

President's Message

By Donna Dunlap



Within a couple of weeks my two-year term as TSCA President will come to an end. I thank you for the opportunity to serve you in this capacity. I accepted the nomination in the fall of 2021 because I wholeheartedly believe in this association, and the pandemic had canceled many of our annual events. My primary goal was to ensure that these events could resume and survive the pandemic pause. I feel at peace leaving the Presidency with everything back on track. Although our events may be slightly different than in years past, our programs have survived and continue to grow.

Top on my list was the annual student exchange program. In early March 2020, we announced the group of students that were chosen to participate in the summer exchange program later that year. Within one week, Friday, March 13th, the world shut down. We were still hopeful it wouldn't last long, but as the months dragged on, TSCA and the Kashiwa International Relations Association (KIRA) canceled the summer activities. When I was asked to serve as President in the autumn of 2021, we had lost two years of this valuable exchange program and two of the students who were chosen eighteen months earlier chose to withdraw. I was determined to get the remaining six students to Japan in 2022. In February 2022, KIRA announced that they would not participate again that year.

Kashiwa did not have students anxiously waiting to visit Torrance. As for TSCA, five of our six students were now seniors graduating in June. It was now or never for these kids. Plan B, and C, was to hire a travel agent and get those students to Japan. Although their experience would look far different than previous trips to Kashiwa, we wanted the students to experience Japan one way or another. As the spring planning proceeded, it was obvious that there would be no host families, no school visits, and no usual exchange activities in Kashiwa. Our travel agent secured hotels in Tokyo, Kyoto and Hiroshima; cities normally visited on the exchange. I just asked the travel agent to add two nights, at a hotel in Kashiwa, to the itinerary so the students could walk the streets of our sister city. Over the next few months, KIRA began to add some activities for these students. They visited three high schools in Kashiwa, one that had never been on the itinerary in years past. Volunteers from Kashiwa made the long journey by train to meet our students in Tokyo and guided them on tours throughout the city. Each day they provided lunch and dinner at nice restaurants. It was an extremely long day for these dedicated volunteers. I am eternally grateful for their perseverance and love for the exchange program. Due to not having the host family's weekend time, the students' time spent in Japan was shortened by four days. Yet the students were able to enjoy a full schedule including a few new events, making their stay unique nonetheless.

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President's Message (CONTINUED)

December 4, 2023

Executive Board Meeting (7pm)

December 11, 2023

NO Association meeting

December 18, 2023

Exchange student application due date

January 6, 2024

Alumni Reunion

Ken Miller Recreation Center

January 8, 2024

Association meeting (7pm)

Katy Geissert Library Meeting Room



Regretfully, by the time the students departed in July, there were only four of the original eight students able to participate. After postponing this trip for two years, I cried tears of joy at LAX saying goodbye to this delegation that was finally on the plane headed for Japan.

Next was revitalizing the annual Bunka-Sai festival, which was canceled in 2020 and 2021. The TSCA Board was worried our vendors, performers, and visitors would forget about our fundraising festival. In 2022, the students' program was an unusually expensive trip to visit Japan, and we needed the proceeds generated from Bunka-Sai to support their trip. In order to do this, we needed to rethink some of the operations: food service, layout of vendor booths and social distancing. Ensuring everyone's health and safety as well as making them feel comfortable while participating was paramount. Even some of our own TSCA members were skeptical about volunteering. I remember that at the first Bunka-Sai planning meeting in January 2022, only six members showed up. It seemed hopeless. But in the next three months, our dedicated volunteers persevered. Vendors and performers were very anxious to once again support the festival. The community, mostly masked, came out in numbers larger than we predicted. We ran out of food much earlier in the afternoon, not anticipating the numbers that would show up. The festival actually generated more money than what was needed to send our students to Japan. Another successful accomplishment that could not have been achieved without the support of all those who were dedicated to once again make Bunka-Sai a reality. The anxiousness that I had was on everyone's mind, but our hearts overcame our brains and WE DID IT!!! I will not forget all the support of TSCA members and friends, the vendors and performers, and the community, who stepped up as the pandemic was shutting down. The following year, Bunka-Sai 2023, was as if nothing had ever disrupted the annual festival! THANK YOU ALL! And please show up, on January 17, 2024, to attend the first of many monthly Bunka-Sai planning meetings so TSCA can have another successful festival to support the summer student exchange program in 2024. All the booth chairs need and appreciate your help volunteering to plan and implement the two-day festival on April 20th and 21st.

