COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

MOCHITSUKI & SETSUBUN EVENT

I assist Japan America Society of Oklahoma (JASO) as an event coordinator. I have been holding cultural activities every month. I would like to share one of my favorite events. We had a Mochitsuki and Setsubun event in Edmond, OK. There is a story behind this event. I had an idea of this event but I was struggling to find the Mochitsuki tools. One day, I talked to my host mother about making Mochitsuki tools by myself. She introduced me her friend's family who is good at woodcrafting. They loved the idea and made Mochitsuki tools for JASO within a month.

About 130 people came to this event and they enjoyed mochitsuki, fresh mochi tasting and Setsubun Mamemaki. I cannot express how much I was impressed by people around me and supporting me. This event could not be done without them. It was also a good opportunity for the community in Oklahoma to meet new people. After this event, many people said "I didn't know that we have so many Japanese and Oklahoman who are interested in Japanese culture." I would like to keep working on making mochitsuki again and our annual event like something it will last forever for our community, JASO.
There is a Japanese Student Association (JSA) at the University of Central Oklahoma. There are about 25 students from Japan and 20 more students who are interested in Japanese culture in JSA. I had a Japan Night collaborating with JSA in April, 2022. The event included mochitsuki, Japanese tea section, authentic Japanese festival cuisine, takoyaki, frankfurt sausage, yoyo-tsur, origami, a Japanese taiko drum performance and a Budo martial arts performance. This event was also open to the local community. I was excited to see outside families and guests coming from other universities to attend the event. The UCO JSA always has wonderful ideas and great teamwork and I hope I can also be the person who is always here to support these students!
SCHOOL VISITING

At UCO International House, there is a program called "SPICE" which provides international cultural activities at local schools.

I have been working on this program to increase the number of schools interested in SPICE. I have visited 15 schools and classes this year. One of the schools I went to invited me to another school event and invited me back multiple times. When visiting the schools, I usually talk about Japan and facilitate hands-on activities such as origami, calligraphy, chopsticks challenge and so on. This past year I also participated in the EdamameChamp campaign by Table for Two. Table for Two is a non-profit organization to spread the Washokuiku through activities. This activity utilized the Chopsticks challenge using Edamame so we could learn about soy and healthy Japanese food at the same time. I was honored to be a part of this campaign and eager to see if I am being chosen as the winner of the best soy photo. While visiting these local schools, I am often reminded and cherish the curiousness of the local students and their curiousness about Japan and Japanese culture. I am very happy to be a part of their life even if it is only for one class. I also hope they can learn and feel something from my class about Japan as well.
Aya arrived in Oklahoma in August 2022. Since her arrival, she has hit the ground running and has not been afraid of jumping in and making an impact everywhere quickly. Over the past year, Aya has accomplished several things in a very short period of time. One of Aya’s accomplishment includes building relationships with numerous schools in the community. Aya visits several schools on a weekly basis and sometimes more than once. This has helped expand our partnerships within our UCO SPICE program which provides cultural experiences to children in the local school systems to dispel stereotypes and learn firsthand from people from various cultures. When it came time to celebrate the largest holiday of the year in Japan, Aya was eager to share Japanese New Year’s Day customs with the local community. Despite having a difficult time finding proper mochitsuki tools, Aya didn’t let it keeping her from having mochitsuki activities and found a local member in the community help build her the tools needed to hold the event. The event was well attended by the community and a huge success. Since the start of the school year, Aya has also helped breathe life and inspiration into the Japanese students and the UCO Japan Student Association where they held their largest Japan Night on campus in several years. Aya has done a great job of mentoring our Japanese students on campus and motivated them to share their Japanese culture. She likely also sees this as an opportunity to impact the JOI program as this is how she became aware of the program herself. Through all of these things, Aya has sparked excitement into several students at the University of Central Oklahoma and the local community for the Japan America Society of Oklahoma which has given us a chance fill all board vacancies in the Japan America Society of Oklahoma since it was revived in 2016. We are so thankful for Aya and all of her efforts and the impact she is making in Oklahoma.