Halifax County Virginia Cherry Blossom Tree Planting Event

**Period:** April 1 - April 24

**Background:** When I viewed some nice cherry blossoms blooming in the yards of local Halifax people in Halifax as well as beautiful cherry blossoms in Washington DC, I came to think that cherry trees should be planted as a JOI activity in Halifax. Thanks to grant money from CGP NY, the JOI material stipend and support from Halifax Public Schools, 22 cherry trees were planted at a public park in Halifax.

**Program:** Elementary school students learned the song “Sakura Sakura”. Fourth graders sang the song at the Planting Event. At the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center, I gave Japanese culture lectures. Participants learned about the Japanese love of cherry blossoms. And calligraphy, wrote “sakura” in Chinese characters and made cherry blossom fans. On planting day, Halifax Public School Board members, and local people were invited. Students and music teachers dressed in yukata sang “Sakura Sakura.”

**Evaluation and response:** All attendants were given Japanese fans decorated with pink cherry blossom and Chinese character “Sakura.” Everybody seemed to enjoy the event with wishes to see blossoms on the trees in the future. Newspaper articles reported the event and added other information on JOI activities here.

**Coordinator Comments:** Local people who read the newspaper article thanked me for planting cherry trees. Master Gardener group members, the Halifax County government, and the County Schools promised to look after the trees. A “JOI Cherry Blossom Tree Fund” will to be established to make sure the trees are looked after and new cherry blossom trees will be added to the Park. I hope local people will remember Japan as they enjoy beautiful cherry blossoms every spring in Edmunds Park.

**Supervisor Comment:** The Sakura Celebration - Halifax Style was a sensational idea for the community by Kazuko. She truly left her mark on Halifax County with this festive occasion. She organized a grand event with students and community members being involved throughout. The cherry trees will be symbols of the many positive relationships Kazuko has established here in Halifax County. Her time with us will be celebrated as families and friends gather under the shade of the Japanese Cherry Trees.
Shiitake Mushroom Growing for High Schoolers and Community
March 3rd – April 30, 2009

Background: The idea of growing shiitake mushrooms in Halifax came to me by chance one day when I saw mushrooms popping out of the grass in my host’s yard. Since there are lots of oak trees around, I thought we might grow nutritious, tasty shiitake mushrooms. I ran to the computer and searched the Internet: shiitake had been introduced as a crop to the US in the 1980s. I went to a Farmers Conference and learned how to grow shiitake. I learned there are some differences with Japan due to the humidity. I went to meet the extension officer in charge of teaching and encouraging Virginians to grow shiitake. With his help and grant money from CGP, the shiitake growing project materialized.

Program:
1) I held a Healthy Cuisine & Shiitake Mushroom Growing Seminar for the community on March 5 at the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center. I shared information on healthy Japanese cuisine and ingredients. Then Mr. Hankins, Virginia State University Extension Officer explained how to grow shiitake mushrooms. Finally, the group planted shiitake spawns on logs and took the spawn planted logs home.

2) The same procedure was followed with Halifax High School agriculture students. The spawn-planed logs are kept on the school campus and looked after by the agriculture teacher for follow up studies on shiitake growing.

Evaluation and response: Participants were very interested in learning what makes Japanese cuisine healthy as well as what the differences are between the diet here and in Japan. All enjoyed the hands-on planting of shiitake mushroom spawns.

Coordinator Comments: Some follow up was needed to visit participants and instruct them where and how to keep logs. To stabilize shiitake growing locally and to have them marketed locally takes time and lots of planning related to forestry. I am so glad to have met the Halifax Extension officer of the Agriculture and Forestry who is now involved in teaching how to grow shiitake mushroom and advising oak tree growing. I hope this will be the visible fruit of JOI in Halifax.

Supervisor Comments: This community outreach project was very exciting and well received by the community. Participants are still commenting on what a great job Kazuko did in organizing, teaching, and co-teaching with the extension agency. This was an opportunity for her to work closely with Virginia Tech University and the Virginia Extension agents.
Intensive Japanese Culture Classes at Sydnor Jennings Elementary School

September 8-29, 2008

285 students X minimum 3 times/classroom = 855+ students served

Background: As a result of daily contact with students during summer camps, I realized the advantage of meeting students more than once to expand knowledge about Japan. I was asked to teach Japanese culture intensively at an elementary school in Halifax, I had not served in my first year. For most students and teachers it was the first time for them to meet a Japanese person and be exposed to Japanese culture.