In 2022, with the pandemic still on everyone's mind, we were about to cancel the annual January Alumni Reunion always held in the Ken Miller Rec Center. We did not have new applicants to introduce, since the 2020 delegates were still waiting to go to Japan. Another concern was having a potluck in a closed indoor venue. The question was why have the activity? The 50th committee was already planning a big picnic at Wilson Park, the biggest alumni reunion with the 2023 adult delegation from Kashiwa and all of the past 50 years' participants of TSCA! The committee was questioning: would the weather be good in February for an outdoor event, would the facilities in the park be appropriate for hosting two hundred people in 2023?

Torrance Sister City Association

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With so many questions, why not have a trial run in 2022, a year before the 50th anniversary?

The committee was pleased with the results. There were more people than we expected that came to this outdoor Alumni Reunion picnic in 2022. It was quite a success. People flew in to attend the 2022 reunion – a good omen for 2023. The picnic in 2023 was also a huge success! TSCA alumni traveled near and far to attend. Mayor Ota of Kashiwa as well as city employees, 41 other adult delegates from Kashiwa and countless (really) participants including TSCA members and friends, Torrance city officials past and present, and a state official attended. The participants, ranging from 3 to over 90 years old, experienced a BBQ lunch of hot dogs and hamburgers, prepared by dedicated TSCA grilling masters. Hundreds of people gathered to enjoy the meal and conversations with old friends and new friends. The 50th committee nearly had a heart attack the weeks prior to the picnic: the only weekend it did NOT rain in the first 3 months of 2023 was the weekend that the Kashiwa delegation was in town to celebrate the 50th anniversary!! WHEW!!

The 2023 Alumni Reunion, on one of those pouring rainy weekends, was back at the Ken Miller Rec Center. It was a challenge in 2023 to advertise the student exchange program with no previous delegates attending any of the high schools to spread the word. We were very happy to have eleven applicants show up and participate with their families at the Alumni Reunion. The 2024 Alumni Reunion will be on Saturday, January 6th in the Ken Miller Rec Center at 11 a.m. Please help us spread the word to any high school student you know to apply before the December 18, 2023 deadline. Information about the exchange student program and the application form are on the TSCA website: torrancesistercity.org

And last, but not least, my focus was on celebrating the 50th anniversary milestone. Few sister city relationships make it that long. We really have something to celebrate and to congratulate ourselves on this accomplishment. The 50th committee convened for the first time in the spring of 2021. The committee's vision was to celebrate in style. SO many ideas were discussed, one of them: TSCA was going to produce a big performance at the Armstrong Theater featuring past student delegates from both Torrance and Kashiwa, most of whom are now professional artists. Well, you know the end result of that idea! The performance was one of a kind, and it was SUPERB!!

I hope you did not mind this recap or interpret it as boastful.

That is the furthest from the truth. I hope you can remember yourself as an integral part of these highlights during my term as your president. I wanted you to remember your own involvement and pat yourself on the back. I could instead have just said:

THANK YOU FOR ALL THE SUPPORT YOU HAVE GIVEN ME OVER THESE LAST TWO YEARS. I may not have shown my appreciation at the time, because I was usually overwhelmed, nervous and apprehensive. I know that I did not, and could not, do this on my own and all of you were part of any success TSCA experienced. I hope I gave, and will continue to give, hugs to show my deep gratitude to those of you who gave your time, expertise and knowledge voluntarily. You made these past two years so enjoyable, not just for me, but also for everyone who was lucky enough to participate in our normal, and overly abnormal, events in 2022 and 2023. I feel very confident that TSCA's programs will survive for many, many years, which warms my heart that these activities will carry on. This program is bigger than any of us. It is not only for us, but also for the younger generations. TSCA is able to offer the opportunity to broaden their minds and experiences for the rest of their lives. The 50TH celebration made me even more aware of the impact Torrance City Sister Association has had, and will continue to have, changing so many minds and the lives of those we encounter each year.

