

Message from Consul-General of Japan Takako Ito

October 2018

We held two special receptions in September, honouring the recipients of commendations from Japan's Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Foreign Minister's Commendations are awarded to individuals and groups with outstanding achievements in international fields, in order to acknowledge their contributions to the promotion of friendship between Japan and other countries. The Commendations also aim to promote the understanding and support of the Japanese public for the activities of the recipients. This year the Commendations were awarded to 205 individuals and 49 organizations both in and outside Japan. (Those outside Japan totaled 171 individuals and 43 organizations.) The announcement of the awards was made in Tokyo on July 17.

Within the jurisdiction of our Consulate-General, which is the province of Ontario, the recipients were Mr. Kenichiro Noma, former President of the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC), and Shodo Canada. The presentation ceremonies and celebratory receptions were held in September as a result of coordinating the schedules of the recipients with the delivery of the commendation certificates from Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono.



Mr. Noma, in addition to raising the status of Japanese Canadians by serving for many years as NAJC President, has undertaken various initiatives as an educator in promoting understanding of Japan among students in Ontario – as a high school history teacher, and, even after his retirement, by providing consultation on how Canadian students can visit and study Japan.

Most recently, he was in negotiations with the municipality of Chatham-Kent to have heritage markers installed in memory of the Japanese Canadian labour camps that were operating there during World War II. As a result of his efforts, a special ceremony in Chatham-Kent on Sept. 7 installed the markers and also planted Sakura trees at the site as symbols of Japan-Canada friendship.

I had the privilege of attending this ceremony, where Japanese Canadian seniors who once lived in Chatham-Kent were also present with their families; in addition to those who still live



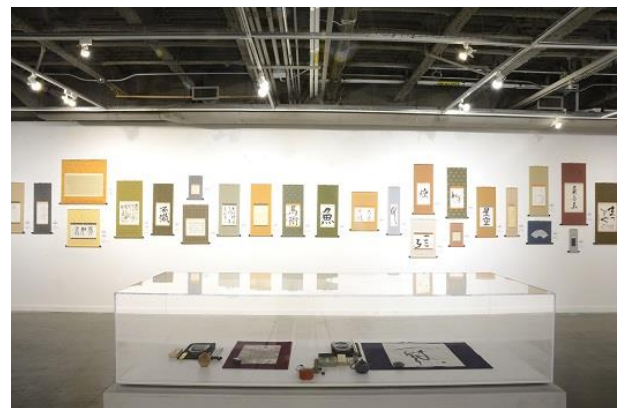
in Chatham-Kent, some came from Hamilton, others from Toronto. In attendance were about 90 people, including: Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario Rick Nicholls and Ontario Minister of Infrastructure Monte McNaughton, both of whom are from the area; Chatham-Kent Mayor Randy Hope; as well as officials representing local parks and schools. By the way, the Japanese Canadians who were forcibly moved from British Columbia during the war included hockey legends Mel (Hitoshi) Wakabayashi and his brother Herb (Osamu), both of whom played in Japan for the Seibu Railroad team and even participated in the Winter Olympic Games. According to Deputy Speaker Nicholls, the brothers were local heroes in Chatham-Kent. Mr. Noma, for his part, will continue working on various projects, such as those which aim to



increase student exchange between Japan and Ontario.

Shodo Canada each year holds the Annual Japanese Calligraphy Competition in Canada and the subsequent exhibit of the entries. Last November was the organization's 10th anniversary. This unique exhibit differs a bit from those in Japan, attracting entries not just by Japanese and Japanese Canadians but also by Canadians who had no knowledge of calligraphy before encountering Shodo Canada.

Shodo Canada's Director, Mrs. Noriko Maeda, lives in Waterloo and from there commutes to various locations where she teaches shodo, including the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre in Toronto. As well, entries to Shodo Canada's annual competition are mounted and exhibited according to their rank of award, and the arrangements for the judges as well as mounting



in Japan are undertaken entirely by Maeda Sensei. I had an opportunity to attend the exhibit last year, and was very moved by the number of wonderful works of calligraphy on display. I also was delighted to learn that many young people are now participating in the competition. This exhibit, in which the works express the artists' individuality and rich sensitivity through the Japanese tradition of shodo, can be seen as a unique cultural phenomenon which arose from the fruitful exchange between Japan and Canada.

Even the CBC is currently producing a program which will feature Maeda Sensei's work. Her calligraphy can also be seen on the labels of sake produced by a brewery in Fukushima Prefecture, prominently displaying the names of the sake. As a sign of support for Fukushima's continuing recovery efforts after the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, I served two kinds of sake from the region at the reception for Shodo Canada, both of which featured Maeda Sensei's calligraphy.



Many people today contribute considerable effort toward supporting friendship and mutual understanding between Japan and Canada, including some who do so for many years without notice of the Consulate-General of Japan. In order to attract attention to their activities, as well as to recognize their accomplishments, we would like to gather more information on individuals who are active in this way in the Province of Ontario, regardless of whether they are Canadian or Japanese nationals. I hope we can count on your kind assistance.