



Co-operation, collaboration and camaraderie - the 2007 JETAA International Meeting proves to be a resounding success

JETAA ACTIVITIES

Organizing an International Meeting was not something that JETAA Toronto had ever planned to do. In fact, before 2005, when we submitted our first bid, most of the people on the JETAA Toronto executive didn't even know there was an international executive representing JET Programme alumni around the world.

Coincidentally, in 2005, one of the goals of JETAA Toronto was to increase the profile of the organization within the Japanese-Canadian community in Toronto and also amongst our members. Hosting an International Meeting fit perfectly into that mandate. That is how we began the long journey of organizing the 2007 JETAA International Meeting.

An emergency executive meeting was called to discuss the pros and cons of hosting such a large-scale event in our spare time. We wondered about what would make Toronto the perfect venue: Perhaps the multiculturalism and variety the city had to offer, and what might undermine our bid, the weather.

Traditionally, International Meetings have been held in November. We would have to hold it in a warmer month. We also had to get the agreement of the Japanese governmental bodies that would be funding the conference; MOFA representatives at the Consulate General of Japan in Toronto and CLAIR representatives in New York and Toronto.

It took a bit of persuasion and negotiation, but finally all parties agreed that this was a great opportunity for JETAA Toronto to showcase its amazing members and the incredible city that we live in.

We e-mailed our bid to the international executive and waited to hear the outcome of the voting. Finally, the reply came with disappointing news. We were unsuccessful. Sydney, Australia would be hosting the 2006 JETAA

International Conference.

In 2006, the international executive asked if we would submit another bid to host the 2007 meeting. Again, we went through the process of discussing our plans with all the right people. We improved our bid from 2005 and sent it off to be rated by the world. At least this time we knew what to expect.

Our competition was Germany, a great option, but in the end, the world decided JETAA Toronto was the place to be in September 2007.

Immediately, the planning began. The conference was seven months away but if we were going to successfully fly 30 people to Toronto from around the world and organize the amazing conference we had described in our bid, we needed to get organized fast.

We contacted MOFA and CLAIR to secure funding for the conference, recruited two JET alumni members to act as conference coordinators and began planning.

From February to September, e-mails flew around the world as receptions were planned, meeting rooms were booked, conference agendas were confirmed and hotels were inspected. In February, the actual conference date seemed so far away, but soon enough, we were only two weeks away from the conference we had been thinking about for two years.

On September 12, 2007, the first delegate flew into Toronto and arrived safely at the hotel. Soon, 21 international representatives had arrived, two members of CLAIR New York, four members of MOFA and four members of CLAIR Tokyo. We were so excited to welcome them to our city and our home!

During the conference, delegates discussed how to

strengthen JETAA chapters around the world, learned about different member services and events offered by different chapters and brainstormed about how to improve communications both within individual chapters and around the world.

Delegates attended a reception hosted by the Consul General of Japan, admired the Toronto skyline at night from the restaurant atop the CN Tower, rode on a streetcar and watched a Major League Baseball game with the New York Yankees star Japanese player, Hideki Matsui.

The conference went by so quickly. One minute we were saying our hellos and three days later we were hugging everyone good-bye. It was an exciting experience that JETAA Toronto wouldn't trade for the world.

Organizing this conference truly gave us a sense of how large the JET Programme community is and how far the bonds forged between alumni extend. From Russia to Jamaica to South Africa to Canada to every country in between, thousands of young adults have completed the JET Programme and come home with a greater appreciation for Japan and for the world.

The 2008 International Meeting will be held in Paris, France. We wish them all the luck in the world. Bon chance!

