

S i s t e r C i t y R e l a t i o n s h i p Manitowoc, Wisconsin and Kamogawa, Chiba, Japan

On August 3, 1993, Mayor Toshio Honda of Kamogawa, Japan (on the Pacific Coast near Tokyo) and Mayor Kevin Crawford of Manitowoc, Wisconsin signed a Sister City Agreement in order to forge a long-term relationship between the two cities. This was the first sister-city relationship within the sister-state relationship between the State of Wisconsin, USA and the Prefecture of Chiba, Japan. Because of this sister-state relationship, the development of a sister-city agreement between the cities of Manitowoc and Kamogawa was commended, encouraged and supported by Governor of Wisconsin Tommy Thompson.

This sister-city relationship was advocated for and substantially supported by many industries in the City of Manitowoc that rely on Japan as a major market for their products. One out of six jobs in the State of Wisconsin exists because of our export trade. It is through the sharing of business and cultural interests that strangers become friends and our similarities are recognized as greater than our differences.

Kamogawa and Manitowoc are similar in size of population, both face a major body of water to the east and both cities enjoy a growing tourism industry. So how did it all begin? In 1973, Kikkoman Company opened a facility in Walworth, Wisconsin. Executives of the Kikkoman Company encouraged the State of Wisconsin to enter a sister-state relationship with Chiba Prefecture which occurred in 1990. This opened the doors for a sister-city relationship. At an international trade conference in May of 1993, the Wisconsin trade representative from Tokyo, Mr. Tanaka, asked Perk Foster of Foster Needle Company if he would investigate the possibility of forming a sister-city relationship between Manitowoc and Kamogawa. First, a City delegation from Kamogawa came to visit Manitowoc. This was followed by a Manitowoc delegation lead by Mayor Kevin Crawford visiting Kamogawa.

3 months after Mr. Tanaka first approached Mr. Foster, on August 3, 1993, the agreement was in place. Since then, the lives of hundreds or perhaps thousands in Manitowoc have been touched in a positive way through visits by groups from Kamogawa to Manitowoc and groups from Manitowoc visiting Kamogawa.

One main objective of the sister city relationship is to help “internationalize” the youth of Manitowoc and better prepare them for the global community the world is and will continue to become. There is no doubt that this has been achieved for those students who have participated since the first student summer exchange program was initiated in 1995. During the summer, 6 students from each city spend 20 days with each other in homestays in Manitowoc and then in Kamogawa.

In 1995, Mayor Honda brought a delegation to Manitowoc to dedicate the new 8th Street downtown drawbridge. Mayor Honda then returned with a friendship delegation in 2000, and returned most recently for the dedication of Manitowoc’s new City Hall in July 2001. Mayor Crawford led a friendship delegation to Kamogawa in September

2001. Mayor Crawford leads a friendship delegation to Kamogawa in September 2004 in honor of the 10th anniversary of the sister-city relationship.

In addition to friendship exchanges, civil servant delegations have also traveled between the two cities, there have been student art exchanges, and the Manitowoc Lakeshore Wind Ensemble performed in Kamogawa in 1995 followed by the Kamogawa Junior Choir performing in Manitowoc in 1996. In 2001, Garth Neustadter, a local virtuoso musician, and his family performed at SeaFesta and the State Fair in Kamogawa and the City of Manitowoc once again hosted the Kamogawa Junior Choir.

August 2001 marked the 8th anniversary of the signing of the sister-city relationship and to date, it has been a great relationship providing years of joy as a result of the bonds of friendship created. The sister-city relationship between Manitowoc and Kamogawa continues to blossom and grow. To symbolize this connection, Kamogawa delegates have planted cherry blossom trees at several Manitowoc locations, and Manitowoc delegates have reciprocated by planting sugar maple trees in Kamogawa. In recognition of these efforts, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources presented Manitowoc and Kamogawa with the 2001 Urban Forestry Long-Term Partnership award. Today, the City of Manitowoc and the City of Kamogawa share one of the most vibrant sister-city relationships in the nation.

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