

President's Message

By Karen Wheeler

Dear friends,

New Year's Eve is coming up, when many Americans will sing the traditional song "Auld Lang Syne" at midnight. The lyrics invite us to look back and remember good times together. For me, this song will have special meaning this year, because my second and final year as President of the Torrance Sister City Association is coming to an end.

In 2024 and 2025, we have enjoyed successful student exchange programs. The High School English Teacher program helped Kashiwa students learn English and gain international perspective. Our Bunka-Sai Cultural Festival raised funds for our exchange programs and gave our whole community the opportunity to see excellent Japanese performers and exhibits of traditional arts and food. Best of all, as we did all these things, we made new friends and strengthened old ties. I will never forget the kind, dedicated, creative and capable people who made all these things possible. These include our Board members, Committee heads and volunteers of all types, our business sponsors, our KIRA counterparts in Kashiwa, City of Torrance staff members, and of course the Student Ambassadors from Torrance and Kashiwa, and all their parents and host families.

In 2026, we will look forward to more good times with good people. TSCA will celebrate our Alumni Reunion on January 10, 2026 from 11:00 AM -2:00 PM in the Nakano Theater. We will be selecting Student Ambassadors and their Adult Leader for the summer exchange program.

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President's Message

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We will also select a new English teacher to fill the vacancy which will occur when Chris Pigao completes their service in July. Bunka-Sai will happen again on April 18-19, 2026. The Student Ambassadors will again travel to Kashiwa in July, and the Kashiwa student delegation will travel to Torrance in August. Preliminary plans will begin to be made for celebrating the 55th Anniversary of the signing of our Sister City Agreement, which will be in 2028.

Please keep reading to find flyers about these events, as well as Membership information, the English Teacher Report, summaries of 2025 Student Ambassador Reports, and more. Thank you very much for your continued interest in and commitment to the Torrance Sister City Association. Best wishes for health, prosperity and good company in the coming year.

**MARK YOUR
CALENDAR**

**** UPCOMING EVENTS ****

Alumni Reunion, Jan. 10, 2026

@ George Nakano Theater

11:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Monthly Association Meeting

7:00 PM, City Hall West Annex

Jan. 20, 2026

Feb. 17, 2026

Bunka-Sai Planning Meeting

7:00 PM, City Hall West Annex

Jan. 27, 2026

Feb. 24, 2026

Torrance Sister City Association

PRESIDENT

Karen Wheeler

VICE PRESIDENT

Alyssa Yamauchi

SECRETARY

Aimee Arreygue

TREASURER

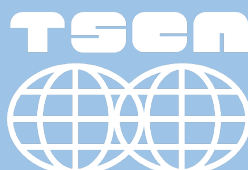
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www.torrancesistercity.org

Host Family Memories

By Yuko Wilson

Assistant Language Teacher at Kashiwa Municipal High School (Ichikashi) and former TSCA Student Ambassador

Hair limp and clothes wrinkled from the treacherous 11 hour flight, we stepped through heavy glass doors into Kashiwa City Hall. The sun had long ago dipped under the horizon, but my drooping eyes were suddenly wide awake. A half-circle of vibrant personalized welcome signs, adults and teenagers beaming with anticipation, and furiously clapping hands beckoned us into the lobby. Upon sitting on one of the brightly-colored abstract oval couches splattered across the lobby, I came face to face with a family of 5. This was the moment in July 2019 when I first met my Kashiwa host family, the Fukuis. As a junior at South High School, I had been given the opportunity to join the 2019 TSCA student delegation, and had been anticipating this first meeting with my host family. What would they be like? What if I forgot to bow? I had no idea that my anxieties would melt away into a years-long friendship among all the members of my family and the Fukui family.



The Fukui Family and I at the summit of Mt. Tsukuba.

The summer of 2019 was a whirlwind of new experiences and nice-to-meet yous, but a few memories during that first introduction to Kashiwa especially stand out to me. Belting Ed Sheeran out of the windows as the car winded through rice fields, the Fukui family drove me to their forest cabin that Mr. Fukui had built himself in the outskirts of Kashiwa. We conversed in mixed English and Japanese, and any language barriers were easily smoothed over with laughter and gestures. Later in the program when I got sick, Mrs. Fukui held my hand and stroked my hair until I was able to fall asleep. I was amazed by my host family's ability to go above and beyond to show hospitality and warmth during my stay in Kashiwa.

