

MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL TAKAKO ITO

May 2019

On May 1, His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince Naruhito ascended to the throne to assume the position of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, marking the beginning of the Reiwa Era. The name Reiwa carries the meaning of “culture coming into being and flourishing when people bring their hearts and minds together in a beautiful manner”. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, upon announcing this name, expressed his determination to foster culture and appreciate natural beauty, full of heartfelt gratitude on peaceful days, and to carve out with the Japanese people a new era that is brimming with hope.

At the Consulate-General of Japan, we will have a Greeting Book celebrating the enthronement for visitors to sign. Please refer to the announcement on our webpage, and come share your well-wishes.

The Emperor Heisei, whose reign spanned the course of 30 years, has assumed the title of Emperor Emeritus after his abdication, and, in principle, will no longer be taking part in official affairs. Before coming to Toronto as Consul-General of Japan, I served Their Majesties as a Master of the Ceremonies at the Imperial Household Agency. Having had the privilege of closely witnessing their full dedication – in both their body and spirit – to public affairs as a symbol of their people, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep personal appreciation for their service. Many people in Toronto recall Their Majesties’ visit here in 2009, and still speak appreciatively of their kindness and their comforting, warm smiles. I shall also always treasure my memories of having accompanied them on their 2017 visit to Vietnam and Thailand, their last overseas visit.

On April 28, I planted new Sakura (Japanese flowering cherry) trees in High Park together with His Worship John Tory, the Mayor of Toronto, as well as Mr. Arif Virani, Member of Parliament, and Ms. Bhutla Karpoche, Member of Provincial Parliament, both of whom were elected in the local riding. In





in addition to commemorating the enthronement of the new Emperor, the newly donated trees mark the 60th anniversary of the donation of Sakura by the citizens of Tokyo to the citizens of Toronto.

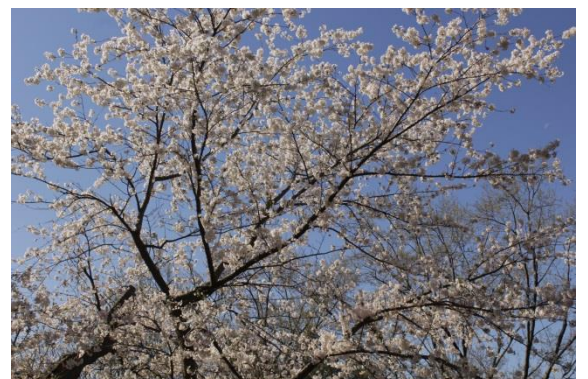
That donation 60 years ago was an expression of gratitude to the citizens of Toronto for their acceptance and support of the Japanese Canadians who were forced to move here from Western Canada after the Second World War, when they were ordered to either move east of the Canadian Rockies or “return” to Japan. After 60 years, High Park is now famous for its Sakura, which are a beloved landmark for Torontonians. The local Japanese Canadian community is also thriving and active in a wide variety of fields, and Japanese culture and business are being



enjoyed as integral parts of people’s lives. The planting ceremony for the new Sakura featured a performance on Japanese drums (taiko), a demonstration of the dynamic “Yosakoi” dance, as well as an outdoor service of the Tea Ceremony. I was truly pleased to see how Japan’s history and culture were being accepted and enjoyed by the people of Toronto.



We are also holding two campaigns this spring with the theme of Sakura, which can be considered the symbol of Japan and Japanese culture. First, with the support of the Japanese Restaurant Association of Canada (JRAC), eight restaurants in Greater Toronto Area will be serving Sakura-themed dishes for a limited time under the “Sakura Delight” campaign. This will be a wonderful opportunity to enjoy Japanese cuisine inspired by Sakura. Our other campaign is to have you submit Sakura-themed



haiku to our social media. If you have photos and other images that go well with your haiku, please submit them also so people can enjoy them online.

Arrival of spring in Toronto has been slow this year, and the Sakura also will not likely be in full bloom until mid-May. However, that the Sakura trees are loved by the people of Ontario when they bloom – not just in High Park but at many locations around the province – is an invaluable symbol of Japan-Canada friendship. While giving profound gratitude and respect to those who have devoted great effort toward strengthening Japan-Canada relations, including those who have nurtured and protected our beloved Sakura trees, we also would like to renew our own resolve to work hard to further develop this friendship.