

Japan External Trade Organization

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JETRO Chicago Midwest NEWSLETTER

Illinois • Indiana • Iowa • Kansas • Michigan • Minnesota • Missouri • Nebraska • North Dakota • Ohio • South Dakota • Wisconsin

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Tohoku Update 2019 – Investing in the Recovery

Prepared by Kelly Highland, JETRO Chicago

Since March of 2012, our JETRO Chicago office has faithfully co-organized an annual program on the pace of recovery and the challenges that the Tohoku Region has faced since The Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. Both the Chicago and Cincinnati programs featured authentic voices from both American and Japanese presenters who are contributing to the recovery in order to build a positive future. This was the first time for us to develop this program in Cincinnati.

On March 11 in Chicago, JETRO Chicago along with the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago, the Japan America Society of Chicago, Chicago Sister Cities International, and the Japanese Chamber of Commerce & Industry of Chicago, presented Tohoku Update. We held the same program in Cincinnati, Ohio, the following evening of March 12, which was co-organized with the Consulate-General of Japan in Detroit and the Japan America Society of Cincinnati.

The testimonials shared by two of our American voices, Rob LoBreglio, Brewmaster, Co-Founder and Vice President of Great Dane Pub & Brewing Company in Madison Wisconsin, and Michelle Beshaw, Buyer and Merchandise Manager for the Brooklyn Museum in New York, showed how they are contributing to the Tohoku recovery. For instance, Rob's company is planning to invest in Miyagi, Japan by opening a brewery and

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An End of Eras



From the Chief Executive Director

*Ralph Inforzato
Chief Executive Director,
JETRO Chicago*

On April 30, the Heisei Era will come to an end in Japan, after 30 years of reign by Emperor Akihito. Crown Prince Naruhito will take the throne on May 1. It was a reign defined by peace and stability for Japan. It was a time when Japan recovered from the collapse of the bubble economy to regain stable but slower and moderate economic growth. It was

a time where we saw an end of LDP dominance, and then an LDP return to power. The Heisei Era was also a time when the U.S.-Japan relationship grew even closer. For Japan, the United States became much more than a mere ally. It became Japan's singular friend in the world – a result of how close the relationship became during the Heisei Era. During his first trip to Japan, Vice President Mike Pence characterized the U.S. relationship with Japan by using the word Kizuna (deep bond of friendship), an unprecedented statement that deeply affected both Japanese and Americans.

Upon reflection, I can clearly remember back to January 1989 when the Showa Era ended with the passing of Emperor Hirohito. My Japanese colleagues were all wearing dark suits, black ties and arm bands; an understandably very emotional time. As I was in the long line of mourners at the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago waiting to sign the condolence book, one of my Japanese colleague's became overwhelmed with grief and turned to me saying that we (Americans) have no idea what Japan has been through during Showa. I could only remain silent and listen as he poured out his reflections on the Showa Era. Think about it; democracy in Japan gave way militarism and war which resulted in total

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East Central Indiana Regional Partnership Building Relationships in Japan



Guest View

*Mindy Kenworthy
President/CEO,
East Central Indiana
Regional Partnership*

The East Central Indiana Regional Partnership led the region's second international trade mission to Japan on November 9-16, 2018. The Partnership is a regional economic development organization representing 10 counties in east central Indiana. The trip provided opportunities to build on the relationships that were established during its first trade mission in 2016

and develop new ones for the future.

For 30 years, the state of Indiana and Japan have been linked together through strong economic ties attributed to the automotive industry. As the only state in the U.S. with three automotive OEMs – Subaru, Toyota and Honda – Indiana is home to 280 Japanese companies that employ nearly 58,000 Hoosiers. The 10 county region in east central Indiana has benefitted from this partnership serving as a strategic location for

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JETRO Around the Midwest

Seminars, Meetings and Events

Ralph Inforzato had a chance to meet with Tim Walz, Governor of Minnesota, on a trip to the Governor's office in February.



