

NEWS RELEASE



**Consulate-General
of Japan in Chicago**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Foreign Minister's Commendations for FY2021

On August 20, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the recipients of the Foreign Minister's Commendations for 2021. This year, commendations will be awarded to 177 individuals and 41 organizations.

Within the Consulate General of Japan in Chicago's jurisdiction, the following four individuals and four groups have been selected for their contributions to the strengthening of relations between the United States and Japan.

1. Individuals

Mr. James A. Schellinger, Indiana Secretary of Commerce

Jim paved the way in encouraging the strong economic ties and investment climate between Indiana and Japan. During his tenure as Secretary of Commerce and CEO of the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), he committed to the conclusion of a Memorandum of Understanding to promote economic and trade relations between Indiana and Japan. In addition, he contributed to strengthening U.S.-Japan relations at the grassroots level by organizing the second U.S.-Japan Infrastructure Forum in 2018, which led to more Japanese companies investing in the region.

Ms. Josephine H. Oyama-Miller, President of Madison-Obihiro Sister Cities, Inc.

Jo has served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Madison-Obihiro Sister Cities Association since 2007, and as its President since 2010 she has been actively promoting sister city exchanges between the U.S. and Japan. She has also contributed to the development of a diverse community in the region, including that of Asian Americans, through her work as a member of the Dane County Redistricting Commission in Wisconsin, to which she was appointed in 2020. The City of Madison and the City of Obihiro in Hokkaido have been sister cities since October 2006 and have deepened their relationship through various exchanges.

Ms. Monica Mitsuko Rokuhira, Former Japanese Language Teacher, Langston Hughes Elementary School, Chicago

Monica is a former Japanese language teacher at Langston Hughes Elementary School in Chicago. Langston Hughes Elementary School is one of the few elementary schools in Chicago that provides elementary school students with the opportunity to learn Japanese. She has continuously provided children at the school with opportunities to experience Japanese language and culture for many years, contributing to the promotion of Japanese language and the better understanding of Japan in the local community. She continues to work as a volunteer Japanese language teacher to further Japanese language education by providing support to new Japanese language teachers.

Ms. Vickie Sakurada Schaepler, Coordinator, Japanese Hall and History Project

Vickie coordinates the Japanese Hall and History Project at the Legacy of the Plains Museum in Gering, Nebraska. The Japanese community in Nebraska built the Hall back in 1928. Vickie is involved in all aspects of the project, such as relocating the Hall, fundraising, collecting documents and artifacts, and leading a team of interested volunteers who have made the project a reality. She also gives lectures on the history of the Japanese and Japanese Americans in Nebraska. She is a member of the History Nebraska Board of Trustees, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) Omaha Chapter, and the Japanese American Resource Center of Colorado (JARCC).

2. Groups

Iowa Sister States Yamanashi Committee

The Iowa Sister States Yamanashi Committee was established in 1960 when Yamanashi Prefecture was hit by an unprecedented typhoon disaster in 1959 and received 35 pigs and corn for feed from the State of Iowa. Over the past 60 years, the committee has supported exchanges in many fields, including education, culture, economics, and sports. In addition to accepting and dispatching civic groups, the committee also works with several universities in the state to coordinate the acceptance of high school students, and is committed to human exchange between the sister cities.

Minneapolis Ibaraki Sister City Association

The Minneapolis Ibaraki Sister City Association was established in 1980 following the establishment of a sister city relationship between Minneapolis and Ibaraki City in Osaka Prefecture. The association actively supports exchanges between the two cities, which celebrated the 40th anniversary of their sister city affiliation last year. It also contributes to the promotion of friendship between the two cities and the understanding of Japanese culture by holding various events, such as the annual haiku contest and the cherry blossom festival. The association also

played an important role in the restoration of the "Bell of Two Friends" sculpture, a symbol of friendship between the two cities, which is located on Nicollet Island

Saint Paul-Nagasaki Sister City Committee

The Saint Paul-Nagasaki Sister City Committee was established to promote exchanges between the two cities, which became the first sister cities in Japan and the United States in 1955. The sister city relationship celebrated its 65th anniversary last year, and active exchanges continue to this day. Based on the cities' strong belief in building peace, the committee has been involved in organizing memorial events and exhibitions in remembrance of the atomic bombings, as well as actively accepting and dispatching citizen groups and exchange students to strengthen the relationship between the two cities. In addition, the committee holds various events such as the Obon Festival and the Cherry Blossom Festival every year to introduce and promote understanding of Japanese culture.

Wisconsin Chiba, Inc.

Wisconsin Chiba, Inc. was founded following the establishment of the sister states relationship between Wisconsin and Chiba Prefecture in 1990. The organization has supported active exchanges in the fields of culture and education between the two states, and has worked hard to develop the sister states relationship, which celebrated its 30th anniversary last year. The organization has contributed to the promotion of friendship between the two states by providing opportunities for the people of Wisconsin and Chiba Prefecture to experience their respective cultures, such as receiving delegations from Chiba Prefecture.

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