



Sister City News

Palmer, Alaska - Saroma, Japan

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2016

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Hello Palmer

by Miharu Hayazaki

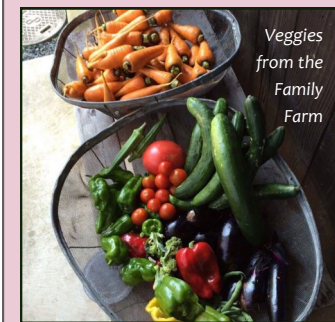
Konnichiwa, Minasan! Hello, everyone! My name is Miharu Hayazaki, and I am from Shiga prefecture in Japan. I majored in Japanese language and minored in English language at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies. Thanks to a J-LEAP grant, I will be teaching Japanese with Swick sensei at Palmer High School for the next two years. I came to Alaska in August. I am very excited to start my career in the City of Palmer.

I was very surprised to learn that Palmer is the agricultural center of Alaska. My parents are farmers and grow a lot of produce, like potatoes, eggplants, Japanese radish, tomatoes, carrots, corn, green onion, onions, green peppers, cabbage, cucumbers, strawberries, blueberries, persimmons, watermelons, chestnuts, etc. They can grow vegetables and work the fields all year round. I love eating their harvest, because everything is so fresh and organic. Ironically, when I was a little girl, I did not eat my vegetables. I have one younger sister, Minami, and we are so close. She is my cool buddy. She is majoring in agriculture at university. My hometown, Nagahama, is located in the middle of Honshu, on the island of Honshu, and is surrounded by mountains and huge rice fields. It is about one hour by car from Kyoto.

English as a Second Language), sociology, international studies, and public speaking. My friend and I organized a Japanese club for Georgia Southern University. The experience of studying abroad opened my mind and changed me so much. I became more sociable and liked collaborating with people. I also discovered that I loved teaching Japanese culture and the language. My exchange to Georgia motivated me to become a Japanese language teacher.

Georgia and my hometown of Nagahama are so different compared to Palmer, Alaska. I love the beautiful Alaskan nature so much. I would never get bored of seeing the stunning mountains in Palmer. Since I came to Alaska, one of my dreams came true. I saw the Northern Lights. That was so amazing; I cannot put it into words. Now, I love to see millions of stars at 7:00 a.m. when I go to school. It never happens in Japan, so it is very cool to see it. To be honest, I am not a big fan of Palmer's strong wind.

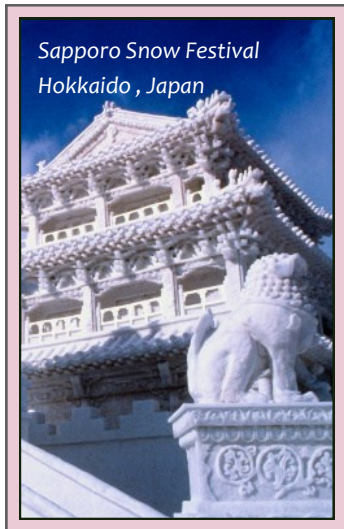
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Veggies from the Family Farm



Miharu and Family



Upcoming Calendar of Events

Japan AK Association's Rice Pounding Festival

Saturday, December 3rd from 3 - 6 pm at the Asian Alaskan Cultural Center (Northwood Elementary, Anchorage).

Free (but bring some spending money for delicious rice cakes, drinks, and the Japanese goods flea market)

Christmas Cranes

Saturday, Dec 10th 2016 from 12- 3pm.

Palmer Library
655 S Valley Way, Palmer

See the back page of the newsletter for more details.

New Year's Celebration

Saturday, Jan 14th 2017 from 2- 4 pm.

Palmer United Protestant Church (Church of 1000 Trees) 713 S Denali St, Palmer

See the back page of the newsletter for more details.

Palmer to Saroma - Exchange Highlights

By Palmer Students

Haley Hershman

The thing that I love the most about the sister school exchange is the bonds and friendships we made.

During the two weeks, we got to know each other so well and had so much fun together.