Program: All kindergarteners through 5th graders met me more than three times. Kindergarteners through 2nd graders were taught with kamishibai, origami, and chopsticks to expose them to Japanese culture. Basic knowledge (shape, size, and location of Japan; and the Japanese national flag) were shared with all. Besides basic knowledge, Power Point slides were added for 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders to show them school life in Japan. They also experienced calligraphy and learned different Japanese characters. Students also met me in music class and learned to sing “Musunde Hiraite”, “Ookina Kuri no Ki no Shitade”, and “Jan Ken Pon.” Children loved to sing them with gestures.

Evaluation and response: Music teacher found classes very interesting, so students shared songs and gestures with their parents and families at PTO Music Night in the gym.

Coordinator Comments: When I met Sydnor Jennings students outside school and at summer camp, I noticed a big difference in questions asked by these students and those at other schools. Their interest in and knowledge about Japan and knowledge were definitely greater. Introducing Japanese culture to K12 students was my most fruitful JOI activities. I hope interest continues.

Supervisor comments: By Kazuko immersing Sydnor Jennings students into the Japanese culture they were exposed to totally new experiences. The students and adults gained a new respect and detailed insight into Japanese culture. Even students with special needs were engaged and excited in the multiple activities Kazuko provided. We are very privileged to have her spend such an extended amount of time at Sydnor Jennings with faculty, staff, students, and parents.
**JOI to Halifax County Public Schools**

**“Let’s learn about Japan” for K12 students**

Period: September 2007 - June 2008

**Background:** Being informed that I would be sited at the public school system before leaving Japan, I took pictures at the elementary school where I used to teach and made slides to show school life for Japanese students. I also made a boxful of Japanese artifacts like chopsticks, lunch box, *daruma* doll, fan, paper balloon, *takiko*, Japanese towel, white & red cap for PE, and so on to share. Those things helped a lot to create lessons for K12 students. There are seven elementary schools and a middle and a high school in the Halifax County. I have visited six elementary schools during the 2007 school year. I taught high school students for seven days replacing the Chinese teacher at the STEM center, a separate school facility for high school students.

After summer vacation started I taught “Summer Camp” – classes in the morning at two elementary schools for seven and eight days each. Summer camp is open to all students - American citizenship in Halifax (I have met only one), but most people here have hardly any opportunity to see, to meet and to talk with a Japanese. I feel the impact of teaching/sharing Japanese culture at schools with younger generation is tremendously important. After experiencing meeting the same students for many days at the STEM center and Summer Camp, I see better results on students’ understanding and raising interest for Japanese culture by the participants.

**Programs:** When meeting students first time, I planned the lesson composed of two parts: 1) comparison of Japan and US on population, size of the land, climate, eating habits, housing, transportation, and so on; 2) show Japanese school life using power point slide show/large-size picture cards. For eight days session to high school Chinese class students and at the Summer Camp I could do lots of things such as origami, calligraphy, *onigiri*, kamishibai, try-on *yukata*, playing with traditional toy, and so on.

**Evaluation and response:** Whenever visited elementary schools, I was greeted by happy faces and lots of hugs when leaving. Most students know characters like Pokemon/Pikachu, but many of them did not know they are from Japan. It was interesting to find that they tend to mix up all Asian countries. Giving them insight to the map of Asia and cultural difference between Japan and the United States together with pointing out differences to other Asian countries should have enlarged their global understanding. An elementary school boy came up to me and asked me to take him home with me. A high school student thanked me saying that my part of teaching the class (the class originally was an Asian study taught by a Chinese teacher) was very interesting and resourceful.

