

## MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL SASAYAMA TAKUYA

November 2023

Although it is now well into November, we seem to be off to a warm winter this year. With many days posting above normal temperatures, many golf courses were open until Nov. 19. Normally, they would all be closed by mid to late October, but I was pleased to be able to play a few rounds this month.



From Nov. 1 to 4, we held Next Stop: Japan, the event that I announced in my October message. It was thankfully a great success, and I would like report on some of the details.

Union Station is among Canada's most iconic terminal stations, used by approximately 200,000 people every day. About 60,000 of them pass through its West Wing, where our event was held.

People from all walks of life came to visit us during the four-day event: those who had just disembarked from the GO commuter trains; those heading to work; those who had just arrived in Canada and had taken the train from Pearson airport; those who had seen our social media posts in advance and were looking for specific booths; those who came with their families and others.

The Hon. Kinga Surma, Ontario's Minister of Infrastructure, very kindly attended the opening ceremony on Nov. 1. She explained how Japanese train stations are community hubs and not mere transportation infrastructure. She said her province finds this model useful as its Government works on the first expansion in decades of

its rail network. She said she is grateful for Ontario's partnership with Japan in support of its Transit Oriented Community.

Throughout the four days, I reaffirmed that train stations are indeed community hubs which energize people's activities. On the first day, Minister Surma also kindly spoke highly about the significance of this event during an interview with a CBC news program. Toronto's local CityNews broadcast also reported on the day.

I feel we were able to attract a wide variety of vendors to participate as exhibitors for this event, all of whom presented various charms of Japan. Food items such as sushi and bento boxes, as well as Japanese sweets, proved tremendously popular. In addition to vendors promoting Japanese cuisine, many others, including the major retailer UNIQLO, were on hand to sell various high-quality everyday items. There was also a Japanese piano capable of brightening anyone's day, as well as beautiful traditional Japanese paper (*washi*), garden plants, crafts such as *tsumami*, and the Japanese method of repairing damaged items known as kintsugi.

Visitors formed long lines around the booth established by JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization), where products mainly sold online through e-commerce by small and medium-sized businesses were on display. During the opening ceremony, Minister Surma was delighted when given a toy Shibainu which is a part of the AMAGAMI HAM HAM line of mascots. At Union Station, we were able put in practice what has become a mainstream retail format: allowing a customer to actually hold an item before they decide whether to place an online order. At the station's LCBO (Liquor Control Board of Ontario) outlet, a collaboration was held with Japanese sake distributors as part of Next Stop: Japan. Commuters both on their way to and from work stopped by, resulting in a long line at the store.

Most of the food items sold out early every day, which made me realize how difficult it must be to prepare such products while guessing the possible number of customers.

Onstage, cultural presentations included ikebana flower arrangements, calligraphy, bonsai, tea, and piano performances by a Japanese duo. All of them drew a tremendous number of visitors.

A standout presentation was a moderated discussion on railways between the celebrated transportation expert and YouTuber, Mr. Reese Martin, and Mr. OGANO Satoshi, a JETRO staff member who is also very knowledgeable about Japanese railways. Their talk was very entertaining as well as insightful and informative. The stage events wrapped up on Saturday with a demonstration by the kintsugi master known as Shuichi. His skill and commentary drew a crowd befitting a rock singer.

The concept behind this event was to recreate the Japanese “*eki naka*” (“inside the train station”) experience in Toronto, but the result was something similar to “*depa chika*” (“department store basement”). I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all the vendors who participated.



Visitors with whom I spoke provided such feedback as “I feel I’ve been exposed to a new facet of Japan,” and, “I was once again impressed by Japan and the depth provided by its long history.” I hope everyone was able to experience both Japan’s respect for tradition and its enterprising sensibilities through this event. I saw many commuters, who were clearly just passing by, stopping to take photos and videos on their cell phones. I realized this was how word of the event would spread.



According to the Union Station representatives who provided the venue, there had never been an event that drew so many people in the station's long history. We also received wonderful comments from people who thanked us for showing them concrete ways to use the new station facilities.



On Nov. 4, the final day, a crew from the Japanese broadcasters NHK came from New York to cover the event. In addition to introducing the small and medium-sized businesses present, they focused on Toronto's future prospects and how its economy is expected to continue growing, pointing out that Japan has an opportunity to take advantage of this growth. In Japan, the program aired on a Sunday afternoon,

and we received a lot of feedback from across the ocean, making our event even more significant.

This event took a tremendous amount of time to prepare. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the many vendors who exhibit, and to many more who showed a great deal of interest in Next Stop: Japan. If everyone involved in this initiative is able to put new ideas into practice in the development of Ontario's railway and infrastructure, I could not imagine anything being more successful.