We've made so many memories and are pretty much like best friends now. Even though it's still hard to understand each other at times, feelings translate beyond words. New family and friendship is not defined by distance, but in the memories that you cherish with them.

I was sad to leave Japan, but I love that we are able to build on these friendships by hosting our new friends in Palmer.

Thank you to the cities of Palmer and Saroma and Palmer High for this experience.

Tucker Christiansen

My favorite day of the exchange was when all the middle school host families took an overnight trip to a cottage about two hours from Saroma.

We grilled steak, chicken, scallops, oysters, and so many other

foods. After we ate, most of us went inside and played Jenga with the Saroma students! It was one of my best experiences because I loved how we could bond and have fun by communicating through games.

Everyone was so nice and loving. They took amazing care of us. I also didn't see even one case of bullying or unkindness. I wish that was what the whole world was like. It inspired me to be a better person in my day-to-day life, and not let the bad things bring me down.

Lilly Bryan

My alarm clock started singing. I opened my eyes to a new day. I was tired but excited to find out what we were doing that day. When we arrived at the elemen-

tary school, we were told to put on our inside shoes. We took our outside shoes off in a sunken down area, stepped into the school and put on our inside shoes. We lined up facing the students and introduced ourselves in Japanese. There were about 30 students and they sat very quietly.

After introductions, we showed the kids how to do the Gummy Bear dance. All the kids laughed. After that, we split up into groups and taught them the dance. They didn't understand English, but they loved it.

Visiting Japan was an experience I will not forget soon. I loved learning about their culture, food, and everyday life.

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Palmer exchange students at Lake Saroma

Hello Palmer cont...

It makes me crazy. I felt like I was going to fly away. People tell me that it will be getting colder, so I need to get used to Alaska's cold weather. I am looking forward to experiencing Palmer's wintertime.

Every day is a new day. To me, that means bad days can be just as valuable as good days. I have learned so many things from each student. I have noticed there are various students who have different backgrounds. Of course, students have moods, worries, and different ways of thinking that can change on a

day to day basis. I think the most important thing in a classroom is building trust and a sense of community. Relationships are so vital. So, I want to seriously listen to all my students' voices.

I love teaching Japanese with Swick sensei. I love her teaching style because it is very practical. She is always positive and a great listener. It is challenging for me to teach Japanese, but at the same time it is very fun and interesting to communicate with students. My goal is not only to teach the Japanese lan-

guage, but to also teach about Japanese culture. I want to motivate students and Palmer citizens, so they want to know more about Japan. I realized that I really love PHS and interacting with students and staff. Sometimes I am still shy to say hello or communicate with others, but I want to try to do my best. Thank you so much for warmly welcoming me to Palmer and giving me the opportunity to introduce myself. I love being a Moose and feel at home in Palmer. Douzo yoroshiku onegaishimasu.

by Miharu Hayazaki

Palmer to Saroma - Exchange Highlights cont...

Anika McDonough

This trip showed me that the world really can be better. In my perspective, the USA doesn't do a lot of recycling, while Japan does much more than what you could ever imagine. I saw one garbage can in the entire time I was there, and it was in someone's house, not in public. They are so energy efficient too.

At first I was worried that Japan might be like China and have a lot of pollution, but that is far from the case. Even in Tokyo, there wasn't much pollution.

Another thing that had an impact on me was how polite everyone was there. I didn't have one person be rude to me at all, not even the kids. All of them respected each other and their teachers as well. Now being here it's so different, and I honestly can't wait for another chance to go to Japan.

Anesia Pavilla

One of my fond memories is visiting an amusement park and shopping with my host family.

At the amusement park we met the other middle school students (Anika, Lily, Tucker) and their host families. We rode Crazy Mouse (a roller coaster), go carts, and a carousel.

I am not sure what the games that we played were called, but I do remember that some of the prizes were bouncy balls, small board games, and katanas/swords.

I feel like this whole trip has helped me with communication and teaching others. Now I wish to go back to Japan because I now feel spiritually connected with Japan and I wish to make more friends there.

