

Marlaina McElheny works at the International Affairs Division of the Hokkaido Government as a CIR and, will be spending this Red Brick Bulletin talking about the online signing ceremony between the legislative assemblies in Alberta and Hokkaido, as part of the 40 year anniversary of Alberta and Hokkaido's sister state affiliation.

Celebrating the Years: Hokkaido Sister States and Friendly Affiliations



2020 was a landmark year for Hokkaido and two of its sister relationships: the 30th anniversary with Massachusetts, and the 40th anniversary for Alberta. To help celebrate the Massachusetts anniversary, we in Hokkaido did a bout of Massachusetts-centric classes with elementary and junior high school students in Hokkaido, and a pen pal letter exchange with students in Massachusetts and other states. You can read more about that exchange in Nov/Dec 2020 Issue [here](#).

This Red Brick Bulletin will focus on the recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two Legislative Assemblies of Hokkaido and Alberta, Canada.

Hokkaido and the Canadian province of Alberta have been sister states since 1980, and have taken part in a variety of exchanges in the fields of sports, education, business, and culture. This relationship encouraged the relationship between the Hokkaido Museum and the Royal Alberta Museum. It has also led to the annual "Alberta Day" in Hokkaido (canceled in recent years due to COVID) to help teach the Hokkaido people about Alberta and the shared relationship.



As 2020 marked the 40th anniversary of friendly relations between Hokkaido and Alberta, it was a year for commemorative events. Even with COVID, both areas planned to hold in November an online signing ceremony of the renewal MOU, as they do every five years. Unfortunately, the online signing ceremony had to be canceled due to the uptick in COVID cases at the time in Hokkaido that demanded the Governor's attention. Rescheduling a meeting between people in two foreign governments takes a while.

However, as the snows began to melt and the spring winds began to blow, a new relationship was sprouting. The Legislative Assemblies in Alberta and Hokkaido reached out to each other (via respective International Affairs Offices) and decided to turn their words and ideas into action.

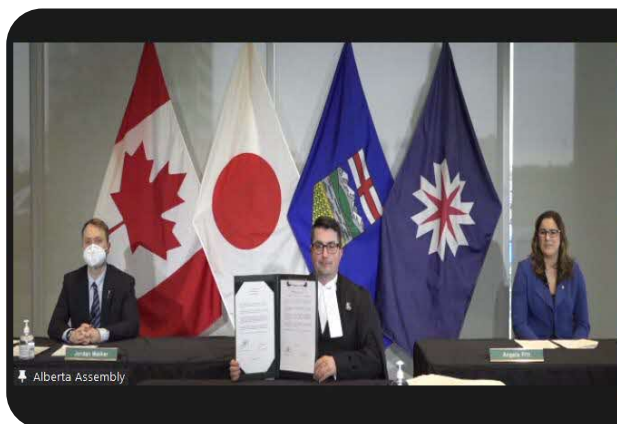
In 2008, as part of the 80th anniversary of the Canada-Japan diplomatic relations, the Alberta Legislative Assembly invited the Speaker of the Hokkaido Legislative Assembly to the commemorative ceremony as the one and only municipal guest from Japan. The Speakers used this as an opportunity to pledge support for exchanges that would help further develop the two regions.



In 2019, when the current Speaker of the Hokkaido Legislative Assembly, Mr. Murata, went on an official visit to Alberta, he was able to take the chance to speak with current Alberta Speaker, Mr. Cooper, and together they were able to lay the basis for the agreement signed this past March.



Originally planned to be a part of the commemorative events celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Hokkaido-Alberta sister state relationship, this MOU between Legislative Assemblies was able to overcome COVID waves and scheduling conflicts. Signed via Zoom on March 24, 2021 JST (March 23, 2021 Alberta Time), this new MOU opened the door to a new, deeper relationship with Alberta. This new connection between parliaments was created with the goal to share information with each other, including insights into the other's system and how they promote democracy. They also are working to promote the exchange of parliamentary figures and staff, and build upon the existing relationship that Hokkaido and Alberta already actively uphold.



Only time will tell what kinds of things this new agreement will create, what kind of exchanges will be engaged in, and what kind of world we can make by furthering these precious international relations.



HOKKAIDO JET SPOTLIGHT



There are over 300 participants of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme who call Hokkaido home. We come from all over the world and we all have a very unique experience with the island. Read on to learn more!



Meet Casey-Lyne!

Hello! My name is Casey-Lyne but most people just call me Casey. I'm a HS ALT just finishing up my 3rd year in the beautiful city of Hakodate. I've also been the HEC Test Coordinator for the past two years. I'm originally from Calgary, Canada where I'll be returning this summer and attending graduate school for a Masters in English. When I first applied to JET, I'd hoped to escape Canada's snowy winters be placed somewhere in southern Japan, but I'm really happy that Hokkaido is where I wound up. I feel so blessed to have such amazing friends and to be able to enjoy Hokkaido's gorgeous natural charm with them.



What is your favorite thing about your region?

I love southern Hokkaido! The weather is usually mild and it's pretty easy to just hop on the shinkansen or a ferry and explore northern Tohoku. I was able to visit 18 prefectures in my first year and a half here before COVID hit. There are also so many local festivals that I've enjoyed attending like Hakodate's Ikamatsuri, Yakumo's Float Procession, Assabu's Potato Festival, and Kikonai's Kanchu Misogi Festival.

What has been your most memorable moment?

Last year, I auditioned for and participated in the script reading of the annual outdoor play held in Goryokaku Park ("Let the Castle of Stars Shine for Tomorrow"). The play tells the history of the area from the Ainu to the present day and I enjoyed attending it in 2019.

I signed up to get more information for the 2020 run, intending to help in the background such as with lighting or costumes, but I attended several meetings and the organizers encouraged me to try out for a speaking role. Unfortunately, the play never got that far in the planning stage as it was cancelled due to the increased risk of infection from COVID-19. Even though the play was never held, I enjoyed the challenge of reading the script in a room full of Japanese-speakers. I'm usually busy enough with my job that I forget it's important to challenge myself and to meet new people.

What is something that you enjoy about spring in Hokkaido/Japan?

Spring is my favourite season! I love the new green sprouts pushing through the ground and the flower buds just starting to bloom. Southern Hokkaido has so many beautiful places like Mt. Hakodate, Goryokaku Park, and Matsumae where you can enjoy walking through cherry blossoms and relaxing in nature. It feels so good to shake off the chill of a long winter and be able to get out and explore.

What is something that you would like to experience in Hokkaido?

Being so far south makes it difficult to explore more of Eastern, Central, and Northern Hokkaido. Before I head back home this summer, I really want to drive around in my trusty kei car and see more of this beautiful island. I have a couple of solo trips planned, one to the Asahikawa area and the other all the way to Shiretoko. If anyone has some audiobook recommendations for me to listen to on the (checks Google Maps) 19 hour round-trip, let me know!

