

BERKELEY-SAKAI SISTER CITY ASSOCIATION



Celebrating over 50 years of Friendship



バークレー・堺 50年超える友好

Welcome to 2021

Virtual Meeting, March 12, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.

The 2021 Annual Dinner will be held at 7pm (Pacific Time) on Friday, March 12, 2021 via Zoom. Please come join us. We have a pre-registration for this event. Once you have registered you will receive a confirmation email titled "Berkeley-Sakai Association Annual Dinner" from Contra Costa Retirees <no-reply@zoom.us>. If you don't receive your confirmation email, please check your spam folder.

We have invited guests from Sakai to join us live in the meeting. We will be showing videos, talking about the 2022 Student Exchange, and showing Kindergarten Art. We will also have breakout rooms where you can talk with others in small groups.

To register for this event please go to our website: <<https://berkeley-sakai.org/>>

We hope to see you there!

Proposed 2021 Board of Directors (to be voted on at the annual meeting)

Chair: Gary Gibson

Vice Chair: Don Rising

Treasurer: Maria LaForge

Secretary: Linda Komendant

Auditor: Brad McCullough

Directors: Wanda Bonneville, Juri Komendant, Kathryn Lucchese, Atsuko Morse, Roy Nierenberg, Noriko Nishizawa, Cheryl Rego, Steve Rego, Carolyn Rising, Jay Sordean, Sally Stevens, and Barbara Stevens Strauss.

Art Bridge Artist Exchange

One of the few programs that took place this year was the Art Bridge Artist Exchange. The exhibit took place November 20 to December 9, 2020 at the Gallery Irohani in Sakai. Five local artists (Mimi Sheiner, Barbara Stevens-Strauss, Clare Olivares, Michelle Theberge, and Phil Donahue) participated and sent artwork for display in Sakai. For many years now, local artist Whitney Vosburgh has worked with Sakai artist Junichi Hotta organizing and coordinating the exchange of artwork between Sakai artists and local Bay Area artists. Whitney recently moved to Maine, and we would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his many years of facilitating the art exchange between Berkeley and Sakai.

Student Exchange

The BSA board recently decided that we will aim to hold a student exchange in the summer of 2022. This gives our board a year to plan and to allow the Covid-19 situation to get under control. Also, by then we will know more about vaccines for the US and Japan.

All students who were set to attend the 2020 exchange will have the option to attend the 2022 exchange. There is a current interest form linked to our website for any interested students.

Atsuko, a board member, is willing to present summer Zoom classes that cover various Japanese and cultural topics. Sign-ups will be posted on the BSA website.

Finally, all interested students are encouraged to attend our annual dinner. Questions? Please contact CherylRego@gmail.com

Berkeley-Sakai Virtual Middle School Exchange

The Berkeley-Sakai Virtual Middle School Exchange is a new student exchange that was born out of the desire to create new cultural exchange opportunities during the Covid-19 Global Pandemic, and subsequent lockdown. It was proposed by Forest Borie, an English teacher at Longfellow Middle School in Berkeley California. The main goals of the exchange are:

1. To push against the tendency of isolation (due to the pandemic) and make new connections
2. To give the Longfellow Middle School students an opportunity to learn about another culture
3. To improve literacy and communication skills
4. To have a fun and meaningful cultural exchange

The initial vision is to start with a virtual Pen Pal program, in which the students would write to each other via email. To overcome the language barrier, emphasis would be put on the visual and performing arts (drawing, music, etc). Specific details are still being explored.

The first step in establishing the new exchange will be to connect Forest with like-minded teachers in Sakai so that they can develop the program together. Several target middle schools in Sakai have been identified, and contacts in Sakai are being established through a number of different channels,

including the U.S. & Japan Exchange and Teaching program (JET), members of the Berkeley-Sakai board, and the Kizuna Across Cultures program (KAC), to name a few.

One area where we still need help is with translation to facilitate communication between the Berkeley and Sakai teachers. If you would like to help as a translator, please send a message to: bsapenpal@berkeley-sakai.org.

We anticipate being able to start a pilot exchange in mid-to-late 2021. Progress of the exchange program's development will be posted on the Berkeley-Sakai website at <https://berkeley-sakai.org/exchanges>. Stay tuned!

California-Japan Sister Cities Network Meeting-November 13, 2020

Your Berkeley-Sakai Board attends the annual California-Japan Sister Cities Network. Many of the sister city organizations in Northern California attend as well as JET (Japanese Exchange & Teaching Program), Sister Cities International, representatives from the Japanese consulates (both SF and LA) and some Japanese sister city organizations. This year, with the pandemic, they held the meeting on Zoom, allowing for more attendees from each sister city organization and so several of us from Berkeley-Sakai Association attended (there are some silver linings to the pandemic). The theme this year was "Bridging the Pacific Creatively: Sister City Relationships Under the New Normal". This was a fantastic opportunity to hear how other sister cities operate and what types of activities they have. While the level of activity in the associations varies, student exchanges are the most common activity, and the cancellation of those exchanges due to the pandemic was true across the board. The Consular offices also gave very supportive addresses to us – a tribute to Sister-Cities being long-standing forms of friendship that has strong backing. At this meeting they also have guest speakers, and this year they had representatives from Crescent City/Del Norte County and Rikuzentakata

City who are sister cities. How they became sister cities is an incredible story. The brief synopsis is that an open fishing boat washed up on shore in Crescent City. They found that it had Japanese writing on it and so they tried to find out more about the boat, who it belonged to, and why it was in Crescent City. It turns out that it washed out to sea during the Tsunami that hit the Sendai/Iwate shoreline. It was used by a school in Rikuzentakata City for education on fishing. The high school in Crescent City repaired the boat and delivered it back to the school in Rikuzentakata City, thus starting the sister city relationship and student exchange. There is now a film and book about this story. You can find out more at this link <https://visitdelnortecounty.com/article/the-story-of-kamome-crescent-city/>.