I thank those who allowed me to go on this trip and suggest that others get involved with the Sister City Program.

Connor Monroe

The thing that truly fascinated me about Japan was its cleanliness. The whole time I was there I saw like only one piece of trash on the ground.

They even reuse their empty scallop shells. They grind them up and use it as gravel for the new roads they are making. They have found a way to minimize landfills because they recycle bottles and lids.

They also make big compost piles to help give the land more nutrients. This helps the Saroma farmers boost their crops without worrying about sucking the land dry. I love how they treat everyone and everything with respect— even the land.

Hannah Villanueva

On my last day in Saroma, I remember waking up at 7:00 AM and smelling the miso soup we had every morning for breakfast, along with rice, tiny pieces of fried chicken, and sweet bread. As we all sat down to eat, I remember thinking how much I would miss having Japanese food every day, but more importantly, how much I would miss my host family.

At Saroma High we visited the classrooms one last time and the students taught us how to write our names in kanji.

Next, we attended the farewell assembly where we each gave our farewell speech in front of the entire school.

My two weeks in Saroma were some of the best weeks of my life. From bike riding along the coast of Lake Saroma to doing zazen at a Buddhist temple, every day was simply amazing.

Thank you to everyone who made this trip wonderful. Saroma now truly feels like my second home.

Tabitha Villanueva

Almost every day, our group went to 7/11. This might come as a shock, but Japanese convenient stores have some of the most "oishi" (delicious) and kawaii (cute) foods I have ever encountered. From the corn-dogs to the ice cream, the flavors are unlike any American food.

While I was in Japan, my brain was constantly searching for the similarities and differences between Japan and Alaska. As I was biking, I felt at peace because the fields of green, distant mountains, and roaring ocean reminded me of home. The bridge we crossed, that separated Lake Saroma from the Pacific Ocean, evoked memories of crossing the Matanuska Bridge in Palmer. And finally, stopping by the sandy beach off the bike path and sinking my toes in the sand made me think of summers fishing in Kenai.

Every day came with some similarities, some differences, and a new found appreciation for the town of Saroma, Japan.



Saroma to Palmer - Exchange Highlights

By Saroma Students

Kotone Honda

When I first saw my host family I was a little nervous, but everyone was so nice! I especially want to thank Haley and her family. They became a part of my own family.

My best memory is Homecoming. The assembly cheerleading performance and the student movie were very exciting to watch. The next day was the football game. I had never seen a football game before, and I didn't understand the rules. But, I eagerly watched it anyway. The day after that was the dance party. It was like a club! As I thought, America really is a different country. I think it would be interesting if we had something similar in Japan.

Kaede Shirakawa

There were three things that stood out for me.

The first was climbing Matanuska Glacier. There was one point where I was very scared, but I kept going. It took about an hour and a half, but it was really fun to go hiking and try glacier water.

The second thing was going to the fire and police station as both were a bit different compared to stations in Japan.

The third was getting used to daily life in Palmer. Of course, the food and house customs (wearing shoes in the house) are totally different. If I have the opportunity to go to Palmer again, I want to go!

Reo Gaman

My most vivid memory of the Palmer trip was the dance party. Having a party and dancing from 8pm to 10pm would be unthinkable in Saroma. It really left an impression on me.

I'm grateful towards so many people at Palmer High School. Japanese teacher Carla Swick

and her team teacher Miharu planned and played games in their classes which gave me the chance to easily make friends. Thank you Kim Akers for a wonderful schedule, and vice-principal Garth Morgan for being our guide at the glacier.

Lastly, I want to thank Conner and his family. I'm forever grateful for your support.

Nanami Kaibe

This was my second visit to Palmer. I was able to have many wonderful experiences, like going shopping, seeing a film, and eating beautiful food. The most fun part was going to school, and my happiest moments were getting to spend time with my host family.

We were able to see a lot of Alaska's nature, like Matanuska Glacier and the Portage visitors' center. I was moved by Alaska's vast natural beauty, which is never seen in Japan. The most precious experience was getting to learn about the colonists of Palmer. Learning about their daily lives, I was able to understand Palmer's history.

