
Osaka Renaissance News

No 31. March 2008

Welcome to “Osaka Renaissance News” - the email newsletter of the Osaka City Government’s “Urban Revitalization Task Force”.

The Osaka Urban Revitalization Task Force

We are the first *City Task Force* established in Japan to address urban regeneration and revitalization issues within a common framework. We also collaborate with the central government’s “Urban Renaissance Program”. The role of the task force is to coordinate and promote the set of initiatives that taken together form the Osaka Revitalization Plan.

.....

“Osaka Renaissance News” is distributed through multiple email channels to spread the word about important initiatives taking place in Osaka.

This Issue: The Osaka Foreign Business Networking Club

In February, the City held the first Osaka Foreign Business Networking Club event under the new leadership of Mayor Kunio Hiramatsu. Foreign business executives turned out in numbers to meet the Mayor and hear his plans for Osaka. Mayor Hiramatsu’s message was of efficient City administration, revitalization, and a promise to be Osaka’s “salesman.”

.....

CONTACT POINT

Osaka City Urban Revitalization Task Force

Toshimitsu Tanaka, Manager, Office of Urban Revitalization and Promotion

Tel: 06 6208 7836

Fax: 06 6202 0910

Email: tos-tanaka@city.osaka.lg.jp

URL: www.osaka-saisei.jp/eng/index.html

.....

AUTHOR

The Osaka City Revitalization Task Force has commissioned Tod Baudin to author this series of newsletters. He is the president of ida Corporation, a multilingual translation, documentation and Internet services company, based in Osaka. He is also an Adviser to the Osaka City Revitalization Task Force. Questions about these articles can be directed to him at: tod@idanet.co.jp

OSAKA FOREIGN BUSINESS NETWORKING CLUB

Contents

- (1) Osaka's Problems and Solutions
- (2) Osaka's Salesman
- (3) Focus on Nakanoshima
- (4) Foreign Voices
- (5) All Aboard
- (6) Last Words

INTRODUCTION

On May 31, 2004, a small but important event took place in Osaka called the "Mayor's Party for the Foreign Business Community." With that event, the seed was planted for what has become the Osaka Foreign Business Networking Club.

The FBNC (Foreign Business Networking Club) is administered by the Office of Urban Revitalization and Promotion, under the auspices of the Mayor of Osaka. Events are held on average four times a year. The goal is to help the city build a stronger channel with the foreign business community through providing more information about Osaka and better access to city officials. In turn, foreign companies and consulates can enjoy the opportunity to meet the City and each other and build up stronger networks within Osaka.

What began as a small gathering of about thirty foreign business executives has grown into a diverse group of over one-hundred people representing a wide range of countries and industries. Meetings are held on a broad range of topics and can include presentations both from the City and from business executives from the

private sector. Occasionally, members will be taken on excursions, such as a boat cruise around Osaka Bay.

The success of the Foreign Business Networking Club over the years has been the result of a close working relationship between the club members, the Mayor, and City officials.

On February 12, 2008, the Osaka Foreign Business Networking Club held its first meeting under Osaka City's new Mayor, Kunio Hiramatsu. For most members, this was our first opportunity to see and hear the Mayor in person. More importantly, it was a chance to determine if his commitment to the foreign business community would be as strong as his predecessor's. Both Kansai Television and Osaka Television crews were on hand to report the event.

Tod Baudin

OSAKA RENAISSANCE NEWS

No 31 March 2008

OSAKA FOREIGN BUSINESS NETWORKING CLUB

“I believe that it is my responsibility to showcase Osaka’s potential and attractiveness to the world, by acting as the “salesman” of our city.”

