



12 October 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ATTENTION: CHIEF REPORTERS

Sister City visit pursues business opportunities

Increased business opportunities between companies in Invercargill and its Japanese sister city are looking good after a visit by an Invercargill delegation to Kumagaya last week.

Delegation leader, Deputy Mayor Neil Boniface, said that a delegation of four city councillors, two staff* and the President of the Kumagaya Friendship Association Tom Sawyer spent five days in Kumagaya meeting with Council, business, education and cultural representatives.

"Invercargill is one of the few sister cities in New Zealand to have longstanding business links – and for many years has enjoyed successful trade in honey, vegetables, pastry products and car parts because of its 16-year old sister city connection with Kumagaya.

"The aim of the delegation was to build on this solid base and further increase business links between the two cities.

"Meetings with the Kumagaya Chamber of Commerce and Junior Chamber of Commerce were the main purpose of the trip and were particularly productive. Like most businesspeople, Japanese are traditionally conservative, but they were very receptive to the idea of increasing our business links and working to identify opportunities for trade and to match up businesses in Invercargill and Kumagaya."

"The Kumagaya Chamber of Commerce has said it will send a delegation of businesspeople to Invercargill in 2010 to meet with local businesses. Preparatory work for this will be done by the Kumagaya Chamber of Commerce and Invercargill City Council," he said.

Mr Boniface said another positive outcome of the trip was that he was able to assist an Invercargill firm that had approached the City Council in September, requesting an introduction to a large Kumagaya business.

*Manager Communications and Secretarial Services, Eirwen Tulett, 211 1678, (027) 293 8680
Fax: 211 1434 Email: eirwen.tulett@icc.govt.nz*

Or

*Communications Officer, Diane Morris, 211 1601, (027) 231 3939
Fax: 211 1433 Email: diane.morris@icc.govt.nz*

While he could not identify the business or the industry it was in, for reasons of commercial sensitivity, he had met with the Chairman of the Kumagaya business who had responded very positively and trade between the two companies was likely.

Mr Boniface said he would this week visit the Invercargill firm to update its Manager on developments and the two companies would take it from there.

The delegation to Kumagaya had also met with representatives of Rissho University at its Kumagaya Campus. Rissho University has a campus in both Kumagaya and Tokyo and is partnered with the Southern Institute of Technology (SIT). The two tertiary institutions have run exchange programmes for some years. University representatives said that they had recently signed an agreement with the University of Otago and indicated that they were also keen to further increase educational opportunities with SIT.

“Meetings were also held with representatives of the Kumagaya Library (which includes an exhibition area) and Museum staff in Gyoda City (which borders Kumagaya). Southland Museum and Art Gallery Chairman Cr Darren Ludlow and Trustee Cr Graham Sycamore spoke about the possibility of reciprocal exhibitions between Invercargill and Kumagaya. Specifically, they spoke about the possibility of holding an art exhibition to coincide with commemorations for the 20th anniversary of the sister city agreement in 2013. In Gyoda City they looked at the upgrade of its museum and how this might relate to the redevelopment of the Southland Museum and Art Gallery.”

Mr Boniface said the delegation had also held meetings with the Mayor of Kumagaya Kiyoshi Tomioka, who is facing an election in coming months. Mayor Tomioka was extremely supportive of the sister city relationship and was encouraging about the further strengthening of business, educational and cultural links between the two cities, he said.

The delegation also met with the Chairman of the Kumagaya City Council, the Deputy Mayor and 33 of Kumagaya’s 36 City Councillors.

In addition, Invercargill City Council’s Communications Manager spent an afternoon with the Public Relations Staff at Kumagaya City Hall, learning about the systems they have for communicating with their 200,000 residents.

Mr Boniface said that amalgamations in recent years meant that Kumagaya was now the largest city in the Northern Saitama Prefecture and had filed to be given “special city” status. Special city status means that the city is charged with greater responsibilities as a regional centre for government.

“While in Kumagaya, the city councillors and staff also spent one night billeted in a Japanese home. The aim was to see and understand how Kumagaya citizens live and what their lives are like, so they could better understand where the many exchange students who travel to Invercargill each year (on average 80-100) come from. It was an interesting cultural experience – with everything from the food, bathing and bedding being very different to Kiwi homes.”

Mr Boniface said the delegation’s time in Japan had been positive and productive. The cost was budgeted for in the sister city budget – and was around \$21,000.

ENDS.

* Delegation members were: Cr Neil Boniface, Cr Darren Ludlow, Cr Graham Sycamore, Cr Lindsay Thomas, Finance Director Dean Johnston, and Communications Manager Eirwen Tulett. An interpreter, courtesy of Southland Boys' High School, was already in Japan with a school group and stayed on to assist Council.

Inquiries, Neil Boniface, (0272) 204 220.

*Manager Communications and Secretarial Services, Eirwen Tulett, 211 1678, (027) 293 8680
Fax: 211 1434 Email: eirwen.tulett@icc.govt.nz*

Or

*Communications Officer, Diane Morris, 211 1601, (027) 231 3939
Fax: 211 1433 Email: diane.morris@icc.govt.nz*