

## **Report by Wisconsin Goodwill Delegation Culture Group Members**

James Croft and Sharon Durtka

The Wisconsin Chiba, Inc. Goodwill Delegation 2016 Culture Group, Dance Academy of Mexico - Milwaukee (DAOM) is a dance group that presents authentic regional dances of Mexico. Their mission is to preserve and safeguard Mexican traditions. Their vision is to promote education and diversity through the arts. Dances from the Aztecs, Veracruz and Jalisco were performed by Marina Croft, the teacher/director/owner of DAOM, Benjamin Croft, Itahiza Cano Tamez and Itzel Nunez; James Croft, director, managed all of the outfits, drum and music.

Jack Takahashi, Mindy Michalski and Sharon Durtka provided the orientations for our Goodwill Delegation, encouraging us to prepare saying that preparation is the first part of the visit. Together we compiled a list of our “three must see or do while in Japan.” And to our surprise each of us all came home having experienced our three wishes! Our short visit was an incredible experience – something of which we never dreamed when we made the decision.

We arrived in Narita on Saturday at 3:15 pm and were greeted warmly by Yasako Aoki, Tetsugi Ogawa, Shigeo Moriyama and others. We felt so welcomed and checked into our comfortable Hotel Mecure rooms. Dinner in the restaurant across the street served “Japanese” Italian food and although we were tired, we enjoyed the food and had a good time talking and getting to know everyone.

After our Sunday hotel breakfast the Education Group left for Chiba City and we became just the “Culture Group”; we traveled by bus to Mobara City. It was incredible to watch the Japanese countryside, businesses, and homes pass by. On the way, we chatted with the CWA members like Tetusji Ogawa who told us about his tracking down a pen pal from Wisconsin 40 years after their last correspondence.

At the Mobara City Hall we meet our host families. Although we were nervous we were also excited. Everyone was so kind and welcoming that we quickly became comfortable. The afternoon began with a short stop at our host families’ homes to unpack, have lunch, and be a for-the-moment tourists with our family guided mini-tour. The welcome dinner was held at the Yamato-ya Ryokan in Mobara City. We were welcomed warmly with the Nezumi flutes a playing of the United States national anthem. The evening was then full of talking and activities and eating. We all had a great time getting to know our and others’ host families.

Each morning after breakfast with our host families, we gathered at the Mobara City Hall for a day of adventure, meeting new friends and sharing our cultural heritage. Our agenda included a courtesy visit with Mayor Tanaka and other officials who welcomed us to Mobara City; we met Mobarin, Mobara City's mascot and to learned the story of the meeting of the prince and princess on the Milky Way once each year.

We took part in Chado - a tea ceremony, then performed to an appreciative audience and received the gift of flute playing of our host families and a calligraphy performance by Fuuga Tsuji. We dyed silk handkerchiefs in two different ways. After dinner at the Restaurant Honolulu House, we exchanged performances with an incredible performance of traditional Japanese dance.

Our courtesy visit with the energetic and very expressive Governor Morita was an honor; we also met translator Zachary Krause, a young Wisconsinite. We visited to Kizarazu City and Umihotaro a bridge-tunnel in the Toyko Bay. Our first school visit was Takudai Koryo High School in Kizarazu City; our exchange of performance included a Karate demonstration and calligraphy class.

At Mobara Middle High School our visit began with sweets and green tea. Walking through the school we were impressed by the quantity and quality of art on the walls and ceilings and the school's cleanliness and organization.

We performed in a gymnasium full of students sitting on the floor; all the students sang and 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade marching band played. Lunch was with the students in their classrooms who served and cleaned up – they demonstrated personal responsibility for one's role in recycling and keeping the class, building and city clean. Our visit to Chosei High School in Mobara City began with the school principal, administrators and a small dance troupe who wanted to know what dances were popular; we taught them a type of square dance. The principal asked us show the same dance to the rest of the students. After our performance we taught the dance to the 100 students audience. Back to Mobara City Hall for another performance, Nezumi's bamboo flute music, Fuuga's calligraphy and Japanese dances for the public. Everyone was invited to try these dance. After many photos we joined our host families for dinner. This was the last night of our home stay.

Thursday - a bittersweet day. Although we were having a great time, it was the last day we were going to see our host families and Japan delegation friends who now we felt were more family than new acquaintances.

It was sports day and our visit to Mobara Elementary School began with a welcome by the school administrators. We moved to the gymnasium and participated in dance activities with the children. After our performance we were treated to an excellent musical performance by the children in band classes. Lunch was with the students.

At the end of the day was the farewell party. The food was superb, the performances wonderful. We were able to see our host families one last time. We felt the night ended too early. It was such a special evening.

On our free Friday we explored Tokyo with Kimiko and meeting Takeo at Shibuya Street Crossing - known as "the Scramble." After coffee at the Starbucks, we headed for the Meiji Jingu Shrine, shopped at Daiso and other nearby shops. Following lunch, we visited the Asakusa's Sensoji Shrine before heading to Tokyo Disney.

Our LAST day in Japan. We packed our bags into volunteers' cars, jumped on a train and headed for Narita. We walked down Narita's narrow street filled with little shops and found a few more small souvenirs such as Dharma dolls. At Naritasan Shinshoji Temple two volunteers guided us through the many halls, a three-tiered pagoda, Niomon main gate, Great Pagoda of Peace and the Goma fire ceremony for our wishes, protection and safety.

It was time to offer a special thanks to our guides and CWA for their seemingly endless patience and for rehydrating us with Coke and water after performances in the 90°F and 85% humidity. We were so well cared for – treated as honored guests and as family. This was an incredible experience.