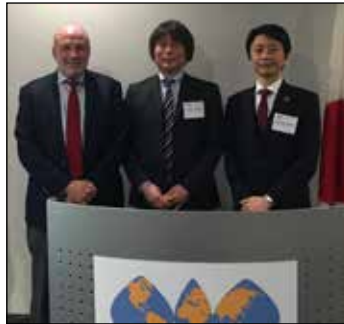
On November 3, 2018, the Government of Japan announced foreign recipients of the 2018 Autumn Decoration, which is conferred by the Emperor of Japan.

Among them was the Order of the Rising Sun, Silver Rays presented to Mr. Larry Ingraham, Founder and President of Ingraham & Associates, and Board Member of the Japan-America Society of Indiana. Mr. Ingraham has been dedicated to strengthening the economic relationship between Japan and the U.S. by promoting trade and investment activities. He has supported trade and investment missions to Japan sent by successive Indiana Governors since he served as the director of the State of Indiana Japan Office from 1983-86. He has also advised many Japanese companies that were planning to expand their businesses to the U.S.

Above, Ralph Inforzato offers his congratulations on behalf of JETRO Chicago, to their dear friend Larry Ingraham.



On February 19, JETRO Chicago's Akira Kawachi (above left) and Kevin Kalb (above right) were among speakers at "Connect & Create," in Chicago, sponsored by JETRO and 1871. This event targeted attendees from startups, incubators, accelerators, entrepreneurs, VCs, investors, and universities, interested in bringing their creative ideas and solutions to connect to global Japanese companies, or who are considering to begin or expand business in Japan.



On March 14, JETRO, St. Louis Regional Chamber, Japan America Society of St. Louis, and World Trade Center St. Louis presented "U.S.-Japan Trade Update" in St. Louis. Speakers on the program included (above, from left) Ralph Inforzato, JETRO Chicago; Shigeru Furuichi, Director for Trade and Investment, Americas Division, Trade Policy Bureau, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI); and Yasuhiro Uozumi, Executive Director, Keidanren (USA) Japan Business Federation.



In November, JETRO held seminars in three locations, Chicago, Columbus, OH and Novi, MI, to inform and educate Japanese SMEs about U.S. Trade Policy Section 232 and 301, and USMCA (United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement).



The Japan-America Society of Indiana held its Japan Update Conference 2019 on Tuesday, March 19, 2019 in Indianapolis. JETRO's Ralph Inforzato was among presenters (above left). At the event, Ralph Inforzato had a chance to meet with John Wilkes, Mayor of Linton, Indiana (above right).



Japan Design Events in Minneapolis and St. Louis

On March 6 in Minneapolis and March 7 in St. Louis, JETRO presented "Enhancing your Quality of Life through Japanese Design." This program focused on the craftsmanship and commitment to manufacturing that flows through Japanese design from traditional products to modern design. The Keynote Speaker was Keiko Matsuura, Design Coordinator for JETRO.

Below, speakers included, from left: Rio Saito, Japan America Society of Minnesota; Keiko Matsuura; Susan Brouillette, Founder and Owner, Umei; Joao Paschoal, Designer, Field Inc.

At left, program speakers and VIPs gather for a group photo. At right, Yuko Kitajima, Director, Japan America Society of St. Louis



At right, the presenters were given a tour of the Umei shop in Minneapolis, by Susan Brouillette.



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JETRO Establishes Programs to Address Human Resource Needs

Prepared by Tsubasa Hashimoto, JETRO Chicago

As of April 1, 2019, for the first time in our history, JETRO Tokyo has established a “Human Resource Support Division.” Labor force development is essential to developing and securing talent for international business.

At JETRO Chicago, we are also trying hard to tackle this issue for Japanese companies located throughout the Midwest.

According to the latest survey of Existing Japanese Manufacturing Companies, more than 70% of respondents expressed their concern regarding labor force or HR related issues.