Mayor Hiramatsu

(1) Osaka’s Problems and Solutions

Mayor Hiramatsu has given many speeches in his day. But on this day, he took to the podium clearly a little nervous. He quickly explained that he had not spoken English for a long time but then went on to eloquently deliver his speech. After thanking everyone for coming, Mayor Hiramatsu immediately acknowledged that, “As you are well aware, our City is facing many challenges such as our severe financial situation.” However, in what was one of the most important statements in his speech, the Mayor went on to say, “In order to tackle these issues, I will further promote efficient City administration through the proper disclosure of information and administrative reforms. As the first mayor from the private sector in eighty years, I will make the best use of my knowledge gained through my experiences, to make Osaka a vibrant metropolis in which our citizens can take pride in.”

As he stated, Mayor Hiramatsu comes from the private sector. After graduating from Doshisha University’s Law Department, he immediately began working for Mainichi Broadcasting System. In 1995, he was sent to New York where he held the position of Bureau Chief for three years. Upon

returning to Japan he eventually took the position of General Manager of the Corporate Secretarial Division. He worked for MBS until 2007, when he left to become a candidate in the Osaka City Mayoral Election.

(2) Osaka’s Salesman

Another of Mayor Hiramatsu’s strategies was made apparent when he said, “I believe that it is my responsibility to showcase Osaka’s potential and attractiveness to the world, by acting as the ‘salesman’ of our city.” Both television stations broadcast this part of the speech in their reports.

Mr. Hiramatsu’s time at MBS prepared him well to be Osaka’s salesman. As a private sector business executive who worked for an Osaka company, he has first-hand knowledge of Osaka’s business environment. As a former news broadcaster, he is very much at ease in front of the media and has an easy rapport with audiences. Finally, by spending three years in New York City, he is very comfortable engaging with the foreign business community, making him well suited to be the Mayor of an international business hub.

In order to be a good salesman, you have to believe in your product. Mayor Hiramatsu made it clear that he believes in Osaka. “Throughout my mayoral campaign, I promised the voters to bring the energy back to Osaka with the power of the citizens. I am proud that Osaka is home to so many excellent companies of many scales, both global and local. We also boast the accumulation of outstanding human resources here in Osaka, so I firmly believe that collaboration between the City Government and the private sector will surely lead to great progress for the city.”

Toward the end of his speech the Mayor said, “I have heard that members of this club have contributed in attracting foreign media like CNN to Osaka. As you may know, I myself have experience in broadcasting, and I will actively take interviews from the mass media. I believe that the Group of Eight Finance Ministers Meeting in the coming June will be a great opportunity to further promote the most recent and better Osaka to the world.” Indeed, this may well be the most effective way that the Mayor can sell Osaka to the world. By taking advantage of mass media, he has an opportunity to greatly increase Osaka’s brand awareness. As he said, the Group of Eight Finance Ministers Meeting in June will be an excellent opportunity get Osaka front and center in the news.

(3) Focus on Nakanoshima

Following the Mayor’s speech, Mr. Hidekazu Kitamura, the Director General of the Planning and Coordination Bureau of Osaka City Government gave a detailed presentation on the “Water

Metropolis, Osaka”, focusing on the Nakanoshima District.

According to Mr. Kitamura, the objective of the city is to enhance Osaka’s attractiveness as a tourist and lifestyle hub through water-related infrastructure and urban revitalization. Nakanoshima, though located in the urban center, is blessed with a beautiful water environment. It also has a rich historical, cultural and artistic heritage. This makes it ideally suited to be the symbol of the water metropolis.

Several urban redevelopment projects are currently underway, including the construction of embankments that enhance water amenities, upgrading of Nakanoshima Park, and redevelopment of the old site of the Osaka University Hospital into a new concept called “Hotarumachi”. Hotarumachi is an impressive redevelopment and is part of Osaka City’s “Water Metropolis” strategy. The project consists of two multipurpose halls, Asahi Broadcasting Corporation’s ABC Hall and the Dojima River Forum. The halls are surrounded by a variety of restaurants, rental apartments, a tower condominium, and a business center containing shops, a fitness center, etc. Asahi Broadcasting Corporation will hold the opening ceremony for their new building, which includes ABC Hall, on May 2, 2008. The other buildings will open in the near future as they are completed.