The Fern Harger Fund

I know I have talked endlessly to anyone who will ask how much the late Fern Harger, the wonderful leader of some of our earliest BSSE exchanges (I was 1973), influenced my life as an educator and the leader of my own student trips abroad.

The other thing I can talk endlessly about is the priceless value of well-prepared, thoughtful travel on high-school students. A thousand tiny aspects of life we always take for granted leap into perspective, and new ways of thinking are suddenly possible, at an incredibly important, seminal moment in young lives.

For this reason, we are trying harder than ever to help young Berkeleyites be part of our unique program, no matter what their financial situation. One creative and determined student opened his own “Go Fund Me” page to realize his dream of getting to Japan!

Because our sister organization in Sakai covers local housing and travel expenses, it is primarily the considerable cost of airfare that needs to be covered by our exchange students. While also finding local travel agents to

give us the best deals, we are asking B-SA Members to give generously to the Fern Harger Fund, which goes exclusively to student exchange expenses.

Please write “Fern Harger Fund” on the message line of your check, or follow the links on our webpage. Thanks a million!

Hosting “THE HARIMAYA BRIDGE” Fundraiser

From the 9th to the 15th of July, 2020, Berkeley-Sakai Association co-hosted the online showing of the 2007 ElevenArts film “The Harimaya Bridge,” the story of an American father whose art-teacher son has recently died in a scooter accident in Japan, and who travels to the town where it happened, to come to terms with the loss.

The showing dates culminated in a live Zoom discussion with Ko Mori and Aaron Woolfolk about the making and meaning of the film, moderated by playwright, author and poet Velina Hasu Houston: a rare treat for all who participated. The logistics for all this, the promotional artwork, and the showing itself were brilliantly organized by Eleven Arts, who split showing profits 50/50 with Berkeley-Sakai.

The showings netted B-SA a few hundred dollars, but the rewards went far beyond money. It was a very bright spot in a very dark year, and incredibly relevant for our times.

The whole project began two years back, as a twinkle in Barbara Strauss’ imagination. Her friend’s nephew is Aaron Woolfolk, a native of Oakland who has gone on to become a film-maker who wrote and directed the film.

“*The Harimaya Bridge*” was written and directed by Aaron Woolfolk, a veteran of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program who taught junior high school English in Kochi Prefecture. Woolfolk won a Directors Guild of America Best African-American Student Filmmaker award for his first movie, the short film *Rage!* He then returned to Kochi and made the short films *Eki* (The Station) and *Kuroi Hitsuji* (Black Sheep), both of which

won several awards and screened at top film festivals and showcases around the world. The Harimaya Bridge is Woolfolk's first feature film.

For those of you unfamiliar with the film's plot, you should know that the father of the dead art teacher is already filled with rage against the country that killed his own father in WWII, and his rejection of the customs of Japan has a very personal feel to it. When he embarks on a journey to track down and repossess every piece of art that his son produced, he tramples on every Japanese sensibility, and every human impulse as well.

The fact that both he and his son are Black (as is Aaron Woolfolk) is not as important as that they are foreigners, but it adds a powerful additional layer for White audiences. The relentless kindness with which the father is treated by his hosts – with occasional outbursts of natural outrage – begins to crack his monstrous facade. Finally, the realization that he has an adorable bi-racial (and completely culturally-Japanese) granddaughter causes him to look realistically at his deep prejudices.

The story's name comes from the local legend of two star-crossed lovers who met at bridge, but could never find lasting happiness, and the depth of the father's conversion to the forces of love and acceptance is demonstrated in his permanent move to Japan to follow his own dream of becoming a photographer and to honor his son's legacy. The party with which he opens this new enterprise is like a meeting in Heaven of all the people he has offended or hurt, to whom he reaches out a hand of friendship, reconciliation and hospitality.

How well all that resonates with our motto of “together creating a peaceful world through friendship and cultural exchange!”

Oddly, though we had been working on it for some time, it was the perfect film for the year. All our worries about renting a theater in downtown Berkeley, providing food, etc. etc. were solved by the necessity of an online format. Good karma, perhaps, or another COVID silver lining!

Kindergarten Art Exchange

The 2021 Berkeley-Sakai Kindergarten Art Exchange has been cancelled by Japanese authorities due to the Covid19 pandemic. Our Berkeley participants are studying remotely this year. The exhibit sites which we use in Berkeley and in Sakai are closed.

We encourage you to check out the colorful drawings from the last exchange which can be viewed on our Berkeley-Sakai website <http://www.berkeley-sakai.org>. Just click on the picture shown on the home page. We also invite you to see them at our 2021 annual meeting to be held via Zoom at 7:00 pm, Friday, March 12.

If you have a relative who will enter kindergarten next September, we will help you guide their participation in the 2022 Kindergarten Art Exchange.

In Memoriam

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of a longtime member, Jim Gallardo. An active member of his community and his church, Jim and his wife, Vi, were also leaders for one of the Berkeley-Sakai student groups that went to Japan. Our thoughts and prayers go out to Vi and their family.

The Berkeley-Sakai Website

The Berkeley-Sakai Association (BSA) website is your information portal for all things BSA. The BSA website can be reached at <https://berkeley-sakai.org>. Have you visited our website lately?

The latest Sakai Kindergarten Exchange pictures from 2020 are on display.

The BSA website is also a great way to renew your membership or make donations to the Fern Harger Scholarship fund. You can pay online via PayPal or credit card.