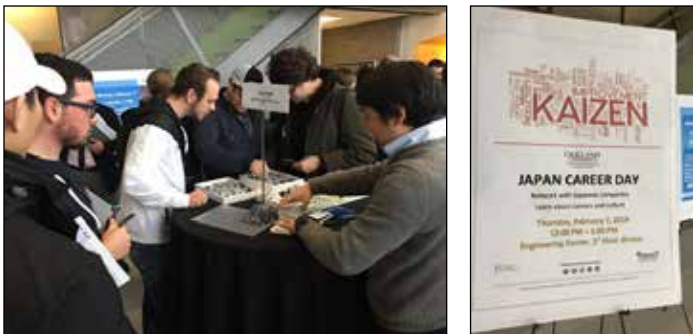
Considering this background, it is apparent that a good economy and low unemployment make it more difficult to recruit and secure talent. Besides, the macro data of the U.S. Department of Commerce shows more Japanese companies in the U.S. have been investing in R&D in recent years. One reason for this is that more Japanese companies are trying to deal with local U.S. companies. In order to meet the needs and expectations of their clients, Japanese companies are strengthening their R&D and communication functions with them, which also results in a talent issue.

In order to respond to these needs, JETRO Chicago developed a Job Connector concept and we are now playing that role. Since labor force issues are not unique to Japanese companies, many academia and local governments are working extremely hard regarding this issue, as well. However, many Japanese companies are not aware that local governments or academia are trying to rectify this issue, therefore we believe that we can fix this by connecting them with each other.

The first program JETRO Chicago organized was held at Oakland University School of Engineering and Computer Science in Rochester, MI. The University had introduced a new curriculum and internship programs, but these are not well known among the Japanese community located there. While Oakland County has good training grants, the process of connecting to them has not been well known by Japanese companies either. JETRO Chicago organized this event in order to assist the Japanese companies in getting to know Oakland University and Oakland County.

After the presentations, networking and a wonderful Oakland University tour, we organized another event, “Japan Career Day.” The concept of this event was to connect Japanese companies to students within the school of engineering. More than 60 students attended and all of the Japanese companies that participated were well satisfied.

Japan Career Day at Oakland University



The March 21 Seminar in Arlington Heights, IL



Theodore J. Duckett, Business Manager, Illinois Department of Employment Security



Kasia Lynch, Founder, Ikigai Connections



Corban Megumi Sánchez, Assistant Director of Advising, Dept. of Modern Language, DePaul University



Ralph Inforzato, JETRO Chicago; Dr. Mark D. Mrozinski, Assistant Vice President for Workforce and Strategic Alliances, Interim Dean of Business and Social Sciences, Executive Dean of Community Education, Harper College; Dr. Troy D. Hammond, President, Professor of Physics, North Central College; Nobuhiro Sawaki, Chair of Business Committee, Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Chicago.

On the other hand, when I introduced this event to some Japanese companies in Michigan, many responded by saying “we are not ready to have American students in our offices,” which means they have no experience of hiring U.S. students who have never worked with Japanese personnel or companies.

This type of comment brought up the idea of organizing a human resource seminar in Illinois. We hosted this seminar on March 21 in Arlington Heights. The first half of the seminar started with a presentation by Kasia Lynch, Founder of Ikigai Connections. She focused on some tips for hiring Americans at Japanese affiliated companies. This presentation included a success story of a Japanese company that hired American students and how they allocated tasks to each of them, understanding their Japanese language skill level, and how to communicate with American employees. Then Theodore Duckett, from the Illinois Department of Employment Security spoke about how the state is making efforts to minimize the gap between employers and the needs of unemployed people, and he also explained about the grants the state provides.

The second half of the program was a meet and greet for Japanese companies to learn more about three local higher learning institutions: DePaul University, Harper College, and North Central College.

This was a prelude to the Illinois “Japan Career Day” set for North Central College in Naperville, Illinois, on April 18.

I hope these initiatives will contribute to sustaining Japanese companies’ investment in the Midwest and continue to thrive in local communities.

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JETRO Presents Sake and Food Events Across the U.S.

