Children’s Art Exhibits and Demonstrations of Japanese Culture at Portage District Library

A meeting in August 2009 with a visiting official of Shiga prefecture, which is a sister state of Michigan, opened up this project. The visiting official, Ms. Saeko Miyamura, told us she was looking for places in Michigan for exhibits of kids’ art of Shigaraki from Koka city of Shiga prefecture.

One of my supervisors, Dr. Stephen Covell, and I contacted Portage District Library and they kindly accepted our request to exhibit the Japanese kids’ arts. Then Ms. Marsha Meyer the Adult Services Librarian in charge of Programs & Events organized the project and suggested we have a reception for the exhibit. Then we started planning having not only the exhibit and reception but also a Japanese cultural event for local people.

The exhibit was held from February 1st to 25th, 2010. Approximately 5,000 people saw the kid’s art during that period. About 150 kids and adults came and enjoyed the event on February 20th, which had a reception and demonstration of Japanese Culture. People tried Shuji, Origami, Japanese food, and green tea and listened to music by Suzuki Academy of Kalamazoo and did Kamishibai. The event was successful because of the big support by Japanese and American students who study at Western Michigan University.

Exhibit Overview

- **Exhibition period:** February 1st to 25th, 2010
- **Title:** “Children’s Art from Shiga, Japan”
- **Artworks:** 17 paintings (65cm x 50cm), 11 ceramic works (30cm x 30cm), 11 photo panels of children and 5 posters of scenes from Shiga.
- **Participating Schools:** Elementary schools in Shigaraki Town in Koka City

Reception and Demonstration of Japanese Culture

- **Date:** Saturday, February 20th, 2:00-4:00 p.m.
- **Place:** Portage District Library (300 Library Lane Portage, MI 49002)

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**Supervisor’s comment by Dr. Rika Saito**

This exhibition was a wonderful showcase for collaborative efforts of JOI, WMU, and Michigan (City of Kalamazoo/Portage) & Shiga municipalities. I saw many local residents exchange their views and findings of various aspects of Japanese cultural assets. Michiko did an excellent job for all parties.
Programs at Kalamazoo Public Library

Kalamazoo Public Library has many programs for local people. One of the biggest programs is “Reading Together” which is held for five weeks in spring every year. Each year following book selection, a community steering committee develops a wide variety of programs, including films, concerts, exhibits, expert presentations, author visits, and so on. The book of 2010 was “Snow falling on cedars”, a story related to Japan. Therefore the Programming Specialist of the library, Ms. Lisa Williams visited Soga Japan Center and I started helping the program as a steering committee member.

I had Origami class and Shodo (Japanese Calligraphy) classes for two days in the night. Because each class filled to capacity, I held an extra Shodo class in April again. The participants were from all range of ages and they told me they had a good time.

I also helped with other events such as tea ceremony demonstration and Taiko performance by Kalamazoo College students. The Taiko performance was held as an opening of a lecture program and fascinated many people.

Supervisor’s comment by Dr. Stephen Covell

The reading together program is Kalamazoo Library's largest annual event. Participation in this event allowed us the chance to reach out to a greater proportion of the local community than ever before and in combination with the events at Portage Library brought our Japan programming great exposure. Michiko took the lead on this event for us and, through her participation on the steering committee, extend our connections in the community.
School Activities

Schools: Woods lake Elementary School, Shamrock Montessori, Kalamazoo Montessori, Angling Road Elementary School, Lawton Elementary School, Lawton Middle School, Mattawan Middle School, Mattawan High School

At the above schools, I led many activities. The classes mainly were social studies and art classes. I introduced general information including geography, Japanese language, showing newspapers and books, life style & food, showing some pictures, and sometimes had activities such as Shuji (Japanese Calligraphy) and Origami.

For getting students interested in Japan, I tried to show modern life style and modern culture including Japanese pop, new technology, songs and also traditional arts including Kimono and Yukata.