Although my time as a student delegate came to a close, in the next few years I had additional opportunities to vacation in Kashiwa, this time with my siblings and parents. In an unexpected turn of events, in 2023 my family went on a road trip with the Fukui family. We piled into the back of their van to embark on a four-day journey through the lush mountains of Nikko, Japan. It was during that road trip that I saw my siblings open up to my Japanese host family, through stone-skipping contests over sparkling rivers, experiencing the shared trauma of being bit by mountain leeches, and conversations under the stars. As my siblings shared how they too felt so thankful for the Fukui family, I reflected on what a blessing it is to participate in a host family program. What may have seemed like only one "summer of a lifetime" grew into a years-long friendship, not only for myself, but rippling out to include my loved ones as well.

As soon as I received my acceptance to the Ichikashi English Teacher position, the Fukuis were some of the first people I wanted to tell. Now that I only live a 10-min drive away from the Fukuis, we continue to meet up for road trip adventures, and they have extended their help countless times in helping me set up my apartment. This year the Fukuis also had their first family trip to Los Angeles, and my parents were able to be their tour guides around Torrance Bakery, Redondo Pier, Rocketship Park, and Trader Joe's. I share these snapshot memories with you all as a thank you to the Fukuis, a thank you to TSCA and KIRA for making this friendship possible, and an encouragement to any who may be considering hosting a student of their own.



Teach English in Kashiwa, Japan

The Torrance Sister City Association seeks qualified applicants for one high school English teacher in Kashiwa, Japan, the Sister City of Torrance. A minimum one-year contract runs from August 1, 2026, to July 31, 2027. The contract is renewable for a maximum three-year assignment.

Duties: Conduct and assist in a variety of English conversation classes; assist with coordinating campus visits by parents, administrators, and junior high students; and assist with extracurricular activities, which may include judging and assisting with speech contests, serving as adviser to the English Conversation Club and business trips, and coaching students for college interviews. Volunteer work with KIRA (Kashiwa International Relations Association) and other city groups may also be required.

Qualifications

Applicants must:

- Live or work in Torrance
- Be fluent in written and spoken English
- Hold a Bachelor's degree plus a teaching credential or have demonstrated teaching experience
- Possess a keen interest in the Japanese language and culture
- Represent the Torrance Sister City Association and foster the goals and objectives of the English Teacher Exchange Program.

Compensation

- Annual salary of approximately 4,800,000 Japanese yen
- One-way airfare from Los Angeles to Japan
- National health insurance (deducted from monthly salary)
- Subsidized housing and transportation allowance
- Paid Japanese holidays and personal days

To Apply

Please email your resume and cover letter to Lori Chong Eurich (Chair, English Teacher Selection Committee) at torrancesistercityinfo@gmail.com

Also, two recent letters of recommendation from people not related to the applicant must be emailed directly to the Chair.

Deadline to apply is

March 20, 2026

Qualified applicants will be scheduled for panel interviews in mid-April 2026.

Questions? Send an email to torrancesistercityinfo@gmail.com



ALUMNI REUNION

Saturday, January 10, 2026

11 AM — 2 PM

Goerge Nakano Theater

3330 Civic Center Drive, Torrance

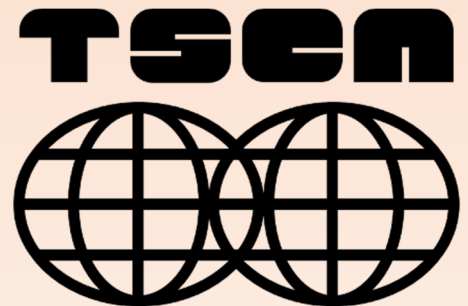
Celebrate the New Year with old friends and new! Join us at the annual Alumni Reunion for the installation of new officers and board members. Enjoy the 2025 Ambassadors' video presentation of their trip to Kashiwa last July. Renew friendships and share favorite memories!

Applicants for the 2026 student exchange program will be attending to learn more about the trip of a lifetime and be introduced. Feel free to wear your happi coat, yukata, or t-shirt from your year. We'll also be accepting membership renewals at the event.