Prepared by Keiko Kubo, JETRO Chicago

JETRO Chicago has organized 17 food and sake events in last 3 months starting from January to March 2019.

Our major events were Japanese sake educational seminars for food and beverage industry professionals in 15 cities throughout the U.S. These 15 locations are potential areas where we believe the sake market is growing: DC, Boston, Miami, Houston, Atlanta, Dallas, Portland, Seattle, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, San Diego, Phoenix, Denver, Grand Rapids and Chicago.

Each Seminar in these cities was conducted by highly qualified sake specialists who are among the best in the industry. Some of them are both sake and wine specialists and others are Sake Samurai (the title of Sake Samurai is given to the specialists who have made outstanding promotion of sake in Japan and overseas, by the Japan Sake Brewers Association Junior Council).

One of important missions of our sake seminars is to convey the strong message to the food & beverage industry professionals that sake is a perfect complement to non-Japanese food. The industry professionals such as bartenders, sommeliers, chefs or wine retailers experienced the taste of "sake and cheese," "sake and beef," as well as "sake and popcorn" pairings as part of our sake seminars.

Beside the industry event, we also participated in the 2019 First Bites Bash of the Chicago Restaurant Week. The main focus on this event was to introduce premium sake to Chicago foodies. Included were dedicated sake tables among various types of alcoholic beverages such as wine, beer and spirits. Sake's diverse flavors, textures and complex aroma were discovered by Chicago foodies through this local event.



Photos from a number of Sake and Food events presented by JETRO.



From Maki to Nigiri: JETRO's first ever Chicago Seafood Business Matching and Sushi Seminar

Prepared by Tamara Rasbury, JETRO Chicago

On March 22, JETRO held its first Chicago based Japanese Seafood Business Matching and Sushi Seminar at the Virgin Hotel targeting food service, distributors and Japanese seafood related companies.

In 2018, seafood exports to the U.S. amounted to \$300 million holding 11% of seafood exported from Japan. This business matching seminar introduced not only Maki sushi ingredients but also Nigiri sushi ingredients.

Eight seafood retailers and manufacturers exhibited at this event. The event promoted sashimi grade tuna, yellowtail, and processed products such as squid, seaweed, scallops, and imitation crab to restaurant personnel and distributors. We received comments from exhibitors such as "We are exhibiting because we already have a market in New York and Los Angeles, but would like to expand our market in Chicago," and "I was able to find distributors and restaurants in Chicago."

At the sushi seminar, Chef Hideaki Yamagata from Nihonbashi's Miyako Sushi carefully explained three key points when making sushi while demonstrating how to make Nigiri Sushi. According to Mr. Yamagata, his key points in making sushi are: 1) the use of vinegar and wasabi for sanitation purposes and to keep the freshness of the sashimi; 2) always use two fingers to hold the sashimi so that you are not touching the entire piece of fish; and 3) make each piece of sushi the same shape. The sushi seminar was very successful with Chicago attendees eager to listen to the seminar and of course to sample Mr. Yamagata's delicious sushi.

This past year, there was a boom in Chicago for Nigiri sushi with an increase in OMAKASE style (chef's specialty menu) sushi restaurants. With the increase in popularity and very high demand for these types of restaurants, we expect to see an increase in the importation of sushi ingredients. This event highlighted that the sushi boom is not just on the east and west coasts, but also in Chicago, the Midwest.



At left, chefs demonstrate sushi and sashimi preparation. Below, attendees visit with seafood exhibitors.



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Japan Shines with J-Startup Pavilion at CES 2019

Prepared by Kevin Kalb, JETRO Chicago

The International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) once again broke its own records for size and attendance this past January 8-11th in Las Vegas. CES 2019, the world's preeminent technology showcase and innovation catalyst, featured more than 4,400 exhibitors, 500 more than 2018, which also included 1200 startups participating in the Eureka Park marketplace. This year, JETRO San Francisco coordinated the J-Startup Pavilion in Eureka Park, featuring 22 Japanese startup companies with an array of innovative technologies from robots to health care to smart home and IoT products.

