

JETAA International Conference

JLGC Hosts Inaugural Meeting of Delegates in New York

JETAA, the Japan Exchange and Teaching Alumni Association, took another giant step forward this summer when the Japan Local Government Center hosted the first JETAA International Conference on August 18 and 19. Delegates from chapters throughout the US and Canada gathered at the Swiss Drake Hotel in New York City to meet face to face with their colleagues, and to formulate the policies which will lead the organization into the next century.

The weekend was filled with a variety of discussions and seminars, interspersed with sightseeing and social events. This first ever conference of North American Regional Representatives was a most satisfying mix of work and play.

Worldwide membership of JETAA has now topped the 15,000 mark, a fact which attests to the rapidly growing popularity of the JET Program itself. Thanks to the expansion efforts and support of the Japanese government, 4,625 young professionals participated in the 1995-96 program year as language teachers and local government interns, an increase of more than 400 over the previous year. With the growth in numbers of alumni and the associated infusion of talent, enthusiasm and imagination has come a corresponding expansion of the potential of both individual JETAA chapters and the organi-

zation as a whole. More than ever, JETAA is prepared to carry out its mission of promoting relations between Japan and other nations around the world.

With this goal in mind, Conference participants began their two-day marathon of presentations, group discussions and debates with a list of issues to be addressed. Paramount among them were:

1. Territory and logistics: how to serve alumni in chapters covering a large geographical area
2. Start-up and incorporation: how to set up a chapter and gain status as a non-profit organization

3. Relationships with other organizations: how to build and maintain strong connections with other organizations such as Japanese embassies and consulates and JLGC

4. Membership: how to increase the number and involvement of alumni members

5. Funding: how and where to get adequate funding

6. Planning: how to ensure that the organization remains focused and goal-oriented

Brainstorming and exchange, however, were not limited to these somewhat traditional organizational issues. Fresh and progressive ideas abounded, one of the most



JLGC Director Toshiyuki Otaki addressed delegates during opening ceremonies and orientation



JETAA delegates introduced their chapters and concerns



Participants discussed goals and problems during group sessions

exciting being the possibility for chapter presidents to work together to develop an official JETAA Home Page on the Internet World Wide Web serving all of North America. Equally important to establishing a direction for the organization's future was the suggestion of establishing a National JETAA whose existence would lend greater authority to JETAA's opinions and actions both in the US and in Japan.

The Conference would not have been complete without the insight and wisdom contributed by a panel of distinguished guest speakers. Prominent figures from the business, academic and political communities joined in urging alumni members to remain

committed to the goal of promoting understanding between Japan and their respective countries. The guests included Ms. Penelope Benson-Wright, President of New York-Japan International; Mr. Naozane Utada, Director of Yomiuri America; Dr. Shigeru Miyagawa, Professor of Japanese Language and Culture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Senator Bob Jauch, representing the 25th Senate District in Wisconsin; Congressman Eliot L. Engel of New York's 17th Congressional District; and Mr. Michio Hamaji, President and CEO of Teikoku Databank America, Inc.

The long hours of meetings and discussions paid off. Tangible proof was found in

the passing of several resolutions. First and foremost was a move to have most chapters incorporated by April 1, 1996. Non-profit incorporation makes the existence of the chapter as an organization official, and greatly facilitates each chapter's ability to raise and accept funds. Recognizing the importance of this goal, JLGC offered to bear the legal costs of gaining non-profit status for all chapters. A second resolution, equally important to JETAA's future, confirmed a commitment by established chapters to act as advisors and mentors to start-up chapters.

By the gathering's end, it was quite clear that the first JETAA International Conference had been a resounding success. The creativity and energy of the attendees left no doubt that chapter presidents stand ready to build JETAA into a strong and influential cross-cultural organization, capable of making a positive impact on Japan-North America relations. Conferences such as this, providing the opportunity for chapter leadership to meet, suggest solutions to problems and share ideas for the future, will be an invaluable tool in achieving this goal.



Exchanges of ideas and challenges were intense during delegate meetings



Dr. Shigeru Miyagawa of MIT was among the guests who shared insights with attendees



JETAA International Conference members joined for a group photo