

MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL SASAYAMA TAKUYA

December 2021

This is the season when days grow shorter and snow accumulates on the ground. It must be especially difficult for those who come to Toronto from warmer weather. In my experience, the days immediately become noticeably longer after Christmas, the winter solstice in December. The leaves of the magnolia tree in front of my house have fallen, but buds have already sprouted in preparation for spring.

The world is currently poised to take on the new Omicron variant of the Corona virus which seems to be spreading in various regions, including Ontario. The safety measures we should undertake remain unchanged. I would like once again to ask you to follow the directives of your local health authorities and stay cautious. To anyone planning to go to Japan, the strengthened border measures may be cause for inconvenience but I ask for your kind understanding.

This month, I would like to report on my November visit to Thunder Bay.

Lakehead Japanese Culture Association

To begin, in Thunder Bay I met with Mr. Terry Tsubouchi, President of the Lakehead Japanese Culture Association, along with others who have been developing exchange between Japan and Canada and promoting Japanese culture for a long time. They told me that, in addition to their activities being restricted by the pandemic, the average age among their members is increasing, resulting in fewer of them having experienced Japanese culture first-hand. I suggested some ideas to remedy this, including: reaching out to students at Lakehead University who are interested in Japanese culture; renewing interest among the Association's younger members in search of their Japanese roots; and undertaking activities with Japanese cuisine as the theme.

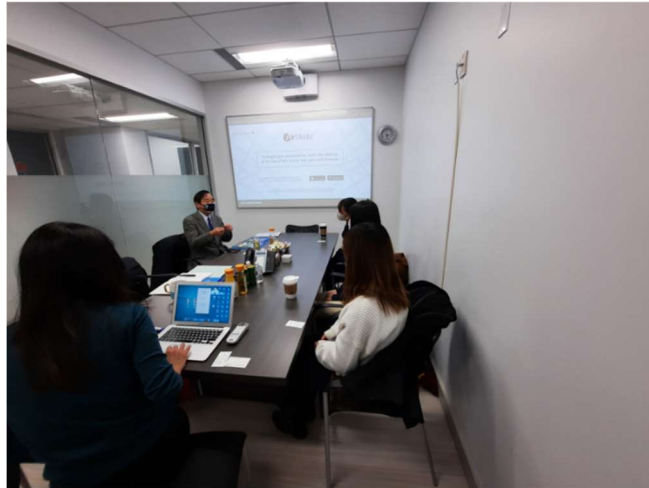


**With the members of
the Lakehead Japanese Culture Association**

Lakehead University

I then visited Lakehead University. While the population of Thunder Bay is just over 100,000, the number of students at Lakehead University exceeds 8,600. If you include faculty and staff, over 10,000 people are involved with the school. One of the characteristics of Thunder Bay is that it is a city of academics and culture. Lakehead University is a comprehensive institution with 10 faculties comprised of engineering, medicine, law, business, and others. The student community is also multinational, with the largest number of foreign students coming from India, followed by Chinese students. There are also close to 10 students from Japan. I was able to meet with three of them who arrived this past summer and will be studying there until the end of the year. I was told they will return to Japan during the pandemic and will look again for opportunities to study abroad once things settle down. When asked about their life in Thunder Bay, they told me about the detailed considerations extended to them by the university, as well as their wonderful host families. In addition to those living in dormitories, some are staying with host families who push them to challenge themselves in every way, which, they told me, have resulted in changes in the way they think. In addition to developing themselves academically, they were able to gain such invaluable opportunities within a short time. As I mentioned last month, the advantages Canada offers foreign students include the variety of learning options, the ease of obtaining a student visa, the relatively small number of Japanese students, and the diverse and tolerant local population. This description certainly fits Thunder Bay. There is also the invaluable presence of Ms. Maiko Scorgie,

Lakehead University's Coordinator, International Relations. Dr. David Barnett, the University's Provost and Vice-President (Academic), explained to me that he would like to warmly welcome more Japanese students, as well as increase interest in the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme. Mr. James Aldridge, Lakehead's Vice-Provost, International, is indeed a JET alumnus.



Meeting with students at Lakehead University.



Meeting with Lakehead University's Provost and Vice-President, Dr. David Barnett, and Vice-Provost, International, Mr. James Aldridge.

The City of Thunder Bay

The next day, I went to Thunder Bay City Hall and met with Acting Mayor Brian McKinnon, as well as members of the Sister Cities Advisory Committee and the Community Economic Development Commission. We exchanged views on such topics as their city's various exchanges with Japan.

Thunder Bay has long since undertook exchange with Gifu City in Japan. Gifu acted as host town to welcome many Canadian track and field athletes ahead of the recent Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games. Exchange of people unfortunately is difficult right now in the midst of the pandemic, but this kind of activity will hopefully resume next year and onwards.

With respect to regional economic activity, Thunder Bay remains the hub for this area despite being distant from large urban centres. Aside from the local economy, Thunder Bay's close relationship with surrounding municipalities and northern territories was easy to see. As well, the city is situated on the so-called Ring of Fire, an area abundant in such resources as rare earth elements. It is expected that industries related to electric vehicles, which are currently attracting a lot of international attention, will be developed there. I was told as well as that Lakehead University acts as a catalyst for energizing the local economy by providing young and talented human resources. This is attracting interest from Japanese corporations which have noticed such characteristics of the region. Furthermore, there are future business opportunities in the beautiful natural landscape providing backdrop for the tourism industry, the promotion of Japanese cuisine, and others factors, all of which are not yet known to the world. I reaffirmed the importance of letting Japanese businesses know of the area's appeal.



**Exchanging views with
Thunder Bay city officials.**

A Lifestyle Surrounded by Nature

I also had opportunities to speak with local Japanese residents in Thunder Bay and was able to see how they were working in a variety of fields while living a full life among wondrous natural landscapes. Beavers can be spotted easily there, even though they are rarely seen in big cities. Many local residents enjoy hunting wildlife in the summer. Just going into the mountains a bit will apparently have you come across large animals like moose. I have only seen such animals in photographs, and honestly could not say what the difference is between a reindeer and a moose. However, I was told the difference is very clear when seeing the actual animals. One local Japanese resident told me that once when opening a car door this past summer, this person came face to face with a black bear. This person told me that, under such circumstances, the thing to do is to back away and leave quietly without taking your eyes off the bear. Incredibly, I was told you can even come across a cougar in the mountains. Once while working the US, I visited Yellowstone National Park and found it simply beautiful. Such natural environments which need to be protected in the United States can be approached quite casually in Canada. A three-week summer camping trip on clear waters rowing upstream by canoe. Loading food and tents and spending time fishing. Children are liberated from video games and I was told that their brains are clearly rejuvenated. The adaptability of children is truly something to behold.



**With the Japanese residents of
Thunder Bay**

On the outskirts of Thunder Bay, overlooking the bay for which the city is named, stands a statue of Terry Fox, a hero who ran across Canada while battling cancer. There is also the Kakabeka Falls nearby, known as the Niagara of the north. When I visited, much of the falls had frozen in ice, and I was treated to a mystical landscape I had never seen before.



The mystical look of the frozen Kakabeka Falls



**The statue of Terry Fox made it easy to imagine
he was still running across Ontario.**

I left Thunder Bay with the hope that exchanges with Gifu City, as well as the vitalization of the local economy, will resume next year.