Eight of the Japanese startups were revealed at CES Unveiled on January 6, 2019, an exclusive event that attracts over 1,500 media sources. This pre-show event gives the media special access to interact with the newest technologies and innovations of CES. One of JETRO's exhibitors

at Unveiled was the Japanese startup Triple W, the creator of the first health tech wearable for urinary incontinence called DFree, which went on to win the "Best of CES Award" for the Digital Health and Fitness Category.

For more information, contact Will Ferguson at JETRO San Francisco at Will_Ferguson@jetro.go.jp.

The J-Startup Program

The J-Startup Program is a new initiative created by Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) in 2018. The J-Startup Program cultivates the brightest of Japan's startups to succeed in the world market. Recommendations from leading business communities determine and select a group from over 10,000 Japanese startups to join the program.

The J-Startup Program works with JETRO and the private sector to provide the following services and more to the selected startups:

- Granting private business spaces and fee preferences
- Professional mentors from leading technology companies
- Collaboration opportunities with large companies in similar fields
- Welcoming programs from Ministers and other important figures
- Marketing services designed for startups to succeed in overseas markets
- Opportunities to exhibit at the world's largest tech conferences, such as CES and SLUSH

More information is available at <https://www.j-startup.go.jp/en/about/>.



Tohoku Update Programs in Chicago and Cincinnati ... from page 1

restaurant and pub. The brewery where the beer will be produced will be located in Miyagi-Prefecture and the restaurant and pub will be in Sendai City. This investment has been in the works for approximately 4 years and it is finally coming to fruition. Michelle's visit to Miyagi was part of a small buyer's mission. She visited Ishinomaki Laboratory, Okurayama Studio, and Nitta Textile Arts. Michelle was so impressed by the Japanese craftsmanship and dedication to perfection throughout her visit that The Brooklyn Museum is now selling the Ishinomaki Laboratory Bird Kit in their gift shop.

Other speakers included, opening remarks from the Honorable Naoki Ito, Consul-General of Japan in Chicago and JETRO Chicago Chief

Executive Director, Ralph Inforzato; Yoshiyuki Koyano, Director-General for International Affairs, Business and Tourism Commerce, Industry and Tourism Department for the Miyagi Prefecture Government, who shared his insights on the recovery and explained the many business opportunities available in Miyagi Prefecture; the Honorable David W. Cook, Honorary Consul of Japan in Ohio; Toko Shiiki, a photographer and documentary filmmaker who shared the personal stories of what the residents of Fukushima had to endure; and Akisa Fukuzawa, a certified Sake Sommelier, who educated the audience about the different aspects of Sake and she also lectured on the special Sake's that come from the Tohoku Region.



Drew Edwards



Ralph Inforzato



Consul-General
Naoki Ito



Michelle
Besbar



Rob LoBreglio



Yoshiyuki
Koyano



David W. Cook



Akisa
Fukuzawa



Andrew Lantz



Toko Shiiki

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JETRO Releases 2018 Survey of Japanese Companies in U.S.

In late March, JETRO released its Survey on Business Conditions for Japanese Companies in the U.S., FY2018, the 37th annual survey.

Among the newsworthy results, over 70% of respondents expected positive operating profits for seven consecutive years (the longest period in JETRO records). The survey was taken from November 9, 2018 to December 7, 2018. 730 responses received from 1,289 surveys sent (response rate of 56.6%).

Topics included: sales performance; future business direction; supply chain; challenges in management; and changing business environment

Here are a few more highlights:

Corporate performance: For seven years in a row now, over 70 percent (74.5%) of respondents expected an operating profit, making for the longest such streak in survey history. The diffusion index (DI) value, an indicator of business confidence, for 2018 was up 9.3 points from 2017 to reach 17.2, and the 2019 outlook also expects the value to rise up to 32.0, with many companies expecting to see an improvement in their performance.

