



THE JAPAN-AMERICA SOCIETY
OF WASHINGTON, DC

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**STUDENT TAIKO GROUP FROM FUKUSHIMA
INVITED TO NATIONAL CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL**

Washington, DC [March 1, 2012] -- The National Cherry Blossom Festival and the Japan-America Society of Washington DC have invited 13 student members of the Yamakiya Taiko Club from Fukushima, Japan to join the centennial celebration of Japan's gift of the cherry blossom trees to the United States.

The students, ages 12-20, are from the Yamakiya District of Kawamata Town in Fukushima Prefecture. In May 2011 they had to leave their homes in Yamakiya because of the high levels of radiation emanating from the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant. It is unclear when they will be able to return home.

Despite these circumstances, the Yamakiya Taiko Club, which has won first prize in a number of national competitions, has stayed together. The students continue to practice taiko drumming at a school in Kawamata Town.

The students' visit, which will take place April 7-17, is supported by the U.S.-Japan Council and the American Embassy in Tokyo under the TOMODACHI Initiative. The initiative invests in the next generation of Japanese and Americans by creating opportunities for cross-cultural exchange, entrepreneurship, and leadership.

Arrangements for the visit are being spearheaded by Michelle Spezzacatena and Darryl Wharton-Rigby, alumni of the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET) who taught in Fukushima. The effort also has involved a number of Fukushima natives, led by Shigeko Bork of Washington DC and The Honorable Masako Mori, a former DC resident and now a member of Japan's Diet.

While in the U.S., the students will perform at The Kennedy Center Millennium Stage in Washington, DC on April 16. They will appear in the National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade® and at the Sakura Matsuri – Japanese Street Festival on April 14.

During their 10-day visit, the students will join the National Japan Bowl, an academic competition for American high school students who are studying Japanese. They will also visit high schools in Virginia and Maryland and meet students from Morgan State University (Maryland). There will be sightseeing opportunities in Baltimore and Washington, DC.

The National Cherry Blossom Festival is the nation's greatest springtime celebration. The 2012 Festival, March 20-April 27, includes five spectacular weeks of events featuring diverse and creative programming promoting traditional and contemporary arts and culture, natural beauty, and community spirit. The 2012 Festival commemorates the 100th anniversary of the gift of the cherry blossom trees and the enduring friendship between the United States and Japan.

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