

## INITIAL OBSERVATIONS OF NEWLY-APPOINTED CONSUL-GENERAL OF JAPAN, THREE MONTHS AFTER ARRIVAL

The eleventh Consul General of Japan arrived in Detroit on August 22, 2015 to assume his new position at the Consulate-General office in downtown Detroit's Renaissance Center. The Consulate-General of Japan in Detroit was established in 1993 for the jurisdiction of Michigan and Ohio.

For Mr. Mitsuhiro Wada, a career diplomat, this will be his first, long-term assignment in the United States – one he wholeheartedly welcomes.

“I am very happy to be in Michigan and Ohio, two key states where Japan enjoys very close relations in diverse fields. I will continue to encourage Japanese trade and investment, promote cultural and educational programs, and support the Japanese residents in this region, as missions of our office,” he stated.

### 1. Detroit's Resurgence

“I have extensively toured around Detroit and have witnessed the impressive recovery and redevelopment process undertaken by the people of this iconic city. There is great new input and investment in Detroit and the positive changes in the city's atmosphere are striking. I also noticed that major cultural events such as Youmacon and the Jazz Festival have been successfully held downtown,” commented Consul General Wada, sharing his early impressions of Detroit. “Japan is one of the active community members here. Last year, the Japanese Business Society in Detroit (JBSD) committed \$3.2 million to the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) under ‘the Grand Bargain’, in an effort to protect its invaluable artwork from creditors. The DIA and JBSD are now discussing a new ‘Japan Gallery’. Such commitment by the Japanese business community carries significant meaning for US-Japan bilateral relations,” he continued.

### 2. Japanese Investment: A Leader in the Region

Consul General Wada expressed that he feels empowered by the fact that Japan remains a leading foreign investor here in the industrial Midwest. There are now nearly 900 Japanese companies, which provide about 110,000 jobs in Michigan and Ohio.

“As this economic growth occurs, the population of Japanese residents also increases. Currently, the two states combined have a population of 26,000 split fairly evenly across state borders. We sincerely appreciate the warm hospitality each state has shown to Japanese businesses and residents alike,” said Mr. Wada

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*Michigan and these Japanese companies provide more than 38,000 job opportunities. Japan is the No.1 foreign investor in Ohio where there are 422 Japanese facilities with about 71,000 jobs.*

### 3. State & City Ties With Japan

“The States of Michigan and Ohio have some of the longest partnerships with Japan in the nation through their sister-state and sister-city pairings,” Consul General Wada commented. “I’m very impressed with the many people-to-people exchanges that have been taking place at the grassroots level among the Michigan-Shiga, Ohio-Saitama and 41 sister-cities’ relationships; and am excited to see new sister-city relations continuing to be developed. ”

### 4. The 47<sup>th</sup> US-Japan Midwest Conference in Tokyo

With less than a month on the job, Mr. Wada returned to Japan to participate in the 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Japan-Midwest Conference and was inspired by the enthusiastic participation of Michigan and Ohio leaders.

“State and city government officials, economic development organizations, and business leaders from both Japan and nine Midwest States attended the conference. It was a great opportunity to meet with Michigan Governor Rick Snyder, as well as the state officials from Ohio. The conference discussions were quite intensive, yet very constructive. Many ideas were shared about economic relations and possible future cooperation between Japan and the Midwest,” Mr. Wada reported.

### 5. Recent Japan/Midwest Exchanges

Prior to the start of the Midwest conference, Governor Snyder visited Michigan’s sister-state, Shiga Prefecture. “I was able to join Governor Snyder in September, as he renewed cultural and business ties in Shiga and Aichi prefectures,” Mr. Wada said. “In August, prior to my arrival in Michigan, I also had an opportunity to meet with Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan in Tokyo. This was the mayor’s first overseas trade and cultural mission to Japan and Detroit’s sister-city, Toyota. It was a great success and the mayor’s message was very well received in Japan,” Consul General Wada continued.

“Ohio’s City of Dublin mayor, Michael Keenan, also visited Japan in February and has initiated the process to develop a sister-city relationship with Mashiko-cho in Tochigi Prefecture. And, in July, top officials of Keidanren, Japan’s most powerful business association, visited Columbus, Ohio and were warmly welcomed by Lt. Gov.

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Mary Taylor.”

6. Japanese Language Learning and the JET Program

Currently nearly 4,300 students are enrolled in Japanese language courses in 42 of the top universities, colleges and community colleges in Michigan and Ohio. “I hope to promote, as much as possible, the study of Japanese language in this region, since not only does language learning draw Americans and Japanese closer culturally, it also enhances employment opportunities at Japan-affiliated companies,” Consul General Wada said. “To foster strong bilateral relations in the next generation, I also encourage youth exchange between the two countries, such as with The Kakehashi Project-Bridge for Tomorrow and the Japan Exchange & Teaching (JET) Program.”

The Kakehashi Project is an annual, government-funded program for U.S. high school and university students to travel to Japan for a ten-day visit and exchange with local institutions. The JET Program, on the other hand, is an opportunity for US college graduates to work in Japan, for one to five years, as assistant English language teachers or coordinators for international relations. There are about 50-60 JET participants selected and sent to Japan every year from Michigan and Ohio under the program.

7. Future task

“I have visited several cities in both states already, such as Lansing and Grand Rapids in Michigan, and Columbus, Cleveland and Cincinnati in Ohio. I have met many dignitaries and business leaders including County Executives, mayors, and state representatives. My aim is to visit as many people and places as possible with the two states during my stay here,” Mr. Wada said. “I strongly feel that our economic, educational, and cultural ties have never been better, and I will put forth my best effort to further promote friendship and mutual understanding while I introduce Japanese culture and/or views. At the same time, I will be introducing the attractions of the States of Michigan and Ohio to Japan.

“My mission as consul-general, and the goals of the consulate could never be achieved without your help and I humbly ask for your continued support,” the Consul General concluded.