Business direction going forward: Of the respondents, 40.9% said they had “increased” their number of local employees in the last 12 months, marking a seventh consecutive year of exceeding 40%, and 44% also expect an increase in the future. The respondents that eye business expansion in the next year or two accounted for 54.2% of companies, coming in at over 50% for a seventh straight year.

Supply chains (raw material procurement, product production frameworks and sales destinations): Changes in the trade environment have prompted some respondents to reevaluate procurement sources, but their trend of local production for the local market, mostly for the NAFTA region, remains unchanged.

Challenges in management: As with the preceding year, “recruiting workers” (69.0%), “labor costs” (65.6%) and “retention of workers” (46.3%) were the top management challenges (factors for increased cost), ranking higher than “effects of trade-restrictive measures” (44.7%).

A press release with more detailed information is available at: <https://www.jetro.go.jp/en/news/releases/2019/8ae9fc493fd7e9d4.html>.

A PDF download of the survey results is available at: https://www.jetro.go.jp/ext_images/en/reports/survey/pdf/rp_firms_us2018rv.pdf.

JETRO Invest Japan Report 2018 is Released

At the end of November, 2018, JETRO released “Invest Japan Report 2018.”

This is a comprehensive report covering recent trends in inward FDI into Japan, related policies of the Japanese government, operations of foreign-affiliated companies in Japan and their perception of Japan’s business environment and JETRO’s FDI promotion activities. It aims to be a reference book for foreign companies considering expanding into Japan and local governments in Japan supporting investment by foreign companies. The report introduces the results from the JETRO’s “Survey on Japan’s Investment Climate 2018” targeting foreign-affiliated companies in Japan.

This is the fourth publication following the 2015, 2016 and 2017 versions.

Please visit <https://www.jetro.go.jp/en/invest/reports/> for the full contents of the report.

Content includes: Recent Situation of Inward FDI in Japan; Toward Improvement of Business Environment; Trend in Inward FDI in Japan – Foreign Investment Contributing to the Emergence of Innovation; Perception of the Business Environment in Japan among Foreign-affiliated Companies; and JETRO Efforts to Promote Investment in Japan

Contact JETRO Chicago • www.jetro.go.jp/usa/

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For general information, call the number above.

The JETRO Chicago team offers a wide variety of business support services for companies in the Midwest planning to initiate a business presence or seeking to add to their existing investment in Japan, and/or work with Japanese companies. Please feel free to contact us.



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Recommend the JETRO Chicago Midwest Newsletter to a colleague, so they can keep up with the latest news, events and ideas that are helping Midwest companies develop businesses in Japan and with Japanese companies. For a FREE subscription delivered quarterly via e-mail, send name, title, company/organization name, address, phone number and e-mail address to Kelly_Highland@jetro.go.jp

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Guest View: Kenworthy ... from page 1



Mindy Kenworthy presenting at JETRO Tokyo. At right, Junji Kurokawa, JETRO Senior Director for Global Strategy (North America and Oceania)

many suppliers. The 18 Japanese companies located in the region have a significant impact on the regional economy currently employing 4,000 people and investing millions of dollars over the last two decades.

The seven-day trade mission included mayors and economic development officials from Henry, Rush and Wayne Counties in addition to Theresa Kulczak and Yoshi Ogawa with the Japan America Society of Indiana.

Group meetings, including a session with JETRO Tokyo business advisors, provided an opportunity for the region to present information on east central Indiana and communicate our desire for new investment. Workforce development was a topic discussed at each meeting and the region provided information on programs and initiatives currently in place to address workforce shortages.

During meetings with automotive leaders from Subaru, Toyota and Honda, the region learned about business strategies directed towards new technologies in electric and hybrid vehicle production and how this will impact future growth.

Indiana entered into a Friendship and Cooperation Agreement (sister-state relationship) with Tochigi Prefecture in 1999. During the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership's 2016 trade mission, we spent time in Tochigi Prefecture learning about the area and experiencing the culture. On this trip, in Tokyo, we hosted a group of chief international

representatives from Tochigi to continue our relationship building.

