

MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL TAKAKO ITO

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The region from Toronto to Waterloo in recent years has come to be known as “Silicon Valley North”. It is drawing a great deal of attention for its remarkably dynamic activities – from research to business startups – in the innovative fields now called “tech areas”, which include IT, AI, robotics and fin-tech. Waterloo itself is home of the Blackberry, which once took the smartphone world by storm, and the University of Waterloo has now become a feeder school for Silicon Valley, reportedly supplying businesses there with the highest number of engineering graduates. As well, there are numerous institutions, such as MaRS in Toronto, which are established by businesses and local governments (sometimes with universities) to develop new technologies and research then match them with appropriate businesses as incubators. These organizations can also work as accelerators, which further scale up such startups founded by students and tech workers. Recently we are seeing an increase in Japanese companies sending study teams to visit such local institutions.



It was against such a backdrop that Collision, North America’s largest international tech conference, was held in Toronto from May 20 to 23 with approximately 25,700 people in attendance. Presentations were given by superstars of the tech world as well as politicians and business leaders. Sales pitches were made by start-up founders showcasing the newest technology. Within the vast venue, there were discussions among investors, sales at industry booths, workshops by technology specialists and much more.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau participated in the opening on May 20, and enthusiastically described Canada’s strengths in headquartering tech businesses and expanding them worldwide. Such strengths include the country’s open immigration policies



that have drawn talented people from around the world; its effective education in the STEM fields; its policies supporting innovation; and its open free trade policy. Panel discussions on such timely topics as self-driving vehicles, fin-tech, the relationship between the entertainment and tech industries, environmental technologies and others also drew large audiences.

I had opportunities there to meet with participants from tech firms in Japan, as well as Japanese tech companies operating in Silicon Valley. With the cost of doing business in Silicon Valley continually rising, how to operate business and attract talent at low cost has become a great challenge for them. So it seems many decided to come see “Silicon Valley North” first hand, given the stellar reputation it has been gaining of late.

The Government of Japan has also been actively involved in the field of innovation, implementing various support measures for Society 5.0 and encouraging the draw of highly skilled talent from overseas. Various Japanese technologies that make full use of robotics and AI are attracting the world’s attention. I also think that the various technologies applied to traditional Japanese hospitality – known as *omotenashi* – are sure to astound the world at the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games next year.



<https://www.gov-online.go.jp/cam/s5/eng/index.html>

Here locally, study tours by representatives of the Japanese tech industry, as well as joint research and business ventures with Canadian partners also seem to be on the increase. The joint research on the Digital Annealer which began last year between the University of Toronto and Fujitsu is a good example.

According to what I heard from a representative of a Japanese company partnered with a Toronto IT firm, with the 13 to 14-hour time difference between Japan and Toronto (depending on whether it’s Daylight Savings Time or Eastern Standard Time here), a Japanese research team can hand off their data to their partner team in Ontario to carry on their work while they rest. When the Ontario

team is done with their day, the Japanese team receives their data and carries on with their work, enabling uninterrupted development across the Pacific Ocean. The 13 to 14-hour time difference is of course inconvenient for telephone conferences, but I was extremely impressed with their creative way of turning this disadvantage into an advantage. As well, with exchanges taking place among Japanese and Canadian executives, and with Canadian researchers working with Japanese teams over long-term stays in Japan, I understand there is much opportunity to learn from one another and competitiveness is on the rise as a result.

From visiting Canadian high schools and universities, as well as from speaking to various local business people, I have come to learn that Canadian youths develop a business mindset from their mid-teens, interning at IT firms and using IT to expand business ideas. I truly hope that in the future Japanese youths will also be inspired to succeed internationally in the field of IT.