I had a wonderful time. Thank you so much.

Haruki Onishi

When I arrived in Palmer, I stayed with the Hushowers. Everything -- from their house, to their yard, to their dog -- was so big!

The first weekend everyone came over to their house and we had a party.

It was fun visiting the preschool and the elementary school. We made origami together with the kids. Then we went to a Hum-dingers and made our own pizzas. I love meat, so my pizza had salami, bacon, and lots of other meats. During all of this, I had my host brother Jesse with me. It was a lot of fun.

On this trip I was able to see a big glacier and moose up close, and many other experiences I could have never had in Japan. This trip to Palmer was truly precious to me.

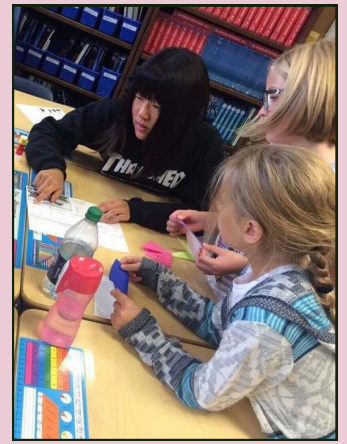
Moka Yamaguchi

In going to Palmer it was all a wonderful experience. The culture is different and surprising. The biggest thing that surprised me was school rules. Food and drinks are OK; having your phone is OK; I kept thinking, "Is this really OK?" I like how when students wanted to answer a question they quietly raised their hands and waited for the teacher to call on them. Everyone had such a positive attitude in class.

I also thought my host family was very kind. For this trip I stayed with Anika's family. Anika has a huge family of 12 people! I was nervous and wondered if I'd be able to get used to life in Palmer, but I was surrounded by good and kind people. I went many places with Anika and her family, learned everyone's names, played on a trampoline, and rode an ATV.

When I didn't know how to say something, I'd use gestures, and I was able to make myself understood. I feel like a smile is the global language. I truly think this experience was a great thing.

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"I feel like a smile is the global language."

Moka Yamaguchi



Saroma exchange students at Palmer High School

Saroma Fall Festival - 秋祭り

By Brenna Kennicker

While Saroma's most well known festival, Kabocha Matsuri (Pumpkin Festival) is the largest festival of the year, the town has another, smaller festival. In the same month called Aki Matsuri (the Fall Festival). It is a 2-day celebration of Fall and the harvest.

The purpose of this festival is to give thanks for the year's harvest and to pray for continued good health and prosperity in the coming year.

The Saroma Cultural Festival occurs on Saturday. It is a yearly event where many of the cultural organizations and clubs in Saroma show off their wares. Performances of songs and dances also take place. Acts ranged from brass band concerts to hula dancing. There were also various exhibitions put on by the Saroma Ikebana (flower arranging) Club, a student calligraphy group, and many others.

As the cultural festival ended many people walked to the former Saroma Train Station

(now a park) where many stalls were set up with food and games. Popular festival foods in Saroma are yakitori (grilled chicken skewers), yakisoba (fried noodles with sauce), and takoyaki (fried balls of dough with octopus inside).

The most popular festival game is the goldfish catching game. Children are given a small 'net' made with thick paper, and they try to catch as many goldfish as they can before the net breaks. The goldfish can be taken home and kept as pets.

On Sunday morning the official part of the festival begins at Saroma shrine. According to Shinto, the indigenous religion of Japan, everything has a Kami or spirit. These Kami are often housed in large shrines, but for festivals they can be transported via a Mikoshi, or portable shrine. Saroma has two portable shrines. The larger one is carried by high school students and a smaller one is carried by elementary school students. A procession is formed, led by a

man dressed as a deity called Sarutahito who guides the procession through the town and is followed by people dressed in traditional clothing.

The procession winds its way through town, stopping at different homes and businesses where offerings of freshly harvested vegetables, fish, and other foods are laid out. These offerings are meant as gifts for the Kami. In giving these offerings, the people hope for good health, fortune, and prosperity in the coming year.