In September 2017, Governor Eric Holcomb signed a Memorandum of Friendship and Cooperation with Aichi Governor Hideaki Ohmura to further private sector exchanges. Aichi Prefecture, which is the manufacturing center of Japan, is home to nearly 70 companies with operations in Indiana. Through the cooperation agreement, Indiana and Aichi will work to advance economic, educational and cultural exchanges to further develop both regions. The east central Indiana delegation had the privilege of hosting a group of government and economic development officials from Aichi Prefecture for dinner in Nagoya. During the evening, both delegations shared information about business activity and how we could partner in the future.

The trade mission was a wonderful experience for the region not only for business development efforts, but to open doors to build important relationships with our Japanese partners.



East Central Indiana Regional Partnership delegation with government and economic development representatives from Aichi-Prefecture.

Kikuko Ono named Grassroots Outreach Coordinator



JETRO Chicago has named Kikuko Ono as Grassroots Outreach Coordinator, assigned to the State of Ohio.

Ms. Kikuko Ono is originally from Tokushima-Prefecture in Japan. After graduating from Kyoritsu Women's University in

Tokyo, she came to the USA and received her M.A. in International Business from Ohio University.

Her experience includes working as an internal learning and development consultant for a Japanese automotive OEM and teaching at the Columbus Japanese Language School as a high school lead for 25 years.

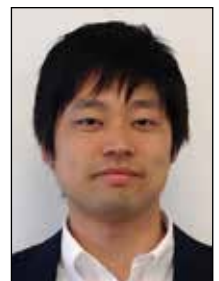
From 2019, she will serve as Grassroots Outreach Coordinator, assigned to the State of Ohio. Contact Ms. Ono at Ono.JETRO.Ohio@gmail.com.

Welcome and Farewell

JETRO Chicago is pleased to welcome Momoko Iida as the new Program Coordinator, Research & Promotion/Agriculture Department. Ms. Iida is a native of Ibaraki-Prefecture where Tsukuba Science City is located. She graduated from Tokyo University of Foreign Studies where she studied Arabic culture and language. Ms. Iida joined Ibaraki Prefectural government in 2014 and was assigned to the Housing Division, where she supported victims whose houses were damaged in two disasters, The Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 and a major flood in 2015. From 2018, she served as a researcher for JETRO Tokyo's Overseas Research Department. Please contact Ms. Iida at Momoko_lida@jetro.go.jp.



In March, JETRO Chicago bid farewell to Hiroki Nihei, who joined JETRO Chicago one year prior, in March 2018 and was part of the Research & Promotion/Agriculture Department Team. His team was responsible for promoting Japanese Sake, Tea and Food Products throughout the United States. Mr. Nihei was on loan to JETRO from the Ibaraki Prefectural government and upon his return to Ibaraki, he will be in charge of promoting exports to the U.S. and Asia.



All of us at JETRO Chicago welcome Kikuko Ono and Momoko Iida to the team and wish Hiroki Nihei the best of luck with the next chapter in his career.

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defeat and foreign occupation, then Japan rose back to democracy, and underwent a miraculous economic recovery combined with a deep sense of peaceful rebirth. My colleague was correct of course. We Americans could never understand what Japan went through during the Showa Era. I believe we could, however, better understand the Heisei Era.

“Heisei” is interpreted by many to mean “achieving peace,” and indeed it was a peaceful period for Japan, especially when compared to the drama of the Showa Era. Looking back on Heisei, it was a very critical time for Japan. During the Heisei Era, there was the collapse of Japan’s financial bubble, although not a collapse of Japan’s economic miracle. Japan entered the Heisei Era in 1989 as the world’s second largest economy. Now in 2019, at the end of Heisei, Japan’s economy is the third largest in the world. People all too often overstate the 1990s as Japan’s “Lost Decade” of economic growth, but Japan’s GDP did not fall off the face of the earth. In reality, after the financial bubble of the 1980s burst, Japan’s economy slowed its growth trajectory.