Although I have not listed any names in particular, please know that I, AM thanking YOU. In addition, I would like to thank the City of Torrance, the city officials and the departments that support TSCA on a daily basis. I also would like to thank the City of Kashiwa, their officials and the dedicated members of KIRA. TSCA is grateful for the bond between the two organizations and the good working relationship we have with Kashiwa International Relations Association. The constant support, help and dedication to not only me, during my time as President, but also to the "sister" committees of Torrance Sister City Association. I am thankful for the pandemic introducing us to ZOOM. Our communication between these committees is now so much quicker and easier, which was especially helpful in planning the 50th anniversary celebrations. I am also thanking all the TSCA members that say yes: to serving on the board and the executive board, to chair a committee and all who support TSCA behind the scenes, on a committee, on their computers and in the kitchen to make our programs so successful. DOMO ARIGATO GOZAIMASHITA!!!



English Teacher Report

Home is where the heart is

By Chris Pigao

One of my favorite things about writing for the newsletter is giving my unique perspective about my life in Kashiwa and the nuances of my lifestyle. From writing about the struggle of getting my Driver's License or digging through our history books at Ichikashi. Miniscule things like talking about Point cards or Pokemon, 2023 has proven quite an experience for me that I will remember for the rest of my life.

If there's one thing you should know about me, I'm not much of a traveler. I really do consider myself a "homebody". In my life, I have only really traveled to two places - Canada and the Philippines. Japan was the first country that I visited to break out of that mold. I was given this advice by many former expats - "travel around Japan " and so, I did.

I was able to visit Osaka, Kyoto, and Okinawa during our holiday breaks. Kyoto was beautiful during the Cherry Blossom season. I was able to visit the real life location of my favorite anime series - K-On! in the nearby prefecture of Shiga. Okinawa was relaxing, but I went during Typhoon season. Nonetheless, I was able to visit the gorgeous beaches and eat a lot of food. I saw the world's biggest Whale Shark at the ChuraUmi Aquarium.

At Ichikashi, I have the pleasure of working alongside my students in two clubs - English Conversation Club and the Light Music Club. Amie Campbell, former ALT, created "Happy Friday" where the students hang out during lunch. I'm glad to say that the tradition still happens, except with one major twist: *I open the room every day during lunch*. We have students from all grade levels and classes stop by and say hello. Our International Students come by and play "Uno". It naturally happened because I modeled it during my own time in High School where I would go to my favorite teacher's room and eat lunch there. This gives me the opportunity to see how the students are doing, and learn more about them. (Like how when 1A student Miho Araki told me that their favorite movie is "The Godfather")

The Light Music Club is by far the most gratifying experience. It was the club that got my interest in this school. My Japanese speaking ability has improved much more since working alongside the club as a "Co-Advisor". I made a promise to the students that if they speak English to me during our class, then I will speak Japanese to them during club activities. While I get to see them perform some amazing J-Rock songs, I get to see them improve in such a short amount of time. I do offer constructive feedback and advice, telling them "to make eye contact with each other while performing". This is how they communicate on-stage. In 2024, I'm hoping to still play alongside our students and meet the newest batch of members come Spring Semester.

Even though these are my day-to-day routines, my biggest struggle I face is homesickness. Even though the city of Kashiwa makes me feel at home, I still miss everything that makes Torrance special. My family, my friends, my go-to spots. I would visit places here in Japan and think to myself "Man, mom would love to see this" or "I wish my bandmates were here to watch this band with me". Of course I contact everyone on a weekly basis, but it's such a different feeling than being in the presence of my loved ones. I tried looking up remedies as if homesickness was like the common cold, but I've learned to honestly embrace these feelings. It's good that you're missing these things. To me, this means that I truly have a deep connection with my home and the people in my life.

Elvis famously sang "Home is where the heart is" and it's true. No matter the place, whether I'm with my family, playing with my bandmates back in LA (or in PC Room 3), laughing with the English Department, playing card games with my students, having heartfelt conversations with struggling students, Dancing and singing randomly through the halls, **Home is not a Concrete Place.**

English Teacher Report (continued)

It's not a classroom, a clubroom, or a music venue. *It's where your heart is and who you have in your life.*

With that being said, please cherish the ones who are with you. In 2024, let's be kind to ourselves and each other. Have a wonderful holiday season and a great rest of the year. I'll be briefly back in Torrance for the winter break - it will be short, but worth all the while.