Enjoy tasty potluck dishes!*

Individuals or Couples: Bring a dessert or a salad/side dish

Families: Bring a main dish and a salad/side dish



**Please have your serving utensil labeled with your name. Drinks will be provided.*

For more info, contact: Joni Kneller - jonikneller@gmail.com



STUDENT TRIP REPORTS

Summarized by Gail Roulette

When our seven Student Ambassadors and Adult Leader went to Japan last July, each one picked a topic of Japanese life to research, experience, and then write a report about their findings. I have been given the task of condensing their reports for the next few newsletter issues.

For starters, Noah Kisiler explored the topic of Dining Etiquette. Here is what he learned:

Japanese restaurants do not mostly have traditional low tables with tatami flooring, as he expected. Western-style tables and booths were the norm. However, he did experience the traditional style in a ramen shop with his second host family, and he decided, *“Sitting on your heels with your shins pressed against the tatami is not the most comfortable seating position, yet I enjoyed the unique experience and the delicious ramen!”*

As far as manners, everyone always waited for the last person to be served before eating, and everyone would say *“itadakimasu”* before eating their meal. The custom of tipping servers is not practiced in Japan, as it is considered unnecessary and even rude.

Meals at home were more informal. Noah helped his host dad cook some meals, which were served on separate plates for each person. If there was a shared plate, the back of the chopsticks were used for transferring the food. The preliminary *“itadakimasu”* before meals and *“Goichisosamashita”* when finished are always said. And everyone helps with cleaning up and washing dishes. These are similar to what his American family does.

Lunches eaten at school are quite different. A lunch cart is brought in from the cafeteria with food for all the students, distributed, and everyone is careful not to make a mess, eat all the food on their plate, return their dishes to the cart, and clean up when finished. Cleanliness, good manners and preventing waste are essentials. Noah would like to see American school lunch systems put more responsibility on students for cleaning up.

Noah ends his report: *“Overall, my experience with dining etiquette in Japan...has helped me notice both similarities and differences between Japanese and American culture. I feel so privileged to have gotten the opportunity to experience this cultural exchange, and I couldn't thank the TSCA and KIRA enough!”*



STUDENT TRIP REPORTS *(continued)*

Summarized by Gail Roulette

Artemis chose to do her study on Japanese Shinto Shrines, and she had many opportunities for on-site visits during her trip to Kashiwa. Her first visit was a Sado experience at Tokai-Ji, where they saw the outside of it and wandered the peaceful gardens.

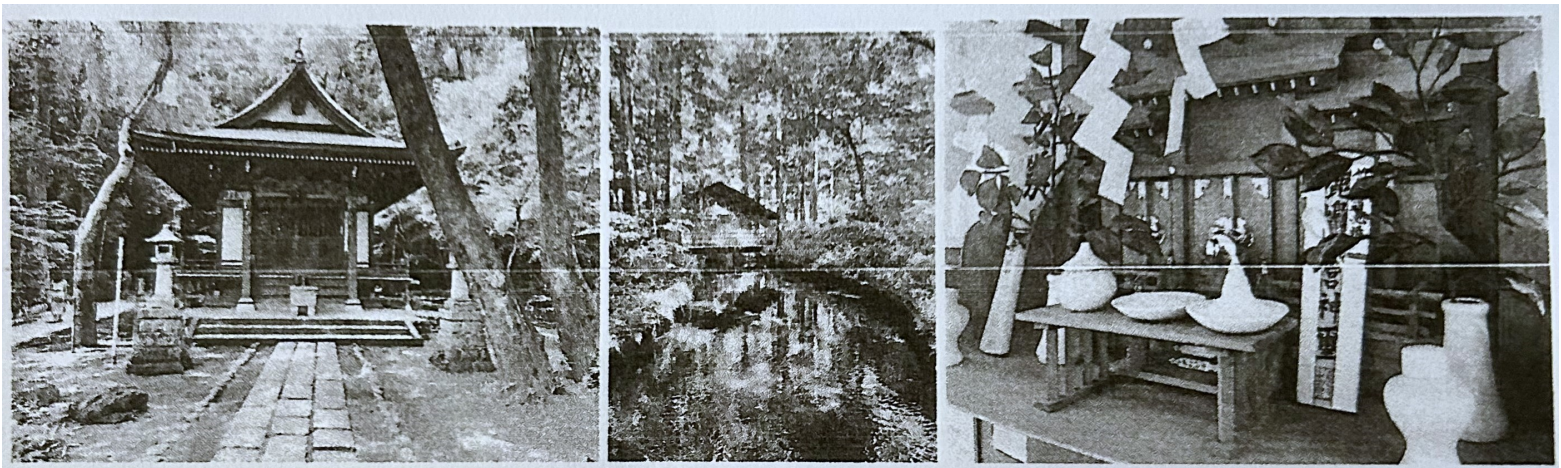
On their first free day Artemis and her host sister visited Jindaiji-Ji “visiting the botanical gardens of the temple, eating Udon right next to a koi pond, laying down in a vast field of grass and bamboo, and praying several times to different altars.” She was later told that giving 500 yen several times was a bit much.

