

Fundraiser for Tsunami Damage to Toba, SB's Sister City

SANTA BARBARA'S OLDEST SISTER CITY of 45 years, Toba, Japan, suffered \$24 million in damages to their oyster and seaweed (nori) ocean farms during the tsunami. In response to this, the Santa Barbara-Toba Sister City Organization is sponsoring a disaster relief fundraising event on Thursday, April 28th, at the Cabrillo Arts Pavilion from 5 to 8pm. Benefit participants will enjoy a buffet provided by local restaurants, a silent auction, and the entertainment of a taiko drumming group "Taiko Center of Los Angeles."

"The Santa Barbara community is once again coming together to generously assist others in need, this time by raising funds towards the recovery efforts throughout Japan," shared Mayor Helene Schneider, Honorary Chair of the event. "There are close to 200 sister cities between the United States and Japan and we're honored to do our small part assisting the people of Toba, our oldest Sister City. We hope this event will enhance the Sister City mission of 'promoting peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation - one individual, one community at a time.'"

Oysters grown for food and nori are a major part of the economy of Toba, which is several hundred miles south of the earthquake area of Sendai. Many small family businesses around the Toba coastline have floating platforms from which rows of oysters grow in frames dangling in the water. The process is a delicate one, and they are usually protected in the sheltered bays and inlets. Toba is famous for its seafood and for the sheets of nori used in making sushi that are grown in the shallow waters and processed in small factories on the islands off Toba.

Toba's Mayor Ken Kida wrote last week,

"The tsunami that followed the terrible earthquake wreaked havoc on the coast of our city. Over 2,000 rafts for culturing oysters and sea weed 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." Mayor Kida studied agriculture in Iowa for two years during his college years. He has visited Santa Barbara several times.

"At first Mayor Kida was reluctant to tell us about Toba's damage because they were so concerned about the tragedy in Northern Japan," explained 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... 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."

Former Mayor Sheila Lodge remembers 1990 when the Painted Cave fire broke out in the middle of a visit from a delegation of Toba citizens. "Our 42 visitors were at a dinner the night of the fire. As reports on its destruction came in they passed the hat and raised over \$1,000 in cash. When they got home the City of Toba gave \$7,500 and the people gave another \$8,700 in small contributions. Their spontaneous and generous donations were greatly appreciated. I hope Santa Barbarans respond in kind to the need resulting from the tsunami in Toba." The Toba money was used to replant trees in Tuckers Grove and behind Alpha School.



Toba before the sunami

"When I visited Toba I was struck by how similar Toba is to Santa Barbara," shared past Mayor Marty Blume of her visit to Toba in 2004 when she toured an oyster farm. "Toba is picturesque with offshore islands and engaged residents. Like Santa Barbara they are dependent on tourism and the ocean. It is a tragedy that their oyster beds have been destroyed. So many families depend on oysters for their livelihood. I hope the people of Santa Barbara will reach out to our sister city in Japan with their donations."

Santa Barbara citizens may contribute to the disaster fund by attending the event, or sending contributions to the address below.

The Cabrillo Arts Pavilion is located at 1118 E. Cabrillo Blvd. To reserve a spot, RSVP: with a check (\$50 per person) to "Toba Tsunami Relief" to: Oysters and Pearls, 10 Fairwood Ln. Santa Barbara 93103. Donations mail also be mailed to the above address. Please state that it is a donation and not a reservation. For information, contact: Takako Wakita, wakita@cox.net. or call 805-964-7559. The Santa Barbara Toba Sister City Organization is 501c3 # 93-1171553.