

MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL TAKAKO ITO

August 2019

On July 1, which is Canada Day, people across the country celebrate the Country's birthday in various festivities. In Burlington, Ontario, Canada Day festivities also included events to celebrate the 30th anniversary of their sister city relationship with Itabashi Ward, Tokyo. Itabashi Ward Mayor Takeshi Sakamoto headed a delegation to Burlington and attended commemorative events alongside Burlington Mayor Marianne Meed Ward and city officials. At night, they celebrated Canada Day and enjoyed the fireworks display over Lake Ontario.

On the occasion of this 30th anniversary, the opening ceremony of Itabashi Garden, which represents the goodwill between the two cities, also took place.



Nearly 100 people attended the ceremony under the beautiful weather. The idea to found a Japanese garden in Burlington originated from the time when Burlington's own goodwill delegation went to Itabashi Ward and visited Tokumizutei Japanese Garden. As the climate and flora of Itabashi are different from those of Burlington, it was impossible to recreate exactly the same garden. So, the city of Burlington reached out to

local landscape architect Ms. Virginia Burt to come up with a design for a Japanese garden that would blend aspects of Japan and Canada. Ms. Burt, who had visited many Japanese gardens in Kyoto, researched tirelessly to come up with her unique idea for Itabashi Garden.

For example, the 23 species of Japanese maple that exist in Canada and the azalea, Itabashi Ward's official flower, are planted in the garden. As well, rocks from Ontario are laid out in a rock garden that wonderfully reflects



Canada's natural scenery. At the "Azumaya" pavilion, visitors can rest while enjoying a sprawling view of the garden. I may say that Itabashi Garden is packed with the creation of new values through Japan-Canada exchange. I was told that the citizens of Burlington had been visiting and taking pictures of the garden even before it was officially opened. With the nearby bridge made of wooden planks (Itabashi literally translates to "wooden plank bridge"), I hope that the name of the sister city Itabashi will remain in the minds of Burlingtonians and the garden will be loved as a place for their recreation and relaxation.

On July 29, I visited the city of Nayoro, Hokkaido, for an event commemorating the 50th anniversary of sister-city relations with Lindsay, Ontario. Neither Nayoro



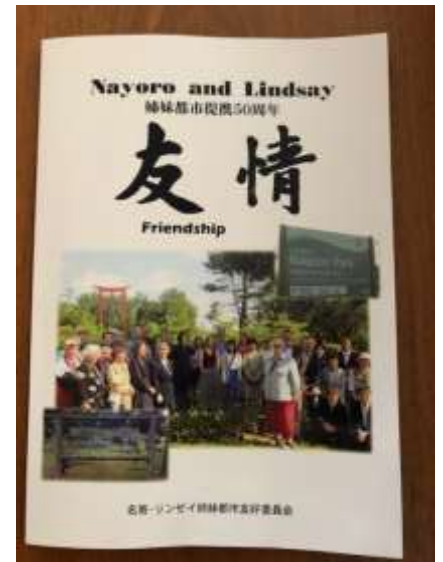
nor Lindsay is a large municipality - Nayoro's population is less than 30,000. But the warm-hearted people of both cities have done what they can to continue the relationship, and I was deeply convinced that this 50th anniversary represents a monumental achievement. This truly is an example of "little and often fills the purse". Their sister city-related activities mainly include goodwill visits every 5 years, biennial high school student exchanges (each time with 2-3

students for roughly 2 months in the summer), and several people-to-people level exchanges as well. Today, the total number of people who have taken part in exchanges adds up to 614.

When Nayoro sent its goodwill delegation to Lindsay last year, I presented the Consul-General's Commendation to the international relations committees of both cities. At that time I was pled, "Please come to Nayoro next year for the 50th anniversary!" Using my summer vacation to return to Japan, I also visited Nayoro.



Lindsay's goodwill delegation, past exchange program participants and host families from both sides as well as members of the Nayoro-Lindsay Friendship Committee all gathered for the 50th anniversary and renewed old friendships. The unveiling of a commemorative plaque in "Nayoro Lindsay Park" and a celebratory reception were also held. (By the way, the maple, cherry and pine trees that had been planted at Nayoro Lindsay Park in previous anniversaries are all growing well.) The reception was given a special touch by the serving of white wine now made in Nayoro and mini tomatoes grown by a farmer who was once an exchange student to Lindsay, as well as the extravagantly decorated sunflowers – the flower of Nayoro – and sandersonias, a local specialty.



Considering the sister city relationship with Lindsay, the City of Nayoro continues to accept Canadian English teachers dispatched under the JET program. One of them even stays to work at Nayoro City University after his experience as Assistant Language Teacher on the program. In Hokkaido, there are 25 municipalities with a sister city relationship with Canada. Among them, Nayoro's is proudly the second oldest.

There are many reasons why sister city relationships start, but the grassroots-level enthusiasm is indispensable in order to maintain the relationship for a long time. Thanks to these efforts, following generations can join the exchange, learn about the sister country's people and culture, and further deepen the friendship and respect. I wish to sincerely thank all of those who have worked to overcome various difficulties to continue sister city relations.