The Kyoto and Hiroshima trip offered the best chances to see temples and shrines. The various sites and most important part of each are as follows:

- Itsukushima Jinja – teaching the rest of the group how to pray
- Fushimi-Inari – taking a long hike and going through all thousand torii gates
- To-ji temple – seeing the tallest pagoda in Japan
- Ryoan Ji – seeing beautiful little pieces of nature
- Kinkaju Ji – doing a Buddhist prayer ritual
- Sanjusangendo – seeing a thousand Buddha statues
- Kiyomizu Dera – doing a beautiful purification ritual

Artemis visited many shrines with her second host family. At Meiji Jingu she watched a Shinto marriage ceremony, as well as walked through all 3 Torii gates; visited Akasa Hie Jinja in the middle of Tokyo; and Daito-In temple, participating in a Zazen experience. She also learned shrine terminology and many details of the decorations. She found each site visit to be unique and dedicated to large deities, but did not see a smaller local Kami.

Finally, Artemis reports that “This experience and this report have been so impactful and amazing that I want to keep partaking in this and bring some of this amazing experience here.” One way, she suggests, is to create a shrine of our own in Torrance. She admits that this idea could be laborious and take years, but could be of benefit to the community and TSCA.



51st Annual **Bunka-Sai**

Japanese Cultural Festival

Saturday & Sunday

April 18 and 19, 2026

11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Ken Miller Recreation Center

3341 Torrance Boulevard (At Madrona Avenue)



Enjoy tasty plate lunches, sweets, arts and craft items, cultural performances, dance, music, martial arts, kids' games, demonstrations



Presented by
The Torrance Sister City Association
TorranceSisterCity.org

Proceeds to benefit the student cultural exchange program
*Please leave your pets at home, authorized service animals are exempt.

TorranceSisterCityInfo@gmail.com



Torrance Sister City Association's
**10th Annual
ANIME ART
CONTEST 2026!**

BUNKA-SAI
JAPANESE CULTURAL
FESTIVAL!
April 18-19



2025 Winners (from left): Angelina S, Mayo N, May U, and Azusa M

DIVISIONS

Middle School & High School

CATEGORIES

Hand Drawn & Digital Art

Separate prizes for middle
& high school by category
Winner **\$30** | Runner Up **\$20**

All participants receive certificates

RULES

- Entries must be on 8½" x 11" paper
- Format: Portrait (vertical) or Landscape (horizontal)
- Entries may be in Color or Black & White
- Only one entry per person
- No violent or dark themes, such as death and funerals
- Entries must include a Release Form signed by the artist and parent/guardian (if a minor)

Entries must be submitted **IN PERSON** on Friday, **APRIL 17, 2026, 4pm – 6pm**
Ken Miller Recreation Center (3341 Torrance Blvd, Torrance, CA 90503)
Winners will be announced on Saturday, April 18, at 12:15 pm

Forms and more info at www.torrancesistercity.org



TORRANCE SISTER CITY ASSOCIATION, INC.