The largest presentation was at Mattawan middle School for 300 7th grade students. I and other international students of Western Michigan University had presentations and we played Japanese music: one of them was music of Japanese game and another one was “Kojo no tsuki” by two violins and piano. Students listened very quietly. The school visits were mostly one time for each class except for Shamrock Montessori for 2 ½ to 6 years old. I regularly visited there and taught Japanese kids music and the children sang at a parents’ day on May 20th.

Supervisor’s comment by Dr. Stephen Covell

We had originally planned for Michiko to be primarily involved in schools but soon realized how difficult it could be to arrange programming at schools. Beginning with an early set of contacts, the schools my children had attended, we slowly increased activities at area schools. Michiko and I soon found that art classes were the easiest to get involved in since they have the fewest curricular restrictions. Michiko pulled out all the stops and even performed violin in yukata for the students on one occasion (see the you tube video, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6-YGqNXm00). Through outreach at the schools we have been able to introduce Japan to a new and receptive audience.
Hand on Manga Workshop

Date: March 8 - March 15, 2011
Places: Spring Valley Elementary school, Woods Lake Elementary School, Kalamazoo Public Library, Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Ann Arbor District Library, Boy Scouts at WMU, Michigan State University, and Western Michigan University.

The Soga Japan Center invited Manga artists, Konohana Sakuya, who were awarded the Grand Prize of the 1st Annual International Manga awards, sponsored by the publisher Shinchosha in 2002.

They had hands-on Manga workshops where participants from small kids to adults learned how to draw manga with G-pen and black ink and how to use screentones while having fun.

This program was supported by an education grant of the CGP NY, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo Public Library, Michigan State University, Ann Arbor District Library and Kalamazoo Institute of Arts.

Supervisor’s comment:

What a great success! We are now hoping to establish a regular relationship with the artists and make this an annual event.
Charity Bazaar by students at Western Michigan University

**Tsunami Relief Actions**

We were able to have several events for the Japan earthquake relief on campus at WMU because of the big effort and cooperation of students and the Japan America Society of West Michigan.

March 20, 2011: WMU Students collected donations at the International Festival and raised $1,130.

March 24, 2011: The Soga Japan Center and Japanese exchange students organized a Charity Bazaar at which they sold goods they had brought with them from Japan and other goods and raised $676.55.

March 24, 2011: WMU students including WMUs Japan Club, with the help of the Japan Center, organized a “Sushi for Tsunami” charity event. Over 300 people came and $2,257.25 was raised.

March 27, 2011: The Soga Japan Center and WMU’s Japan Club students helped to teach how to fold Origami

**Supervisor’s comment:**

Our outreach coordinator became the focal point for fund raising efforts on campus. Thanks to her hard work students, faculty and area residents were able to come together in support of our friends in Japan. The events were a great success and really brought home to all how important our relationship with Japan has been and how close we have become as a trans-Pacific community.
Community Activities

K-12, Tween, Teen, Adult, and Family programs

The Soga Japan Center held programs at eighteen schools and organizations in Michigan at which we taught about Japanese cultures including food, Kimono, music, Origami, Shodo (Japanese calligraphy) and so on.

K-12, Tween and Teen programs: Spring Valley Elementary (five times), Woods Lake Elementary, Gull Lake High School, Wylie W Groves High School, Boys and Girls Club, Girl Scout, Boy Scout, Otsego District Library (twice), Kalamazoo Public Library (six times)

Family programs: St Ambrose Catholic Church (twice), Ann Arbor District Library, Kalamazoo Institute of Arts (twice), Richland Community Library (four times), Parchment Community Library

Adult programs: American Association of University Women, Zion Lutheran Church, The Fountains at Bronson Place (three times), St. Joseph City Library

Supervisor’s comment:

Reaching out to the public to teach about Japanese culture has been an important part of our Japan Center programming. Our outreach coordinator made extensive contacts in the local community and brought Japan to people and places that otherwise would not have had a chance to learn about Japanese culture. Everywhere she went she was warmly received and we look forward to building on these contacts to develop lasting programs in the local community. Thanks to her tireless efforts we are now in a position to continue the outreach position for another three years through a commitment from the university and the Japan Foundation.