

# konnichiwa



Margaret Hobbs photos

Standing underneath the McMinnville mural at Security Federal Savings Bank are the Sister Cities exchange students from Mikawa, Japan and their host students. They are, first row from left, Jessica Chastain, Nana Shibuya, Yuzuki Homma, Yuzu Fukasawa, Hino Narisawa, Shion Usami, Manami Saito, Akari Sato, Isshin Abe, Haru Ujikawa and Rikuto Takoi. Back row, Rose Simpson, Wilder Higgins, Sarah Grace Vinson, Caroline Stewart, Lauren Mansfield, J.J. Brown, Gavin McGee, Harper Riley, Colin Riley and Daniel Nuthalapaty.

## Students from Mikawa, Japan visit McMinnville

BY MARGARET HOBBS  
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(McMinnville, Tennessee)

With swimming, caving, kayaking, painting, bowling and other activities, the 10 Sister Cities Japanese youth and their chaperones might have felt the need to go home to get some rest.

Students from Mikawa, Japan started their United States visit in Washington D.C. with a tour of the historical city before traveling to Warren County. They are part of the Sister Cities student exchange program with McMinnville and Mikawa alternating hosting and visiting responsibilities.

The partnership started in 1993 under the administration of Mayor Norman Rone, making this our 24<sup>th</sup> student exchange. One trip was cancelled due to the devastating tsunami prohibiting Warren County from visiting. Ten local students will be chosen to participate in the program, with Warren County's delegation going to Japan in 2019.

Sister Cities International was created by President Dwight Eisenhower in 1956 at a conference on citizen diplomacy. He reasoned people of different cultures could celebrate and appreciate their differences and build partnerships. The program has been endorsed by every president since its inception.

Local Sister Cities chair Leigh Ann Stewart works closely with a group of dedicated board members, making arrangements for the group on their journey. Together they make all the arrangements for the guests, starting in Washington and entertaining them while in McMinnville.

"This program is special to me, personally, because of the impact it has had on my own family. We have been honored to host on three occasions," said Stewart. "It is rewarding to see how this exchange touches lives and creates an awareness of other cultures. The kids make new friends not only from Japan, but also from Warren County."

The week's activities included visits downtown to Dodie's Painting Studio and Topz Deli and Frozen Yogurt, as well as an afternoon at the Gilley Pool. Yorozu opened its doors to them for a tour of the plant, later enjoying a banquet at Bridgestone Learning Center. Lunch at Smooth Rapids and a kayak trip was fun for the group, as well as a trip to Cumberland Caverns. Yoga at the Isha Institute of Inner-Sciences, bowling at KP's Bowling Lanes and a going away cookout at a rural home added to the many memories made by the visitors.

Host family Jessica Higgins and her boys Wilder, 13, Barker, 11, and Ledger, 8, were excited to be part of the program, and pleasantly surprised to have a girl. Yuzu Fukasawa joined the group and seemed to fit in nicely, as she has younger brothers at home.

"It was a neat experience to have a girl in the house," said Jessica. "We had to go over some particular rules for my boys before she came, but it worked out well."

Jessica has a positive story concerning a Japanese exchange student her family hosted several years back, one she formed a special bond with.

"We are still friends, and keep in touch, and she visited while we had Yuzu with us," said Jessica. "Because of that exchange, she and I have become life-long friends. I hope the same for my boys."

She, as well as the other host parents, feel the exchange program is a good opportunity for the children to learn other cultures, make new friends and broaden their horizons.

Chaperones Kazuaki Homma and Mio Toki expressed their sincere wishes and gratefulness to the group on behalf of themselves and the students.

In leaving, Mr. Homma tested out an expression learned during his visit. "We thank you for everything, and can't wait to return the favor when you visit us. This is not goodbye, it's see y'all soon."



Japanese exchange student Rikuto Takoi shares a fun moment with new friend Colin Riley.



Lauren Mansfield receives a hug from new friend Manami Saito, and is joined by Akari Sato.



Jessica Chastain, left, and Nana Shibuya make sure to sign each other's Tennessee flag artwork following a session at Dodie's Painting Studio.

Yuzuki Homma and Mark Simpson say goodbye at the farewell party for students and host families. Many friendships were formed and many tears were shed while saying hope to see you later.



# goodbye