**Comments:** Teaching at schools and meeting students is always great fun and rewarding. Remembering how Japanese students respond to ALTs, I find students here are less shy, more active and willing to participate. There are a few Japanese with

**Supervisor’s Comment:**

This past school year seems to have been a very rewarding one for Kazuko and especially our students of Halifax County. I think that her warm and friendly nature has proven to be just what we needed to get our students and community interested in Japanese culture. Through her interaction with our students have come many requests from churches, civic and community organizations for her to speak. To my knowledge she has never turned down a speaking opportunity. She exhibits a great pride in her country and its culture and is very willing to share.
JOI to Halifax County Public Schools

Japanese Culture Capsules (Funded by CGP grant)

Date: October 16 - December 11
Place: Southern Virginia Higher Education Center, South Boston
Total number of participants: 73

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 16</td>
<td>History &amp; Usages of Paper in Japan Origami Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 30</td>
<td>Japanese Visual Arts and Calligraphy Practiced writing with brush and ink</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 20</td>
<td>History of the Furoshiki, wrapping cloth Practiced wrapping with furoshiki</td>
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<td>Nov. 27</td>
<td>Japanese Cuisine Made sushi roll</td>
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<td>Dec. 4</td>
<td>Japanese Fashion, Textiles, and Kimono Experienced dressing in kimono</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 11</td>
<td>Japanese Holidays Listened to “Kamishibai” storytelling</td>
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**Background**

This was a part of the $4,900 grant project awarded by the CGP. Six consecutive classes on Japanese culture were offered for interested community members and public school teachers. The topics for the six sessions were: origami, calligraphy, furoshiki, kimono, Japanese holidays and cooking. Each session included an introduction to the topic with opportunities to interact and practice with the presented materials.

**Evaluation and response**

Due to miscommunication and publicity by the local Education Center that organized the sessions, the attendance was not as well as expected. Those who did attend showed great interest and did say that they thoroughly enjoyed being shown and explained about various aspects (phases) of Japanese culture. The age of attendees ranged from the 10 years of age to 70 years of age.

The calligraphy class had the largest number of participants. They enjoyed writing their names in katakana.

Halifax is a rural area and I find no Japanese stuff except soy sauce and rice vinegar. The local people’s knowledge about Japan is very limited/almost none. I find a great meaning as a JOI coordinator to introduce whatever Japanese to open their eyes to Japanese culture that they hardly see/experience except on TV/internet.

There have been many requests from the local people who missed the sessions to repeat them. I have offered the sessions to the Center and most likely that will be one of my activities for second year.

**Supervisor’s Comment:**

I attended several of the capsules and was well pleased with the presentations and the interest of the participants. At least four of the participants attended every session.
Taiko Performance (Funded by CGP Grant)

Date: Sept 24 and 25, 2007.
Place: the Prizery, South Boston, VA
Total number of participants: 925

Background: This was the first project that I worked on and participated in as a JOI coordinator. The idea of a Taiko performance in Halifax first came up while training in Atlanta. Since I had not settled nor been accustomed to the site, every step to accomplish the project was a great experience. Thanks to the CGP’s quick and favorable decision to grant us $4,900, and the great support of Bethany College personnel and the Halifax County Public Schools, we could bring Kato Takumi, taiko performer and make the event happen. We accomplished four performances of Taiko drumming and were able to introduce Japanese culture with satisfactory attendance and evaluation.

Audience participants dressed in Japanese attire.

Comments:
Since Halifax is a small rural area, moving around to advertise the event allowed me to quickly be accustomed to the area. My taking part on the stage gave me a good chance to be introduced to students, local people and the staff as a part of the Halifax County Public School system. It made a great debut for me as a JOI coordinator.

Evaluation and response: In spite of the short time to plan, it was a great success. All of the students and adults who attended were so positive and the interaction with the performer was a sight to behold. Those in attendance stated they were amazed at the high level of energy and athletic ability of the drummer. The children continue to greet me with “konnichi wa” whether they see me at their school or around the community. Right after the event I started to receive invitations to present at community functions and club activities.

Comments from the Supervisor

The Taiko performance was a great way to introduce Kazuko and Japan to Halifax County. People are still talking about the performance and have made Kazuko so recognizable around the community.

Kazuko Yamasaki
Kato Takumi
Maria Domoto
Michiko Odo
Carolyn Young
Paul Nichols

Kazuko’s debut.
A unique learning opportunity came to Halifax County, Virginia, in the guise of a visiting coordinator from the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership (CGP) and The Laurasian Institution (TLI). These two entities designed the JOI project and assigned Kazuko Yamasaki to our school system for two years starting in 2007. This program offered a grassroots opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of Japan by sending Japanese individuals to U.S. sites as coordinators of community outreach activities about Japan. According to the JOI website, “many Americans have little knowledge and awareness of Japan, its culture and significance and contributions to the United States and the rest of the world (Japanese Outreach Initiative n.d.)

