

Watsonville visit strengthens ties with sister city in Japan

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WATSONVILLE — Sasha Radich knew how "nervous, scared, excited and tired" his new friend must have felt Sunday night.

His friend, 14-year-old Yusuke Hayashi, had just flown in from Kawakami, Japan, for a week-long visit to Watsonville. It was the boy's first time on this side of the Pacific, but at least he knew Radich, who had visited his hometown on the same sister cities exchange just two months ago.

"I think it's important to see new ways of life, a new country, a new way of schooling and new people," said Radich, also 14.

Radich enjoyed his visit so much, he said, that he can't wait for his next visit with his Japanese host family. His father, Zarko Radich, said his son's trip made his family consider hosting a student from Japan this week.

"I felt I just had to pay them back for their hospitality," Radich said. "If they did it, why couldn't we do it? Sasha wanted to invite all of those friends back because they were so nice to him, and I wanted to show we're nice, too."

Ties have been forming between families in Watsonville and Kawakami since the two became sister cities seven years ago. The contact was begun by the Japanese city of 4,800, which sought a cultural partnership with a fellow lettuce-producing region in California.

Relations grew between the two cities, and since 1993, they have sent their citizens and young people back and forth, Watsonville sending out visitors twice and Kawakami three times.

This week, the third delegation from Japan — 10 students from Kawakami Middle School — is touring both of Watsonville's year-round middle

schools, the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk and several farms in the Pajaro Valley.

After a welcome dinner at the Watsonville Buddhist Temple, Zarko Radich spoke of an encounter Sunday evening with his host student, who was still shy about speaking English. The boy pulled out a photograph of his parents, showed it to him and said, "This is my father," and, "This is my mother."

"I pulled my wife over and said 'This is my mother,' ... he started laughing, and that broke the ice," said Radich, owner of Jack's Cigar Shop off Union Street in downtown Watsonville.

On Monday, students kept a busy schedule following host students around E.A. Hall and Rolling Hills middle schools, then were escorted by Mayor Tony Campos on a tour of the police station, fire department, library

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Students from Kawakami, Japan, wind up their tour of E.A. Hall Middle School on Monday.

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and City Hall. Harry Fukutome, a Watsonville nurseryman and two-time visitor to Kawakami, helped translate for the students.

The visiting students, dressed in short-sleeved white shirts and dark

blue pants or long skirts, said they were impressed by the size of the fire engines, and by the firefighter who obliged them by sliding down the station pole. After their Watsonville visit, the group will leave Friday for a tour of San Francisco.

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