Importantly, the past 30 years saw a tremendous amount of Japanese manufacturing investment that flowed into the United States, China and Southeast Asia. More investment from Japanese companies came to the United States during the 30 years of the Heisei Era than at any other period in the history of our bilateral relationship. Our Midwest region was a great beneficiary of Japanese manufacturing investment during this era of “achieving peace.” As of 2015, just over 278,000 American working men and women have careers at local Japanese manufacturers; it has never been this high. In the Great Lakes states of Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin and Michigan, there are 198,000 Americans working for Japanese companies – an increase of 35% since 2010. As of 2016, 861,000 Americans work for Japanese companies in the United States. That is 11 times more employment than from Chinese companies. Perhaps, in a way, the Heisei Era may be defined as the three decades when the mindset of “achieving peace” set the tone for a stable environment that enabled Japanese companies to confidently set their investment business models to expand globally. Fortunately, the U.S. was a great beneficiary of their investments.

During JETRO’s Japan Session at the Winter Meeting of the National Governors Association in Washington, DC this past February, Utah Governor Gary Hebert and Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb provided their insights on the U.S.-Japan peace dynamic. They explained that through the



JETRO’s Japan Session at the NGA Meeting.

JETRO at the National Governors Association Conference

During the Winter Conference of the National Governors Association in Washington, DC on February 23, Ralph Inforzato had the chance to interact with a number of Midwest Governors.



With Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine and First Lady Fran DeWine.



With North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum and First Lady Kathryn Burgum.



With Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds.



With Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker.



With Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb.

decades as our economies have become more interdependent because of increasing investment and trade, the bonds of peace between our nations are also greatly strengthened. Sometimes, we lose sight of this perspective that investment and trade between our countries also fortifies a binding peaceful bilateral relationship.

The conclusion of the Heisei era also marks the passing of another spectacular period, as 45 year old Ichiro Suzuki retired from his 19 year U.S. professional baseball career in a Seattle Mariners uniform at the Tokyo Dome on March 21 before an emotional 46,451 fans. I remember watching his final game on television. In 2001, Ichiro won both the AL Rookie of the Year and the American League MVP awards, a rare achievement. I mention Ichiro because he is a prime example of the Japanese work ethic. I am surrounded by this tremendous work ethic each and every day, but most American’s don’t get to experience working with Japanese day to day. During these past 19 years, we could see for ourselves Ichiro’s work ethic, fierce discipline and commitment to perfecting the skills needed in his profession, which, are in many ways a reflection of Japanese society. Why would hundreds of Japanese tourists visit Chicago during these very cold April days? They were simply attracted, like we all were, by the aura of Ichiro’s perfection to our national pastime.

The Heisei Era also saw the passing of a tremendous JETRO career. After seven and a half years, our dear JETRO Chairman and CEO Hiroyuki Ishige completed his tenure as the leader of JETRO on March 29. Through Chairman Ishige’s visionary leadership and high energy, JETRO re-captured its vigor and sense of mission and continues to perform an important role in Japan’s Economic Growth Strategy.

Chairman Ishige visited each of JETRO’s domestic offices in Japan and visited all 74 overseas offices developing enduring relationships through listening, dialogue, and guidance for all office members. He particularly had a valuable impact on our Midwest states’ leadership, especially our Midwest governors and on the members of the JETRO Chicago team.



Chairman Ishige and the JETRO Chicago staff.

We at JETRO Chicago are very grateful for Chairman Ishige’s leadership and the hard work he accomplished with us. Each time he visited, he gave us encouraging words and guidance which were always valuable. We clearly remember Chairman Ishige’s words during JETRO 60th Anniversary speech.

“From the perspectives of contributing to Japanese trade policy and maintaining free and fair trade rules, we are not allowed to be bystanders. Now is the time JETRO really comes into play in the U.S.!”

We very much respect his words and will always take action to keep them true.