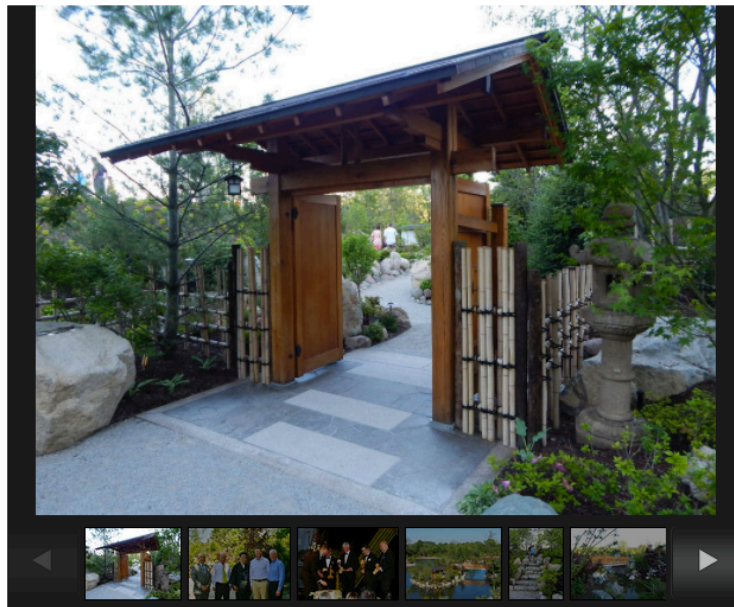




## Japanese ambassador among first to visit new Japanese Garden at Meijer Gardens



The Japanese Garden at Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park opened its doors to the Japanese ambassador to the United States and the governor of the Japanese prefecture of Shiga for the dedication of the \$22 million Japanese Garden at Meijer Gardens. (Jeffrey Kaczmarczyk | MLive.com)



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GRAND RAPIDS, MI – The new Japanese Garden at **Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park** is sure to become a popular travel destination among Japanese citizens living in the United States, according to Japan's top-ranking diplomat in Michigan.

Japan's ambassador to the United States, Kenichiro Sasae, was among the first to visit the \$22 million Richard and Helen DeVos Japanese Gardens.

Sasae, the ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary to the United States from Japan, traveled from Washington, D.C., to Grand Rapids for the private dedication last week of the Japanese Garden on June 10.

"The fact that the ambassador came shows how important the garden is for our bilateral relations," said Kazuyuki Katayama, the Consul-General of Japan in Detroit. "It shows how strongly the Japanese value this garden."

"It will be a great asset in the future," said Katayama, who accompanied Sasae to the event, joined by Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder, prior to the Japanese Garden's opening to **Meijer Gardens'** members on June 11 and to the public on June 13.

Katayama's predecessor, Kuninori Matsuda, traveled from Detroit to Meijer Gardens in 2012 for the announcement of the project. Katayama, who represents the government of Japan in Michigan and Ohio, was present for the dedication of the garden designed by Hoichi Kurisu, a native of Hiroshima.

"The ambassador told me he was so satisfied and so impressed with the supporters he met," Katayama said. "It was a well-organized and touching dinner including the remarks by Hoichi."

Katayama, who has visited the Japanese Garden site twice during the nearly three years of construction, described it as "a very authentic garden."

In addition to Snyder, Taizo Mikazuki, governor of the Japanese prefecture of Shiga, which has an official sister-state relationship with Michigan, was in Grand Rapids for the ceremony.

Meijer Gardens currently has a separate exhibition of art and cultural artifacts from Shiga on display through the end of August.

Referring to Meijer Gardens' Japanese Garden as "one of the largest Japanese gardens in the Midwest," Katayama predicted many of the 13,000 Japanese citizens living in Michigan, as well as an almost equal number living in Ohio, will consider a visit to Meijer Gardens to see the 8-acre garden.

"I hope this garden will be a kind of symbol in the Midwest for cultural exchange and mutual understanding," he said.

The Japanese government and its people are particularly fond of Grand Rapids thanks to President Gerald R. Ford. The Grand Rapids native in 1974 became the first sitting U.S. president to make an official visit to Japan.

Japanese ambassadors were in Grand Rapids for the funeral of President Ford in 2007 and of First Lady Betty Ford in 2011.

"He made a very great contribution to our bilateral relationship," Katayama said of the 38th president.

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