

Dear Friends,

I was appointed as Consul-General of Japan in Chicago on October 14th 2019.

Everybody that I have met has told me that the winters in Chicago are severely cold but the people are very warm and kind. I realize that “the outside being freezing cold, while having warmth in one’s heart” is the true characteristic of the Midwest, the heartland of America.

Chicago is known for its many famous sports teams in baseball, basketball, football, and hockey, as well as being a cultural city represented by the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and a rich history of Jazz and Blues. With all this in mind, I am very excited to assume my post here as Consul-General. The popular band Chicago has always been my favorite and I have been listening to Bob Seger & the Silver Bullet Band, Dan Fogelberg, Styx, Prince, Cheap Trick, John Cougar Mellencamp, and Kansas ever since I was in middle school.

The 10 states under the jurisdiction of the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago (Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota,) are known for a variety of industries in manufacturing, agriculture, tourism and finance. The Japanese businesses in these states are very active as well.

As the Consulate-General, our first priority is to provide consular services that contribute to the safety and security of the approximately 35,000 Japanese nationals living within our 10 state jurisdiction. It is also a top priority to ensure the safety of overseas educational facilities (Japanese schools, Japanese supplementary schools) as well as Japanese nationals visiting the U.S. For this purpose, we will enhance the quality of services at our consulate, continue to provide traveling consular service, and present timely information on our website and by e-mail.

In order to further develop the economic relationship between Japan and the Midwest, the Consulate-General will put forth the utmost effort, based on the opinions and requests from Japanese companies. There are approximately 1,600 Japanese business facilities in our 10-state jurisdiction, creating around 160,000 jobs that contribute to the local economy and serve as the foundation of a strong Japan-U.S. relations. I will do my best to convey this wonderful situation to people, both inside and outside of this country. I would also like to further strengthen the understanding of Japan in the people of each state, as well as the understanding of the Midwest in the people in Japan.

In addition, we would like to actively promote Japanese culture and facilitate exchanges between sister cities and other grassroots – level exchanges. There are 72 sister state / sister city relationships between various parts of Japan and the Midwest, and Japanese culture is

widely promoted through Japanese festivals and other events. I feel very encouraged by Japan's soft power and I am so grateful for their on-going efforts. I am very excited to meet all the people who are engaged in these events.

Anything would not be possible for the Consulate-General without the close collaboration with JETRO Chicago, Japanese Chambers of Commerce, Japan-America Societies, Japanese associations, Japanese-American organizations, the Midwest U.S.-Japan Association, the sister city associations, etc. I look forward to working with all of them and strengthening our consolidated efforts.

Our mission is to ensure the safety and security of Japanese nationals and at the same time further develop exchanges and economic ties between Japan and the U.S. To that end, I will continue my constant efforts with our staff to be an open-minded Consulate-General to better serve everyone in need. Please feel free to share your frank opinions in order to further improve our operations. We thank you for your continued support and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Kenichi Okada
Consul-General of Japan in Chicago