Kazuko’s initial debut was the presentation of a taiko drummer to students. The idea of a Taiko performance in Halifax first came up while Kazuko was training in Atlanta. Since she had not settled nor been accustomed to the Halifax site, every step to accomplish the project was a great new experience. Thanks to the CGP’s quick and favorable decision to grant funding, and the great support of Bethany College (West Virginia) personnel and the Halifax County Public Schools, Kato Takumi, a world-renowned taiko performer appeared at the Prizery, our local community arts center. The program consisted of four performances of Taiko drumming and was able to introduce Japanese culture to over 925 students and community members.

Working with the school systems academy and career cluster approach to education, Kazuko Yamasaki submitted another grant project request to GCP. The project themes were shiitake mushroom growing and cherry blossom tree planting. The thought was that a project on shiitake mushrooms and cherry blossom trees, which are indigenous to Japan, would be a wonderful opportunity for students and local people to learn about Japanese culture using a hands-on approach.

While awaiting approval of this project, Kazuko began an intensive Japanese culture class at a local rural elementary school. For most of the students and teachers, this was the first time they met a “real” Japanese person and first exposure to actual Japanese culture. All grades kindergarten through fifth (around 260 students) met with Kazuko Yamasaki a minimum of three hour long sessions. She taught students in kindergarten through second grade using kamishibai (a form of storytelling), origami, and chopsticks. The students learned basic knowledge about Japan such as the shape, size, location, and the national flag. Besides the basic knowledge, students in third through fifth grades viewed a power point to show them school life in Japan. Students were also exposed to the art of calligraphy and how different Japanese characters are formed and what they represent. A special feature of the intensive classes was the integration of music into the culture exposure. Kazuko Yamasaki worked with the school music teacher and all the students learned to sing with appropriate motions “Musunde Hiraite” (Close hands, open hands), “Ookina Kuri no Ki no Shita de” (Under the big chestnut tree) , and “Jan Ken Pon” (Rock, paper, scissors). The students and music teacher worked very hard learning these songs and presented them to parents at a Parent Teacher Organization music night held at the school with over 50 parents, grandparents, and other relatives attending.

To carry out these two major tasks the involvement of many members of the school faculty, student body, local businesses, and community groups was required. Community stakeholders included local business partners especially minority and nontraditional businesses such as the community arts center and higher educational staff. Also local government officials, the local Master Gardner’s Association, the local extension agent for the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Agricultural Services department, school administrators and board members, employees of the school system who assisted and became interested in the cultivation, and parents of the students.
Utilizing all community partners, the first task was collecting suitable logs for the shiitake spawns and pre-cutting them to the desired lengths for drilling. A school employee donated some logs for this project from his farm as well as a local logging company providing us with over 100 pre-cut logs for the project. Utilizing the expertise of Andy Hankins, Virginia State University, Extension Specialist of Alternative Agriculture Virginia Cooperation Extension, and Mr. Jason Fisher, Extension Agent, Virginia Cooperative Extension Office of Halifax, as well as the agriculture and wood sciences teachers at Halifax County High Schools, the completion of the task was quick. Concurrently, the high school agriculture teacher presented students with shiitake growing needs and concepts during their daily curriculum and assumed responsibility for shiitake mushroom cultivation with students.

The cultivation and dimension of the shiitake mushroom planting was a true community event. Agriculture class students learned about the care and growth cycle of the shiitakes and embraced the project with vigor. They planted their “own” logs to leave at school and ones to take home. A community open planting event held at the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center filled to overflow capacity and required the addition of additional space to accommodate all those who wished to learn. Kazuko Yamasaki presented a short overview of Japanese culture and cuisine prior to the planting activity to this group of over 115 participants. The actual drilling and planting of the spawns moved to the nearby community arts center because of spacing reasons. The variety of participants ranged from farmers, young adults, college professionals, and retired persons who embraced the activities and stayed well after the official closing time of the activity. Kazuko Yamasaki also presented several free community events at the local higher education center on Japanese culture focusing on healthy cuisine and Japanese people’s love for cherry blossom trees. After the program, Ms. Yamasaki received over 25 requests for additional information and assistance regarding shiitake cultivation.

