

Email Newsletter from Mayor of Okayama (82) May 1, 2017 Issue

【Visit to San Jose, where I felt the history of 60-year friendship】

Hello, I'm Mr. Omori, Mayor of Okayama.

From 21 to 27 April, the members of Okayama Citizens Delegation and I visited San Jose (USA) to participate in the 60th anniversary celebrations of our sister city relationship.

In San Jose, we were warmly welcomed with various events such as the welcome ceremony held by the City of San Jose, the welcome dinner and the cultural exchange event by San Jose Okayama Sister Cities, Nikkei Festival in Japantown and the farewell party. I would like to mention special moments which left the biggest impression on me.

One thing was when I met Mr. Liccardo, Mayor of the City of San Jose.

60 years ago, the population of Okayama was 260 thousand and that of San Jose was 200 thousand. The main industry of both cities was agriculture. Now, Okayama has developed to become the ordinance-designated city with 720 thousand citizens and San Jose became "Capital of Silicon Valley", which has a population of 1.04 million.

Behind such rapid growth, not a few problems exist. In San Jose, for instance, a housing policy is not coming up with the population explosion. And as a gap between rich and poor is expanding, the number of homeless is on the rise despite of the relatively lower rate of unemployment.

Whereas, Okayama also has many challenges such as children on waiting lists for nursery schools. I realized that both cities were facing similar challenges in terms of coping with drastic changes in the city.

The other thing was when I participated in the 40th Nikkei Matsuri (an annual festival in Japantown).

I was impressed by this festival where participants were united beyond difference among countries. There were many third or fourth generation Japanese Americans in the festival. They were all cheerful, proud of having their roots in Japan, and living positively with mature comprehension of their history.

I was glad to know that the spirit of hospitality is no longer a privilege given only to Japanese. Heartfelt hospitality from the people in San Jose such as the City of San Jose and San Jose Okayama Sister Cities convinced me so.

Also, I would like to give a big round applause to Kibigaku performers and Okayama Gakugeikan High School Wadaiko (Japanese drum) Club from Japan for their amazing performances which livened up the events.

To take this opportunity, I would like to express my gratitude to the relevant people who made this anniversary happened, including Okayama Citizens Delegation, the Delegation of Okayama City Council and the Business Delegation from Okayama Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Okayama and San Jose are the oldest sister cities to each other and have cultivated their ties for 60 years. With big respect and gratitude towards those who have contributed so far, please let me keep fostering this friendship together with you.