

FRIENDSHIP
NEWS

SHINZEN
TSUUSHIN

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To all of our friends and supporters in Abilene and Omitama:

Akemashite omedetou gozaimasu.

明けましておめでとうございます。

Happy New Year!

Kotoshi mo yoroshiku onegaishimasu.

ことしもよろしくおねがいします。

Looking forward to our continued relationship
in the coming year.

In this edition of Shinzen Tsuushin:

From the Chair of the Sister City Committee

The New Year:

Year of the Rabbit

New Year's celebration in Japan

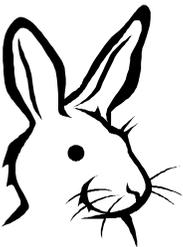
Japan Club

News from the Sister City Board



From Donna Reynolds,
Chair of the Abilene-
Omitama Sister City
Board:

As 2010 draws to a close it gives me great pleasure to reflect on the past year. The “Flying Swine” delegation spent 10 days in Japan but many more days building a lifetime of happy memories. All the hard work preparing for the trip paid off. The 13 students and 6 adults have many great pictures and wonderful stories that they are still sharing with family and friends. With our modern technology, it has been convenient to keep in touch with Facebook. I look forward to 2011 and preparing for the delegation to visit Abilene. A very Happy New Year to all!



Year of the Rabbit . . .

2011 is the Year of the Rabbit (*usagi*—うさぎ), the fourth animal in the twelve year cycle of the Chinese cycle of years (so called because of its origination from China.) Preceding the year of the Rabbit (or Hare) are the Rat, Ox, and Tiger; following the Rabbit are the Dragon, Snake, Horse, Ram, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig.

There are a number of mythological stories which explain the origin of this 12 year cycle. One of them goes like this:

The Buddha promised to designate the first 12

animals as the signs of a year in order of appearance at a meeting. One night before the event the cat and his pal the rat agreed that the first to wake the following morning would wake the other. However, the rat broke his promise and arrived at the meeting first. The ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and pig followed respectively. When the cat finally awoke and hurried to the meeting place, it was all over. According to legend, this is why cats prey on rats.

This story also explains why the cat does not appear in the cycle as observed in China, Japan or Korea, though it does in the Vietnamese observance.

People born in the year of the Rabbit are considered most fortunate. They are thought to be smooth talkers, talented, ambitious, virtuous and reserved. They have exceedingly fine taste and regarded with admiration and trust.

New Years in Japan . . . Although *Shogatsu* means January, it is celebrated for the first 3 days or the first week of January.

These days are considered the most important holidays for the Japanese. One could equate it with the celebration of Christmas in the west. During this time business and schools close for one to two weeks. It is also a time for people to return to their families which leads to the inevitable backlog of travelers. The Japanese decorate their houses, but before the decorations start to be put up a general house cleaning is done. The most common New Year's decorations are pine and bamboo, sacred straw festoons, and oval shaped rice cakes.

On New Year's eve, bells (*joya no kane*) are rung

108 times at the local temples to speed out the old year. The New Year is welcomed in by the eating of year-crossing noodles (*toshikoshi-soba*) on the evening before. For many western style clothing is replaced with kimono on New Years day as people go for their first temple or shrine visit of the New Year (*hatsumoude*). At the temples and shrines they pray for health and happiness in the coming year. The reading New Year's cards (*nengajou*) and the giving of gifts (*otoshidama*) to young children are also apart of the New Year celebrations.

Food plays a big part of Japanese New Year's celebrations. *Osechi-ryori* are special dishes eaten on the first three days of the New Year. Grilled and vinegary dishes are served in multi-layered lacquered boxes (*jubako*). The dishes are design to be pleasant to look at, and keep for days so that the mother is free from having to cook for three days. There are some regional differences but the *osechi* dishes are basically the same nationwide. Each of the food types in the boxes represents a wish for the future. Sea Bream (*tai*) is "auspicious" (*medetai*). Herring roe (*kazunoko*) is "the prosperity of one's descendants". Sea tangle roll (*kobumaki*) is "Happiness" (*yorokobu*).

The above is taken from the web site japanese.about.com/od/japansecultur1/a/123099.htm moderated by Namiko Abe.



Japan Club of Abilene . . . At our December meeting the theme was "Merry Christmas" (メリクリスマス). Those attending had fun dressing in kimono and having a picture taken . . .



. . . and hearing from Club sponsor Elizabeth Shimabuku about Christmas celebrations in Japan. Elizabeth went to Japan as an Assistant English Teacher (AET),



married, and lived six years in Japan. Members were treated to make your-own sushi, Christmas cake, and Ramune soda. Gifts from Japan were also given to each person. These were provided generously by Chiho Tsutsumi and Keiko Sexton by way of Club sponsor Donna Reynolds.

Our next meeting will be Sunday, January 16. Our theme will be "The New Year" and one of our activi-

News from the Abilene-Omitama Sister City Board . . .

Two important upcoming events will be front and center in the work of the Board.

First, our current AET, Jason Gibson, completes his tenure at the end of the current school year. We have received from Omitama that they would welcome a new AET. The application process is now underway. Applicants must be a graduate from college or university with a bachelor's degree (and degree in education is not required), and must be willing and able to commit to at least one year living and working in the school system of Omitama. The successful candidate should be able to live independently and be very flexible in adjusting to new and unfamiliar cultural situations, customs, and occasions. For more information, contact Donna Reynolds at 785-263-4169. It is anticipated that applications will be reviewed at the January meeting of the Board and a selection made by the February meeting. This will allow ample time for the new AET to complete the necessary paper work for passports, visa, and travel.

The second major project for the Board is the 2011 Omitama delegation visit to Abilene in late July/early August. At our November meeting the Board members began volunteering to head the various committees necessary to ensure an enjoyable and successful visit. It is anticipated that Board members will be recruiting Friends of Sister City to aid in the planning and arrangements.

Among the tasks to be done is:

- ◆ Recruiting of host families
- ◆ Special event planning (welcoming and departing events with meals)
- ◆ Itinerary (places to see, things to do)
- ◆ Transportation (pick up and return to airport as well as for the various itinerary events.)

If you are interested and would be willing to

help in one of these areas, please contact Donna Reynolds at 263-4169 or Ron Rein at 263-1092.

The Board also completed updating the Friends of Abilene-Omitama Sister City organization. Board members spent time calling previously identified members to determine their willingness to continue as a Friend. E-mail addresses were acquired so that we might foster better communications between the Board and Friends as we work to improve and expand our relationship with our Sister City.

Along my journey
through this transitory world,
new year's housecleaning
Matsuo Basho

Matsuo Basho, 1644-1694. Of samurai stock, he lived simply as a kind of hermit, earning a small amount of income from his disciples through teaching and judging poetry contests and traveling through much of central and northern Japan. He is considered a superlative haikai no renga poet.

Abilene-Omitama Sister City Committee

Donna Reynolds, Chair
Ron Rein, Vice-chair
Jackie Bisnette, Treasurer
Corina Ryland, Secretary
Jerry Rankin
Mary Zey
Mary Montgomery
Lisa Wright
Elizabeth Shimabuku

Meetings of the Sister City Committee are held the fourth Tuesday of each month starting at 7:00 p.m. and are open to the public. Meetings are held in the conference room of the Convention and Visitor's Bureau (use west entrance).