Following the procession is a traditional dance group. The dancers are all students here in Saroma. They wear kimono, traditional hairstyles and makeup, and perform many different dances throughout the day. Not only are these dances for the entertainment of the community, but are also for the entertainment of the Kami too. For many people, watching the dances is the best part of the festival, and they are very popular.



Saroma to Palmer - Exchange Highlights cont...

Shion Hori

I stayed in Palmer for two weeks with Tucker's family.

We went to many schools. One thing that surprised me was the smart boards. In Japan we still use blackboards and chalk, but in Palmer they have these projectors and white boards that you can write on with a touch. You can even write in different fonts and colors. I kept thinking it would be amazing if we had something similar in Japan.

We visited Matanuska Glacier; it was my first time seeing a glacier and was a lot of fun. I was surprised you could drink glacier water. It was delicious! I wanted to take some back to

Japan to share.

The best part of my trip was going shopping. Tucker's mother took us to a big store. They had so many different types of items and the shopping carts were very big and heavy.

Tucker's family took wonderful care of me. It was a really great experience.

Tsugumi Otani

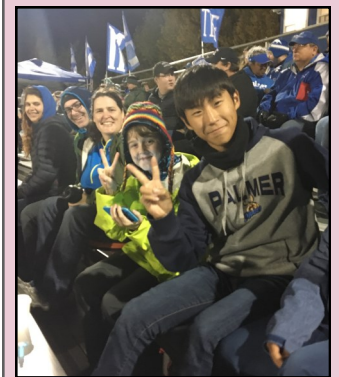
This was my second visit to Palmer. I got to experience many cultural differences and have a lot of different experiences.

I participated in different classes at Palmer High School. I was surprised that the greetings in

Palmer's Japanese classes were almost identical to how we start and end classes here.

During my final week in Palmer, it was Homecoming. Every day had a different theme. The best day was Disney Day. I wasn't sure if people would really dress up or not, but there were people dressed as Disney princesses in the entryway, and the Japanese teachers Carla and Miharu were dressed in Pooh and Tigger costumes.

I got to participate in classes and meet many different people. Everyone was always so nice and friendly. That is my best memory of my time there.



Please Join Us for these Sister City Community Events



December 10th, 2016 from 12-3 pm

Christmas Cranes

Create your own origami crane Christmas ornament.

Saturday, Dec 10th 2016, 12- 3pm
Palmer Library
655 S Valley Way, Palmer

Cranes are majestic birds that are recognized as symbols of honor and loyalty and remind us of the special Sister City relationship between Palmer, Alaska and Saroma, Japan.

- Make a unique and beautiful

ornament for your holiday tree.

- Enjoy family fun for all ages.
- Learn more about our Sister City in Japan.
- Materials and instruction are provided for FREE.

This event will be part of the annual Colony Christmas event.



January 14, 2017 from 2-4 pm

A New Year's Celebration

Join us for a Japanese New Year's Celebration.

Saturday, Jan 14th 2017, 2- 4 pm
Palmer United Protestant Church (Church of 1000 Trees)
713 S Denali St, Palmer

There will be Japanese games, snacks, and refreshments.

The event will also include a very brief annual meeting for Palmer Saroma Kai, the non-profit group that supports the

Sister City Program. The meeting will include reports from the board president and treasurer, as well as board member elections.

If you would like to run for a board member seat, contact Carla Swick at 775-0807.



The Sister City Program, established in 1980, works together with the Sister Schools Program in the cities of Palmer, Alaska and Saroma, Japan, to promote cultural enlightenment, student and teacher exchanges, international good will, and lasting relationships between cities.

This newsletter is published by Palmer Saroma Kai, an organization that provides encouragement and support for the relationship between the Sister Cities of Palmer, Alaska and Saroma, Japan.

To submit articles, photos, or items of public interest, please contact Carla Swick at carlaswick2010@gmail.com or by phone 907-775-0807.

Your comments, suggestions, and constructive feedback are welcome!