

## MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL TAKAKO ITO

March 2019

As Consul-General, my duties include the promotion of Japanese exports as well as of Japanese culture. The Government of Japan places a great deal of importance on exporting our food culture as well as sake. For this reason, we held an event on Feb. 26 which provided an opportunity to learn about pairing sake with Japanese food.

The expert who provided detailed information on sake was Mr. Michael Tremblay, who holds the title of “Sake Samurai”. Mr. Tremblay, a resident of Toronto, along with Mr. Patrick Ellis of British Columbia, became the first Canadians to be given this distinction last September. This title, which has been conferred since 2006 by the Japan Sake Brewers Association Junior Council, is intended to



help increase the popularity of sake and Japanese food culture around the world. Only about six individuals are given this recognition each year, and there are still approximately just 80 Sake Samurais in existence, including those who are Japanese. In other words, they can be considered the elite among international promoters of sake. Mr. Tremblay began his career as a wine sommelier. He was later enchanted by sake, however, and now not only works as a sake

sommelier at the Japanese restaurant where he works but also gives lectures on sake across Canada and the United States. He also often acts as a judge at international sake competitions, and continues his studies by visiting various sake breweries in Japan. Despite being very busy traveling all over the world, he very kindly agreed to take part in our sake pairing event when we approached him, and even gave us invaluable advice.



This event paired sake with five tastes: salty, sweet, sour, bitter and umami. It also paired sake with a Western menu consisting of steak, cheese and dessert. Attendants also tasted sake paired with sashimi, as well as a sparkling sake as an aperitif and after-dinner drinks such as shochu and whiskey. While there were many people who were surprised by the existence of sparkling sake, we received a lot of compliments for the Sparkling Toyokuni that we served, which will also be used at the Tokyo Olympics next year.

The Chef from my official residence was in charge of preparing the food at the event, coming up with various dishes by which our guests can experience Japanese food and Japanese ingredients. For example, to experience sweetness there was spinach *shira-ae* (vegetables with tofu dressing) along with *dashimaki tamago* (Japanese omelet flavoured with dashi). For sour tastes, fish marinated in vinegar and other ingredients (*nanban zuke*) was served. In order to demonstrate umami, we served simmered vegetables (*umami*), while sautéed goya, onions and *shirasu* (whitebait) with bonito flakes stood as an example of bitter dishes. There were people in attendance who had not had many of the dishes before, but they nonetheless enjoyed their new experiences and paid us a lot of compliments.

Wagyu beef was used for the steak, and was paired with aged sake. The tender, melt-in-your mouth wagyu went well with the *junmai daiginjyo* (a type of premium sake) aged for 10 years, and this pairing also received a lot of praise. Blue cheese and plum wine (*umeshu*) was also a marvelous pairing that was a brand new discovery.



The guests this time consisted mainly of Canadian journalists who write on food and beverages, as well as industry representatives who mainly handle wine. Most were not particularly knowledgeable about Japanese sake. However, through this event they were able to understand that sake can vary greatly

in taste and can be paired with different foods, just like wine. After the event, it was very gratifying to receive comments like, "I was able to learn a lot about sake," and, "I would like to share my experiences widely." I hope that the journalists will write many articles on the event, and that industry representatives will begin purchasing and distributing the sake that they liked, thereby boosting the popularity of Japanese food and sake in Ontario.

When I host a lunch or a dinner at the official residence, I usually choose the sake to go along with the Japanese dishes prepared by my Chef. When I have Japanese guests, I try to serve sake that is from their home region in Japan. When I have Canadian guests, I try as much as possible to serve sake from regions affected by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake in order to support their recovery efforts. At this event, we lined up the bottles of the sake we provided in a separate room along with tourist brochures of the regions they represented. Many guests in attendance happily collected the pamphlets, saying "I will go to Japan soon," or "I am scheduled to go to Japan at the end of the year." It seems the event was also very useful in promoting tourism to Japan.



There are countless examples of outstanding Japanese food and sake. We plan to hold many more events aimed at making them better known in Canada, so that more Canadians can purchase and enjoy them.