3031 Torrance Boulevard, Torrance, CA 90503

October 2025

Dear Friends of Torrance Sister City Association,

The Torrance Sister City Association (TSCA) will hold its **51st Annual Bunka-Sai Japanese Cultural Festival at the Torrance Cultural Arts Center on Saturday and Sunday, April 18th and 19th, 2026.** All proceeds from the festival support TSCA's annual Student Cultural Exchange Program with Torrance's Sister City, Kashiwa, Japan.

Each year in July, Torrance sends eight high school students and an adult leader to Kashiwa and Kashiwa sends a similar group to Torrance in August. Both groups live with host families for several weeks, visit historical and cultural landmarks and meet with key business and government officials in each city. These student ambassadors gain invaluable experiences that enhance their knowledge and understanding of each other's culture and form many life-long friendships.

TSCA is asking for donations that will be used for drawings and/or the silent auction held during the festival. Can you please donate an item? Contributions received by March 1st are acknowledged in the program book, which is distributed to thousands of festival attendees.

The Torrance Sister City Association is a nonprofit organization sponsored by the City of Torrance and all donations to TSCA are tax deductible. **Our tax identification numbers are: Federal #:95-3079582, State #:7874400.** If you have any questions or need more information please contact TSCA member Alina Nadsady at tsca.auction@gmail.com.

Thank you for your consideration in supporting TSCA's Student Cultural Exchange Program! A receipt for your donation appears below for your records.

In appreciation,

Karen Wheeler
TSCA President

www.torrancesistercity.org

*****Receipt for your records*****

Received from _____

Item(s) _____ Value: _____

TSCA Member's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Torrance Sister City Association
2026 Bunka Sai Japanese Cultural Festival
Donation Tracking Form

Please complete and attach to your donation by March 1, 2026

Name or company making donation:

Contact person for donation (if different from above):

Phone Number of Contact Person:

Email of Contact Person:

Estimated value of gift:

Description of Item(s) donated:

Please list any conditions, restrictions, or expiration dates that may apply. If you are donating a gift certificate, we kindly ask that the expiration date be one year from our event (event is April 18-19, 2026:



Torrance Sister City Association

Dear Friends of TSCA,

This past year has been another successful one for our TSCA programs. We are back to operating at 100% capacity, making for a very full and fun calendar year with new friendships and core memories made! The support and participation in our events and programs have truly been heartwarming, and we are proud of our positive impact on the Torrance community.

We couldn't be more thankful for your continued support through your membership dues and donation contributions—especially over the last few years as we rebuilt our programs. Your contributions continue to help offset increasing annual operational costs, allowing our fundraising efforts to focus on continuing our mission of promoting friendship, goodwill, and understanding through people-to-people connections.

Thank you for being a part of our 50-year story. As friends of TSCA and alums of our programs, your role has been integral. We hope that TSCA has played an important part in your story as well, and we look forward to your continued support and consideration.

Best regards,
Alyssa Yamauchi
TSCA Membership Chair

Our 2026 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DRIVE has begun!

There are several membership levels available,
and two convenient payment options:



Pay by MAIL:
Complete the form below,
and mail with your check.



Pay ONLINE:

Check out with **PayPal**

Scan the QR code
or visit

www.torrancesistercity.org



Postmark deadline to be included in the printed TSCA Membership Directory is 02/19/26.

----- Cut and return the below with your check payment. -----

2026 TSCA Membership Application Form

Mail your check and this form to: Torrance Sister City Association, c/o Community Services Dept, 3031 Torrance Blvd., Torrance, CA 90503



**TORRANCE
SISTER CITY
ASSOCIATION**

3031 Torrance Boulevard • Torrance, California 90503

Except for the Lifetime Membership all dues are in effect from January 1 to December 31.*

- ☐ \$20 Individual ☐ \$40 Family ☐ \$75+ Supporting ☐ \$125+ Benefactor
☐ \$200+ Corporate ☐ \$2,000+ Lifetime Membership*

Donation to TSCA (in addition to annual dues): \$ _____

- ☐ I am Interested in TSCA activities, specifically: _____
☐ For the TSCA Directory, only include my: _____

Total Enclosed: \$ _____

Member Information

Please complete your contact information directly below and to the right.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Additional Contact Info

***TSCA Newsletters are sent to all members via email.*

Email**: _____

Phone: _____

If you have questions about membership, please send an email to: tscamembership@gmail.com