

Gov. Evers: Visits Wisconsin's sister state in Japan, meets with educators and local leaders

Posted on Friday, Sep 13, 2019

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CHIBA CITY, JAPAN – Gov. Tony Evers today visited Japan's sister state of Chiba Prefecture, where he met with Gov. Kensaku Morita and the Chiba Prefectural Board of Education and toured the original Kikkoman soy sauce facility.

Gov. Evers congratulated Gov. Morita on Chiba hosting the 2020 Olympics in Chiba next July. "We share the honor you feel in achieving this global recognition, and we will be watching the Olympic Games just a little more closely because they will be taking place in our sister state," he said.

The governor and First Lady Kathy Evers also met with the Chiba Prefectural Board of Education. As a lifelong educator, Gov. Evers said he was especially interested to learn more about the Wisconsin-Chiba Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) Program, which recruits Wisconsin residents or graduates from Wisconsin universities to serve as assistant language teachers for at least one year in Chiba.

Students attending public schools in Japan begin English instruction in third grade and continue studying it through junior and senior high school. Japan has hired thousands of native English speakers from the U.S., the UK, England, Australia and other countries to serve as assistant language teachers. Local officials told the governor they are looking for ways to improve these efforts.

Chiba educators indicated that as in Wisconsin, they are facing the challenge of preparing their students for a global economy and increasing diversity in their own country. Although Japan has traditionally been relatively homogeneous culturally and linguistically, local school officials said the number of students whose primary

language is not Japanese is growing—a change that is prompting the schools to find new ways to meet the students' needs and to keep their parents informed.

Gov. Evers highlighted the Wisconsin Language Roadmap Initiative, which aims to ensure students at all levels become proficient in at least one language other than English.

“Wisconsin’s next generation must be able to engage across linguistic, cultural and national boundaries in order to meet the demands of the global economy,” he said.

Gov. Evers also met with members of the Chiba-Wisconsin Association, which helps to maintain the sister city relationship in Japan. The two states will celebrate their 30th anniversary with events in Wisconsin, which also hosted the 20th and 25th anniversary celebrations.

The governor ended the day with a visit to the Kikkoman Corp. headquarters in Noda, where he toured the company’s original soy sauce brewery.

Kikkoman was the first Japanese firm to establish a manufacturing operation in Wisconsin when it opened its soy sauce brewery in Walworth. The Wisconsin facility, which employs more than 200, is now responsible for about half of the company’s global production of soy sauce. The company also operates Kikkoman R&D Laboratory Inc., which is located in the University Research Park in Madison.

“In 1973, Kikkoman decided to build its first overseas plant in Walworth, Wisconsin. Little did anyone know at the time that in doing so, Kikkoman was transforming the palate of American tastes. Today, having soy sauce with a meal is as common as ketchup, and Japanese food is as familiar to us as hamburgers and hot dogs,” Gov. Evers said.

Kikkoman Chairman Yuzaburo Mogi said the company chose Wisconsin almost 50 years ago “because of the people. They share many values of the people of Japan. Also, Wisconsin was an ideal location because of its clean water and clean air and its central location to our North American markets. The support and help we received from then Gov. Lucey and the Wisconsin Department of Commerce were additional factors in our decision.”

The governor is leading a 28-member delegation that includes 13 business leaders from nine Wisconsin companies. The trade mission concludes on Sept. 14.