(A collage of the amazing year I had)

(Post-script: I want to briefly mention and pay my respects to Ichiro Kuwabara-Sensei, who passed away in May earlier this year. He was the former English Teacher and the Head of the International Department here at Ichikashi. He then moved to work for the Kashiwa Board of Education - being the office liaison for new ALT's. Kuwabara-san is survived by his wife, 2 sons, and all of the friends and co-workers throughout Chiba Prefecture that he worked alongside. You will always be remembered)

English Teacher Update



Pedro Abina, our new English teacher gave his introduction speech by broadcast at Ichikashi with support from Chris Pigao, our other teacher who is on their second year. We wish Pedro well in his new role and thank Chris for their guidance and support.



Torrance Sister City Association

Dear Friends of TSCA,

This past year has been quite the celebration! Not only were we able to bring back ALL of our exciting programs to the Torrance community, but we were also able to host the first Kashiwa student delegation since 2019! This year was also extra special as 2023 marked 50 years of student exchange programs, adult leaders, English language teachers, host families, anniversary delegations and, of course, Sister City friendship. Certainly, a reason to celebrate!

We couldn't be more thankful for your continued support through your membership dues and donation contributions – especially through these last few years and as we rebuild our programs. Your contributions continue to help offset annual operational costs, allowing our fundraising efforts to focus on continuing our mission of promoting friendship, goodwill, and understanding through people-to-people connections.

Thank you for being a part of our 50-year story, and we hope that TSCA has played an integral part of your story as well! As friends of TSCA and alumni of our programs, thank you for your continued support and consideration.

Best regards,
Alyssa Yamauchi
TSCA Membership Chair

Our 2024 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DRIVE has begun!

There are several membership levels available,
and two convenient payment options:



Pay by MAIL:
Complete the form below,
and mail with your check.



Pay ONLINE:

Check out with **PayPal**

Scan the QR code
or visit

www.torrancesistercity.org



Postmark deadline to be included in the printed TSCA Membership Directory is **02/21/24**.

----- Cut and return the below with your check payment. -----

2024 TSCA Membership Application Form

Mail your check and this form to: Torrance Sister City Association, c/o Community Services Dept, 3031 Torrance Blvd., Torrance, CA 90503



**TORRANCE
SISTER CITY
ASSOCIATION**

3031 Torrance Boulevard • Torrance, California 90503

Except for the Lifetime Membership all dues are in effect from January 1 to December 31.*

- \$20 Individual
- \$40 Family
- \$75+ Supporting
- \$125+ Benefactor
- \$200+ Corporate
- \$2,000+ Lifetime Membership*

Donation to TSCA (in addition to annual dues): \$ _____

I am Interested in TSCA activities, specifically: _____

For the TSCA Directory, only include my: _____

Total Enclosed: \$ _____

Please make your check payable to: TSCA

Member Information

Please complete your contact information directly below and to the right.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Additional Contact Info

***TSCA Newsletters are sent to all members via email.*

Email**: _____

Phone: _____

If you have questions about membership, please send an email to: tscamembership@gmail.com

EXPERIENCE JAPAN



Torrance Sister City Association

is looking for highly motivated Torrance residents who are high-school sophomores through seniors, 19 years old and younger, to serve as cultural ambassadors in the Student Cultural Exchange Program. Since 1974, TSCA has sponsored hundreds of students to represent the highest qualities of American Youth in Kashiwa, Japan, our sister city, for three unforgettable weeks in July.

2024 applications will be available in November on our website:

torrancesistercity.org

To submit your application or if you have any questions, please email

torrancesistercityinfo@gmail.com

- **Promote international friendship and understanding**
- **Become part of a family in Kashiwa, Japan**
- **Visit modern Tokyo and the ancient temples of Kyoto**
- **Gain understanding of Japanese customs and daily life**
- **Experience Hiroshima**
- **Make lifelong friends and much, much more!**

APPLICATION must be postmarked by Monday, December 18, 2023 ▪ TorranceSisterCity.org

Regan Galinato (TSCA student delegate 2018) graduated from UC Irvine with a bachelor's degree in Environmental Engineering. Regan is currently working for EDI Consulting in Torrance and conducts environmental site assessments.



**Torrance Sister City
Association**

3031 Torrance Boulevard
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