The Cherry Blossom planting proved to be another great success in bringing the Halifax County community together. Prior to the actual ceremony, Kazuko Yamasaki visited local elementary schools and read them the story of “Hanasaka Jiisan” (a Japanese folk tale about cherry blossom trees) and presented a brief history of the cherry blossom trees in Washington, D.C. She also presented information about Japanese culture, cuisine, and cherry blossoms to a local private school and a school in a neighboring North Carolina school district for a total student audience of over 700 elementary school students.

A local farming supply store located and procured at a greatly reduced price the proper cherry blossom trees. Working with the local county administrators and the Halifax County Master Gardner’s Association, preparations for planting were completed at Edmunds Park, a local community park.

A planting ceremony for the 25 cherry blossom trees was held on April 24, 2009 with students from a local elementary school singing “Sakura, Sakura” (cherry blossom song), their parents, school board officials, members of the local governments, local Japanese citizens, and the Halifax County Master Gardner’s Association. The scenic view of the trees, adorned with huge pink bows, lining the pond hugging curved drive added emphasis to the intent and purpose of sharing the beauty and culture of Japan. Many local participants in the ceremony continue to visit and care for the trees while waiting their blossoming time.

Kazuko Yamasaki made fans with cherry blossoms and the Chinese character for “sakura” and distributed them to all participants at the ceremony. All student participants received a copy of the words of “Sakura, Sakura” in both Japanese and English accompanied by musical score. They also received a personalized fan with cherry blossom cutouts on the front and the words “Cherry Blossoms” and their name in Japanese on the back on the fan.
To preserve these wonderful contributions to our community, the school technology department made videos of the “Shiitake Spawn Planting” and “Cherry Blossom Tree Planting Event” for others to view in the years to come. These videos are archived on the school’s internal web page for local school use due to confidentiality issues of posting students’ photos on the World Wide Web.

The intent of this grant project was to present Japanese culture and customs to the county. In the future Halifax people will enjoy the beauty of cherry blossoms in Edmunds Park and remember Japan and the Japanese Outreach Coordinator who lived in Halifax for two years. The extension office in Halifax has promised to continue introducing shiitake mushroom growing in the region and for the many local people who attended the original presentation. The extension office is still receiving requests for information and guidance in this venture. The members of the Master Gardeners have started growing shiitake mushrooms also in addition to overseeing the health and care of the Cherry Blossom trees. Kazuko Yamasaki hopes this shiitake-growing project will contribute to the local farm products and its economy and provide alternatives to its tobacco-based heritage.

The Halifax County School system, its students, educators, and local community businesses and partners gained wonderful insight into the world of the Japanese and their quest for beauty. Everyone learned from this wonderful opportunity. The cherry blossom trees have blossomed and the mushrooms are beginning to sprout! Sayonara!

Works Cited


Authors’ Bios

Virginia R. Jones, PhD. works as a Data Analyst for Halifax County Public Schools. She has been a Business and Information teacher, Algebra 1 teacher, middle school administrator, and technology specialist for the school system. Dr. Jones served as the supervisor/coordinator for Kazuko Yamasaki during this project and can be reached at vjones@halifax.k12.va.us.

Kazuko Yamasaki, has returned to her home in Japan and is a resident of Otsu, Shiga 520-0821, Japan. She is actively involved in community outreach programs and environmental concerns. She can be reached at kazukobiwako@hotmail.com.
Words to Sakura, Sakura (with third verse in Japanese)

**SAKURA**

Sa - ku – ra,  Sa – ku – ra, cherry blossoms everywhere.
Clouds of glory fill the sky, Mist of beauty in the air
Lovely colors floating by,
Sa - ku – ra,  Sa – ku – ra, Let all come singing.

2
Sa - ku – ra,  Sa – ku – ra, blossoms waving in the breeze.
Yo – shi – no, the cherry land, Ta – tsu – ta, the maple trees,
Ka – ra – sa – ki, pine tree grand,
Sa - ku – ra,  Sa – ku – ra, let all come singing.

3
Sa – ku – ra, sa – ku – ra, Ya – yo – i no
(Cherry blossoms, cherry blossoms, Across the Spring sky)
So - ra - wa, Mi – wa – ta – su  ka – gi – ri,
(As far as you can see.)
Ka – su – mi – ka  ku – mo – ka,  Ni – o – i zo  i – zu – ru,
(Is it a mist, or clouds? Fragrance in the air)
(Come now, come. Let’s go and look.)