



## World Friends Visit Takeo City

On April 19, the City Council received a presentation from Sebastopol World Friends about a recent trip to one of Sebastopol's Sister Cities, Takeo City, Japan. Visits between Sebastopol's Japanese sister city have been going on for many years. This year, 18 middle school students, three chaperones and 12 adults from the community visited the town's sister city to celebrate the 31st year in unity. Students, chaperones, and others spoke to the Council about their experience.

"It shows other ways of being in the world," Sebastopol Councilmember Patrick Slayter, who attended as the city's liaison, said. "That's a really important lesson learned only through the exchange."

The Takeo City Program is a two-year program for seventh and eighth grade students. American and Japanese student ambassadors are paired with one another or matched in small groupings and homestay at each other's houses for 10 days in spring, experiencing their respective cities, cultures and lifestyles. In the first year, Takeo students visit and stay with Sebastopol families and in the second year, Sebastopol students visit Takeo, which just concluded. The program also offers adult cultural exchange opportunities, by means of hosting visitors and traveling as part of an adult group or chaperone.

Sebastopol Police Chief Jeff Weaver was slated for the trip, but couldn't attend. "The Chief asked if anyone else wanted to go and I jumped at the opportunity," Sebastopol Police Office Jacques Levesque said. "I was really excited to go," Levesque said.

He left a day early, allowing for time to visit temples, shrines and castle ruins. "The countryside is beautiful," Levesque said.

Of Takeo City, Levesque said the municipality used to be smaller but has grown over the years, due to incorporation. In fact, in 2008, the city of Yamauchi, Japan merged with neighboring towns to form Takeo City. Yamauchi and Sebastopol became Sister Cities in 1985. The police department, which Levesque visited, has grown proportionally to match the city's expanse, too. "They have 80 officers to our 14," Levesque said. "They're similar to our agency, with different divisions."

Levesque described the agency as very efficient, with officers showing a lot of respect for one another. He did note something different about their uniforms – while Sebastopol Police vests protect from gunshots, Takeo City Police vests protect from knife attacks, since guns are outlawed.

"There's a lot less gun violence," Levesque said. "It's a very respectful culture there."

Levesque said he would like to see the Sebastopol community live a little more "in the present moment" like those in Takeo City. "We're always on our cell phones.

They weren't so much in to that," Levesque said. "I love our city, but they're in the present moment and go out of their way to make sure you're comfortable and that your needs are met."

Meeting needs was a quality of the people of Takeo City – and Japan, at large – that Slayter, noticed too. He relayed a story about a trip to Naga, where the group was taking a break to get some lunch.

"I was waiting in line and a girl came up and was just moved to tears over the customer service she received in a store," Slayter said. "She could have been buying a pencil for all I know. But seeing how a complete stranger helped her; that really has an impact."

"It's so important to see other cultures and other ways of being in the world," Slayter said.

Many Sebastopol students, families and citizens have had unique opportunity to gain rich cultural experiences through the program.

Takeo City's Mayor Tadashi Komatsu visited Sebastopol to participate as an honored guest in the Apple Blossom Parade. Unfortunately, with news of a major earthquake in southern Japan, he had to cut short his visit. Takeo City did not experience major damage, although other areas did. Takeo is assisting neighboring cities, and our thoughts are with them.

Portions of this article were republished with permission from Sonoma West Times & News, Amie Windsor, Staff Writer.



## Walk Safety

Pedestrian safety is a serious issue. One in six traffic fatalities in California is a pedestrian. A pedestrian is a person on foot or who uses a conveyance such as roller skates, skateboards, etc., other than a bicycle.

Our circulation system contains inherent risks in mixing metal vehicles weighing thousands of pounds and traveling at speed with people on foot or on a bicycle. Drivers as well as pedestrians can contribute to a safer Sebastopol.

There are increasing concerns about pedestrian safety. Pedestrians have the right of way in crosswalks, even if the crosswalk is in the middle of the block.

Every intersection is considered to have a pedestrian crosswalk whether or not there are painted lines on the street. Before turning a corner, watch for people about to cross the street.

Some crosswalks have flashing lights to warn you that pedestrians may be crossing. As you are driving, look for pedestrians and be prepared to stop, whether or not the lights are flashing.

Always stop for any pedestrian crossing at corners or other crosswalks, even if the crosswalk is in the middle of the block, and at corners with or without traffic lights, whether or not the crosswalks are marked by painted lines.

And if you are a pedestrian, you have the responsibility of crossing safely and with reasonable prudence.

Do not step into the roadway without

looking. If moving vehicles are close, allow them to pass. Do not assume that flashing lights or traffic signals will automatically stop traffic: always look both ways.

Do not walk and text or talk on your phone—pedestrians (as well as drivers) can cause accidents by inattentive behavior.

If you are walking at night, try not to wear dark clothing, and carry a flashlight. It can be very difficult for drivers to see dark-clothed pedestrians at night. Do not assume drivers see you. If we all pay careful attention and use appropriate judgment, accidents in Sebastopol may be reduced.

### Traffic Snarls

Several ongoing construction projects have created traffic congestion. Construction can result in long-term improvements, but can often create short-term disruptions.

Caltrans is about halfway through the process to replace the Highway 12 bridge into Sebastopol; that project has caused slowdowns and will continue to do so for a number of months.

The CVS construction at the corner of Petaluma Avenue/Sebastopol Avenue has also created some major traffic jams, particularly by temporarily reducing the number or width of lanes.

The project will result in significantly improved sidewalks and improved pedestrian crossings, and will also include accessibility improvements mandated by Caltrans. These improvements would have been required of any major development project at the site.

The City continues to work with Caltrans and project developers to minimize disruptions, but pending project completion, some impacts will continue to be experienced.

### Take Our Website Survey

Voice your opinion about the City's website! The City is engaged in a complete revamp of the Sebastopol website.

Up until April 26, we are asking for your feedback about the website through a survey at <http://www.sebsurvey.com>, followed by a community forum to discuss results on May 4 (6-8PM) at Sebastopol's Library. What would you like to see improved on the site?

Printed paper surveys will be available at City Hall, the Sebastopol Library, and select City buildings around town. Stay tuned for those locations as they will be updated on the webpage.

City of Sebastopol, 7120 Bodega Avenue, Sebastopol, California 95472, 707 823-1153

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