

**Origins of the Fort Wayne Sister City Committee
(Fort Wayne Sister Cities International, Inc.)**

From Howard L. Chapman

In 1975 I was visiting my brother Bruce in Seattle, Washington. At that time, he was a member of the City Council there, and gave me a city tour. During the tour, I noticed a large replica of a Japanese shrine. Bruce told me that it was a gift from Seattle's sister city, Kobe, Japan. He asked me if Fort Wayne had a sister city, and I told him I didn't know. He suggested that, if not, then it would be a good "Bicentennial project" for Fort Wayne to find a sister city.

When I returned to Fort Wayne, I called LaDonna Huntley. LaDonna is a friend and was working for the City as an assistant to the mayor. Her job was to organize and administer the Bicentennial festivities during the 1976 celebrations. I told her about Bruce's suggestion, adding that I thought it would be something she could include in her plans for the following year.

A week later I received a letter from Mayor Ivan Lebamoff, advising that he had talked to LaDonna, and agreed that this was a good idea. Accordingly, he had established a "Sister Cities Committee" with the task of finding a sister city for Fort Wayne, and had appointed me as the Chairman of it. (No good deed goes unpunished.)

I set about to form a committee, and enlisted Pat Parker, Don Doxsee, Mary Brant, Gabe Delobbe, and LaDonna Huntley. There may have been a couple of others, but my memory dims.

There was interest (from the Mayor) in finding a city in Bulgaria. We did, in fact, have correspondence with one, and they were amenable to a friendly exchange, but told us in confidence that (because they were an iron curtain country) no formal association was possible. Accordingly, that fell through.

There was also interest in finding a city in Germany, given the many German descendants in Fort Wayne. We had negotiations with Hamburg, but they told us that they would only be interested in a formal relationship if a Fort Wayne industry would first build a plant in Hamburg. Obviously, that fell through too.

During this time, we also communicated with Sister Cities International, and made some other contacts, but were still looking when we first heard about Takaoka. A Japanese businessman named Teruo Yonemura was in Fort Wayne on business for, I think, Toshiba. He walked into the Fort Wayne Chamber of Commerce one day and asked if Fort Wayne had a sister city and, if not, if they

would be interested in finding one. Don Doxsee was on the Chamber Board at that time, and someone there knew that Don was involved somehow with looking for a sister city. They called Don, and Don called me.

We arranged for the three of us to meet at my office. Mr. Yonemura ("Terry") told us that he lived in Toyama, close to Takaoka, and had contacts in Takaoka. He was aware that Takaoka was interested in finding a sister city in America, and offered to make further inquiry if we were interested. We were interested. A little research revealed that Takaoka and Fort Wayne had many similarities. Population size, industry, and climate. We furnished Terry with a letter addressed to the City officials in Takaoka, advising of our interest in pursuing a relationship that could develop into a formal sister city affiliation.

I received a very cordial reply from Masaya Hashimoto, the "right hand man" to then Mayor Kenji Hori in Takaoka. After an exchange of correspondence over a few weeks, it was arranged that Mr. Hashimoto would lead a delegation of four government officials and business leaders to visit Fort Wayne for face-to-face talks. I believe that it was during this time that we first met Kimio Arai. Kimio, Mr. Hashimoto and Mayor Hori proved to be strong advocates of our relationship, and all became personal friends. There were meetings with our mayor, tours were given, and the group returned to Takaoka satisfied that we were "for real", and that Fort Wayne was a good match for Takaoka.

During 1976, through correspondence, both cities signed documents to declare the creation of the sister city bond between them. Nonetheless, the following year, Takaoka requested that a delegation from Fort Wayne come to Takaoka "to make it official." By then, Fort Wayne had a new mayor, Bob Armstrong. At first, I think that Bob thought that perhaps the whole thing was "a democratic thing," and "Ivan's baby," but after we talked about it, he decided that it was politics-neutral, and would be good for Fort Wayne. Once on board, he became an enthusiastic supporter, and agreed to lead our delegation to Takaoka.

That summer, an English teacher from Takaoka, Hisako Tanabe, brought 10 high school girls to Fort Wayne. With great assistance from Evelyn Blitz (an Aunt of Graham Richard), we were able to find host families here with girls of similar age. They spent a month here. Hisako stayed in our home, and she and her husband have been great friends ever since. Mac and Pat Parker hosted one of the girls. Some of the people who hosted the girls from Takaoka decided to travel with the group that visited Takaoka the following year, including Zohrab Tazian and his wife. The relationships created during that time, both the girls from Takaoka, and the host families here, helped form a good foundation for a long term and continuing fondness between the two cities.

About 40 of us went to Takaoka in April of 1977, including Betsy and me, the Mayor, LaDonna, Gabe, and a number of others. We arrived by train and the reception was overwhelming. It seemed as if most of the city had turned out to welcome us. There were hundreds of news people, television crews, and a brass band. When we ascended from the train platform to the street, we entered a huge throng. Mayor Hori was there to bestow bouquets of flowers on each of us, and we were introduced to the Japanese custom of many speeches. We were taken by bus to our hotel, and every street was full of people waving Japanese and American flags. The windows were open and when the bus would stop, people came over and lifted up little children to shake hands with us. (If any of us had had any doubts, they were erased.)

The official signing ceremony took place a couple of days later at City Hall. The large room was packed, and our delegation had seats of honor. Nobody does formality like the Japanese. With great ceremony, each of the two mayors took turns in signing a document declaring that the two cities would henceforth be sister cities, and would engage in cultural exchanges, student visits, economic partnerships, and all of the other attributes that go with it. Actually, they each signed two copies of the document, one for Fort Wayne, and the other for Takaoka.

That is how it all got started.