

Sayonara, Felton

San Lorenzo Valley native takes Japanese adventure

By MARIA GAURA
Sentinel staff writer

FELTON — Felton may be a small town, but it has big horizons. When native son Dan Garbez boards his flight to Japan today, he'll carry with him a mandate from the Felton Business Association to seek a Japanese "Sister Village" and strike up an official relationship.

Garbez, who will turn 25 shortly after he lands in Tokyo, will also do his part to reduce the U.S. trade deficit with Japan by seeking an importer interested in distributing Santa Cruz County wines in the Far East.

The idea of seeking a "sister village" grew out of several visits from Japanese exchange groups that have toured the San Lorenzo Valley in the past few years. Garbez, who has been involved with the Felton Business Association as a board member and vice president, was urged by other FBA members to seek out a suitable village during his travels in Japan.

Garbez plans to seek a town close in size to Felton that is largely dependent on tourism. As far as historical background goes, "there's no way we're going to find a correlation," he said. If his matchmaking efforts are successful, the towns may look into student swaps or exchanging visits from business people.

The plan to export local wines was hatched with the help of John Schumacher, the owner of Felton's Hallcrest Vineyards. After hearing of the plan, three other local wineries have agreed to send samples of their wares to Japan with Garbez as well, including Devlin Wine Cellars, Roudon-Smith Vineyards and Silver Mountain Vineyards.

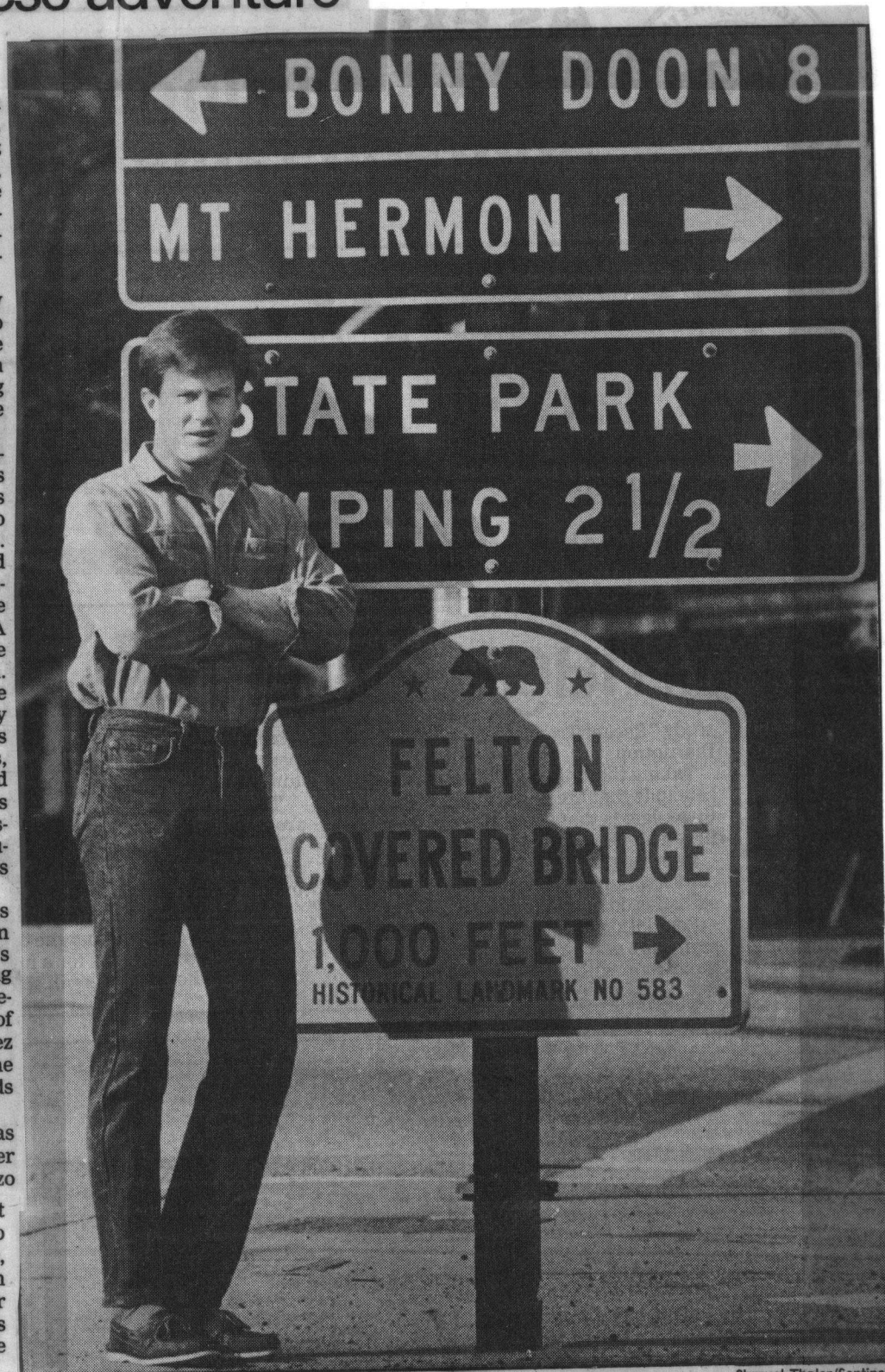
Garbez's trip to Japan was sparked when Eric Kelso, a former classmate of Garbez at San Lorenzo Valley High School, wrote about his three years of living in Tokyo and how exciting it was. Garbez, who has managed the Felton Fosters Freeze for his parents for the past year or so, decided it was time to strike out and seek some adventure.

"I'm doing it because I'm young and single, and Japan seems to be where the opportunity is now," he said. "They're doing better than we are, and I'd like to see how and why."

"Eric says it's not for everyone," he said. "But if you want to, you can learn something new every moment you're awake. Even going to the corner grocery store can be an experience."

Garbez plans to stay with Kelso, spend at least a year in Japan, and support himself by teaching English. He doesn't speak any Japanese yet, but plans to learn through the sink-or-swim method.

"You can't learn anything by passing through, and taking pictures, and buying things at the tourist shops," he said. "You have to live and work ... and immerse yourself in the culture."



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Dan Garbez, 25, hopes to find a Japanese 'sister village' for Felton.

REFERENCE

SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL
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