

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



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Santa Barbara pitching in to aid stricken sister city in Japan

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The Santa Barbara-Toba Sister City Organization is calling on Santa Barbara to reach out to its sister city of Toba, Japan, by enjoying some Japanese culture for their benefit.

The organization will host an "Oysters and Pearls" benefit buffet and silent auction on April 28 for disaster relief for the sister city.

Toba, Santa Barbara's oldest sister city, is a coastal city that depends largely on its oyster and seaweed ocean farms, delicate floating platforms normally sheltered by bays and inlets. The 5-foot tsunami wave the community experienced badly damaged those farms, resulting in \$24 million in damage.

Toba Mayor Ken Kida wrote to the sister-city organization last week: "The tsunami that followed the



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A 5-foot tsunami wave caused some \$24 million of damage, in Toba, Japan, especially to the floating platforms that are used for the city's oyster and seaweed farms.

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Sister city's economy severely damaged

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terrible earthquake wreaked havoc on the coast of our city. Over two thousand rafts for culturing oysters and sea weeds were seriously damaged. The people of Santa Barbara's sympathy is greatly appreciated and Toba city would humbly accept donations from Santa Barbara. Any help would be appreciated by the victims."

The city is about 250 miles south of Tokyo, several hundred miles south of hard-hit Sendai, and while no buildings were damaged, many family farms suffered, said Takako Wakita, chair of the Santa Barbara Sister Cities Board. The oysters grown in Toba are used for food, as is the seaweed, called nori, popular in sushi.

"At first, Mayor Kida of Toba was reluctant to tell us about this damage because they were so concerned about the tragedy in North Japan," said Linda Mathews, president of the Santa Barbara-Toba Sister City Organization. "But the livelihoods of many families and small business in Toba have been severely impaired. Toba has not fared well during the downturn in the Japanese economy this past decade and this is a serious blow to the city's economy. We would like to help them as they helped us after the Painted Cave fire."

A group of Toba citizens was visiting Santa Barbara when the Painted Cave fire broke out in 1990 and Toba donated \$16,000 to the city of Santa Barbara. The money was used to replant trees in Tuckers Grove and behind Alpha School.

Santa Barbara's relationship with Toba began in 1966. Since then,

citizens and officials have made mutual visits. Toba is the home of the world's first cultured pearls and boasts the Mikimoto Pearl Museum, which was not damaged.

The benefit will feature a Japanese buffet dinner and open bar, a silent auction, craft tables, and a taikodrum team from Los Angeles. The event will take place from 5 to 8 p.m. at the Cabrillo Arts Pavilion, 1118 E. Cabrillo Blvd. Tickets are \$50 per person.

Donations may also be mailed to: Oysters and Pearls c/o Vandervoort, 10 Fairwood Lane, Santa Barbara, CA, 93103.

The organization also will have a table with photos and flyers at Wednesday's State of the City breakfast, from 7:30 to 9 a.m. at Fess Parker's Doubletree Resort.

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