

# Volunteers from Japan

EARTH QUAKE '89 - Santa Cruz City



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Chaperone Yuzo Higashijima sets Tokyo students to work toting relief goods; from left, Yugi Okamura, Urana Saito and Misako Hashizume.

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**W**HEN 37 students from Tokyo's Chuo University volunteered to come to Santa Cruz for earthquake relief, their action sent shudders through their island nation.

Volunteerism, according to Ken Joseph, who organized the effort, is an rare entity in Japan. Helping family members is foremost there; aiding unrelated people is uncommon. Then came the Oct. 17 earthquake.

Two days after the earthquake, Joseph lectured at the university about the American's spirit of volunteerism and encouraged students to personally help earthquake-ravaged Northern California. The students' reaction was so unprecedented that it made Japanese newspapers and was read by former President Ronald Reagan, who was visiting Japan.

Reagan, interviewed on the evening news, brought up the volunteer effort. "The newscaster, one of the biggest in Japan, was flabbergasted," said Joseph. He wanted to talk about the national debt and trade issues, but Reagan kept talking about the student volunteers, Joseph added.

"What Reagan was really saying was that what the United States wants to see from Japan is action like this," said Joseph, who lives in Japan. Afterward, Reagan met with several of the student volunteers.

With backing from the former president, the volunteer effort was the talk of Japan, said Joseph. Several citizens also volunteered after reading the newspaper articles.

"Everything in Japan is done in terms of family," explained Joseph, who was raised by his American missionary parents in Japan. "The family takes care of itself. There are no street people;

no one goes hungry. If someone loses a business, the family helps out.

"But that has begun to break down. And we need to expand the definition in Japan of what family is. Explaining the idea of a world family is a totally new concept. Here, in the United States, you help everyone, but the family is not together. Neither system is ideal."

Joseph told the students that because Japan is now a world leader, it must not only give money to help other nations, but also must give in personal ways. This could help Japan's reputation in the world, he lectured the students.

Joseph, who works for the volunteer group Japan Helpline, contacted the Salvation Army, saying he had volunteers willing to help. "We were mostly worried we would come over and be in the way," he said, "but it turned out they really, really need people."

The Salvation Army directed the volunteers to their Santa Cruz corps, where six volunteers arrived Thursday for a six-day visit. The volunteers will be coming in three groups, Joseph explained.

The first group was followed out her by a reporter from the Fuji news service of Japan, who filmed the volunteer effort for Japanese television.

Even though they'd been traveling and had little sleep for two days, the Japanese volunteers went right to work Thursday. They put boxes of food together, handed out staples and camping gear to earthquake victims and sorted through donations at the Salvation Army warehouse.

By Friday, after a good night's sleep at the Army's Camp Redwood Glen and a bountiful lasagne dinner, the volunteers were a bit more energetic.

"I wanted to help by action. Many of the (Japanese) companies send money," said

Masatumi Higashi, 25, one of the few volunteers with a good command of English.

Higashi, who is studying English and American literature, paid for the trip with his own money; others did the same, or borrowed money from their family.

Misako Hashizume, 22, is one of two women who joined the initial group. A senior at the university, she will graduate in March and go to work for a large corporation.

So, said Hashizume through Joseph, this was the only opportunity she might have in her life to do something like this.

"What's really been significant is to see the warehouse where people just dump stuff, to see how people from all over the country have sent stuff. This is really unusual to see," said Hashizume.

Shuro Fujiki, 23, said he was fascinated by Joseph's lecture and borrowed money from his parents to come. "All that we knew about this was from television reports," he said through Joseph. "They all showed the bad destruction, but not all the nitty-gritty stuff like not having enough peanut butter."

To the volunteers, earthquakes are nothing new. Their country is shaken by mild quakes almost on a daily basis. Japanese engineers are in California studying the destruction to see what they can learn from it, according to Joseph.

"Nearly 70 years ago, when the Kanto earthquake nearly devastated the city of Tokyo, America sent many people to help us and even sent a complete hospital," student volunteer Higashi noted. "Now it's our turn to help, if only in a small way. We want to let the people ... know that we care and, on behalf of many other Japanese, help in a practical way."