

MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL SASAYAMA TAKUYA

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Even now in November, the number of new COVID-19 infections in Ontario shows no signs of decreasing. The provincial government recently put in place a new framework which ranks its regions according to five colour-coded categories. Within the GTA, Toronto and Peel Region regrettably have been placed in the grey “lockdown” category. The Consulate-General of Japan urges everyone to remain vigilant so that we may all get through these difficult times safely.

I would like to take this opportunity to let you know of two organizations which are using innovation to surmount various challenges posed by the pandemic in order to continue their activities.

The presence of the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre (JCCC) in Toronto is vital to the promotion of Japan’s culture in the city and maintaining its traditions. The JCCC, located in North York, never fails to surprise travelers from Japan who visit it for the first time. I wonder if you can understand why?

First, there is the wide variety of activities that it offers. There are of course traditional ikebana flower arranging and the tea ceremony, but classes in other cultural activities such as shodo (Japanese calligraphy) are also tremendously popular. With respect to the martial arts, there are not only judo and kendo, but also activities such as aikido and kyudo (Japanese archery). Indeed, I was delighted by this as I was a member of the Japanese



archery club as a student. There is also a childcare facility (Ikebata Nursery School), as well as the Kaiseki Yu-zen Hashimoto Restaurant which is an object of admiration among Toronto celebrities. Various events are held throughout the year in Kobayashi Hall with its capacity of 500 people.

Upon entering the JCCC, one encounters stories of the Japanese Canadians who have supported the Centre. I have been told that establishing a cultural centre in Toronto was a longstanding desire of first and second-generation Japanese Canadians who had experienced tremendous hardships during the Second World War. Many Japanese Canadians contributed financially to the construction of the original building designed by the

renowned Japanese Canadian architect, Mr. Raymond Moriyama. Some even put their homes up as collateral for this purpose. I am deeply moved by how this Centre is the expression of fervent dreams held by Japanese Canadians. It is also worth noting that its subsequent operations are thanks to the financial foundation it established. The JCCC was one of the locations visited in 2009 by Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan (now Their Majesties the Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita) during their goodwill tour of Canada.

The JCCC not only maintains Japanese cultural traditions but also creates and popularizes its own trends. The Toronto Japanese Film Festival, held at the start of summer each year, is a prime example. This film festival welcomed its ninth year this year with participation from celebrated actors and film industry representatives from Japan. It also enjoyed a sort of “homecoming” in 2018 and 2019 by holding an event in Hibiya, Tokyo, called the Toronto Japanese Film Festival in Hibiya.

Many of the JCCC’s events have been cancelled or moved online this year because of the coronavirus. My sincere wish is that the pandemic will soon subside, and that the Centre’s energy and activities will return as quickly as possible.

The JCCC will hold a fundraising event in December called Keep the Lantern Lit, described as an online event like no one has experienced before. I am truly looking forward to seeing its success.

Also at the JCCC is the office of Japanese Social Services (JSS), providing service to people of Japanese background who are encountering difficulties in unfamiliar environments. In most years, the JSS holds a Holiday Drive to collect toys and clothing. This year, however, it is fundraising instead. I would like to take this opportunity to ask for your support.

The JCCC is the focal point of Japanese cultural activities in Toronto. Meanwhile, the Centre for the Study of Global Japan was established in July 2017 as a hub of scholarly activities on Japan. This Centre is located in the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Toronto, a university renowned for producing several Nobel laureates. In the summer of last year, Dr. Phillip Lipsky assumed his position as the Centre’s first Director, invited from Stanford University as a capable emerging researcher on Japan. If we are only talking generally about interest in Japan, there are a few thousand students of the Japanese language just in Ontario. However, as an institution focusing on scholarly exchange and research on contemporary Japan, the



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Centre for the Study of Global Japan is already positioned at the highest level in Canada. As an educational institution, it is currently nurturing approximately 20 diverse young scholars at the graduate level. As an example of how it widely disseminates scholarly knowledge, there is its regular Japan NOW Lecture Series which examines various issues relating to contemporary Japan.

With respect to international diplomacy, one tragic loss resulting from COVID-19 this year was the passing of Mr. OKAMOTO Yukio. Around the time I joined Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Okamoto was already an immense presence, tremendously active as the Director of the First North America Division. In memory of his numerous accomplishments, the Centre for the Study of Global Japan will be holding a special online event on Dec. 2. If you are interested, please use this link to register: <https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/csgj/event/29738/>

It seems the COVID-19 pandemic will continue for a while. Toronto also recently saw a considerable amount of snow. As you maintain your safety protocols against the coronavirus, I hope you will also lend your support to the above organizations that typify the best of Toronto.

SASAYAMA Takuya
Consul-General of Japan