and colourful, so I thought I would take this opportunity to invite you to take in the colourful Japan-related exhibitions currently being held in Toronto.

Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors, now on at the Art Gallery of Ontario, has proven so popular, it is difficult to even obtain tickets. Some streetcars around the city, however, have been decorated in red and white polka dots to commemorate the exhibit, and just looking at them puts one in a good mood. At the Textile Museum of Canada, about 40 works by Itchiku Kubota, who revived a decorative technique known as *tsujigahana*, are on display. This technique, which can be described as paintings expressed on kimono, is breathtakingly exquisite. I strongly urge you to go have a look and enjoy its beauty. This is also the year of Japan at the Gardiner Museum, which is holding exhibits on contemporary ceramics by Japanese artists. The works on display will change three times, and the first exhibit is on now. It is a must-see for anyone interested in ceramic art!



Meanwhile, I have gradually started visiting regional areas beyond Toronto, something which I had been holding off due to the unpredictability of winter weather. As a start, I attended the Japan Bowl held at Huron University College in London on March 10. Japan Bowl is a quiz contest that tests the knowledge of Japan and the Japanese language among participating high school students who are divided into teams of three. Started in 1992 by The Japan-America Society of Washington DC, it is now a large event that draws participants from across the US. In an effort to bring the contest to Canada, Huron University College and the Japan Society in Toronto worked together to hold the first Japan Bowl in Ontario - I regret it was not the first in Canada as there was a Japan Bowl in British Columbia in February. However, with encouragement from the Japan-America Society, ours became an enthusiastically heated



tournament with two categories dividing high school and university students. Only high schools and a university in the London area took part, but there were also many people from the Toronto area who were involved. They included judges, sponsors and the Sakura Kai from the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre who performed traditional Japanese dance as special guests. The organizers were clearly motivated to develop the event into one that will eventually be held across Canada, and I look forward to seeing it grow in the coming years. One week prior to the Japan Bowl, I attended the Ontario Japanese Speech Contest, and was pleasantly surprised by the high level of proficiency among the contestants. I strongly hope that the community of students who study Japan and the Japanese language will continue to expand in the future.



On March 22 and 23, I visited Windsor, which is a sister city of Fujisawa in Kanagawa Prefecture. Windsor is a major city in Southern Ontario from which you can see Detroit across the river. It was the first time for me to visit the city, and I was the first Consul-General of Japan to visit Windsor from Toronto in six years. Windsor Mayor

Drew Dilkens told me that, among the 12 sister city relations upheld by his city, its exchange with Fujisawa ranks first or second in terms of active engagement with Windsor. I was delighted to know that grassroots exchange between Japan and Canada continues to be strong and full of life. In Jackson Park where many local citizens gather, three Sakura cherry trees were planted last year to commemorate the 30th anniversary of exchange between Fujisawa and Windsor. They are still short and thin, but it was clear they had endured the cold winter and were ready to bud. Among the faculty of the University of Windsor, there were alumni of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme and the MEXT Japanese Government Scholarships, and I was able to enlist their future support in promoting these programs among their graduates.



Windsor is a city where you can still recognize historical influences from the UK, and there are apparently many Scotch whisky aficionados who have organized a few local clubs. I toured the largest LCBO store in the city, and saw a substantial Scotch section that one does not see even in Toronto. According to the manager, Japanese whisky is very popular and sell out as soon as it comes in the store. Although the

saké section was very small, it was stocked with several kinds of *junmai ginjo* and plum wine, making me hopeful that it might expand depending on future marketing strategy.

Sakura blossoms have already fully bloomed in Tokyo, but I am still eagerly waiting for the Sakura in Toronto' s celebrated High Park, on the grounds of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and in my own backyard. There are also new plantings of Sakura being planned in Ontario, so I look forward to the blossoms gradually spreading across the province.