One major hindrance to the development of Nakanoshima thus far has been the lack of an efficient east-west travel connection. In the fall of 2008, through public-private cooperation, this will be remedied when the Keihan Nakanoshima Subway Line will open. The subway line will include four new stations spread along a total length of 2.9 kilometers.

Many other major redevelopment projects on or around Nakanoshima are planned or underway.

Beginning in the spring of 2010, Asahi Shimbun will begin replacement of its current three buildings with two towering skyscrapers. The new towers, scheduled for completion in the spring of 2013, will be among the tallest in Osaka's downtown area. A new Festival Hall with the same 2,700 seating capacity, revamped with state-of-the-art acoustics and stage facilities will open in the east building.

Kansai Electric Power Company (KEPCO) and Daibiru Corporation are proceeding with a joint development. This development consists of the new Kanden Building, head office of KEPCO, which opened in January, 2005, and the Nakanoshima Dai-biru East and West Buildings, which are scheduled to open in 2009 and 2012 respectively.

The National Museum of Art, which opened in 2004 and the redevelopment of the former Osaka University Hospital site are two more examples of the rebirth of Nakanoshima.

Nakanoshima Park and the surrounding environment is a historical and cultural

asset. One of the highlights of the park is the beautiful rose garden. This park is also scheduled to be updated. Plans include cafes, an outdoor theater, and restaurants.

(4) Foreign Voices

The President and CEO of Fuji Fire and Marine Co., Ltd., Mr. Bijan Khosrowshahi, was the first of the FBNC members to speak. He remarked that his company has their headquarters in Osaka and that many great manufacturing companies also have their headquarters in Osaka. He then went on to ask the Mayor what the city could do to keep these corporate headquarters in Osaka; if the city was focusing on attracting specific industries in order to be recognized internationally for those industries; and finally, what the foreign business community in Osaka could do to assist the Mayor in his mission.

Mayor Hiramatsu replied to the first question by saying that current economic conditions make it difficult for the city to offer companies incentives to keep their headquarters in Osaka. Instead, the City has to show companies the advantages that Osaka has that other cities do not. He continued by saying that Osaka's attractiveness is not related to funds or incentives but to its people. The strength of business is in human relations. Osaka's people are its biggest asset.

In reply to the second question, the Mayor mentioned that the robot industry is growing quickly in Osaka, from thirty companies a few years ago to more than three hundred now. He said that the City

has also put a lot of effort into developing the manufacturing sector.

Mayor Hiramatsu answered the third question by saying that Osaka City constantly needs new ideas to move forward and that they are relying on the wisdom of the foreign business community to provide new ideas.

Mr. Michael Bobrove, Vice President of the ACCJ and head of the Kansai Chapter, spoke briefly on behalf of FBNC members. He thanked the Mayor for meeting so quickly after assuming office and then explained some of the activities that the ACCJ does in the Kansai, particularly the ACCJ's annual walkathon.

Mr. Dirk Jan Kop, Consul General of the Netherlands, spoke on behalf of the Consulates General. After congratulating the Mayor on his election victory, Mr. Jan Kop pointed out that there are sixty-five countries represented in Osaka, with around twenty countries represented by a Consul General or Honorary Consul. He went on to explain that he believes that consulates can play a role in Osaka's business promotion efforts by connecting small- and medium-sized companies in their respective countries with suitable partners in Osaka.

(5) All Aboard

Following the conclusion of the speeches, FBNC members, along with the Mayor, city officials and local television media were treated to a ride on the Aqua Liner, also known as the Suijo Bus. The bus toured around Nakanoshima Island, allowing members to see firsthand all of

the developments in their various stages of completion.

The hour-long trip also provided an opportunity for Mayor Hiramatsu to meet and talk to the members. As he went from table to table, the mayor was clearly in his element. In interviews with the television reporters, members were unanimous in their praise for the new mayor. They were very impressed with his energy and enthusiasm. The consensus was that the Osaka City Government now has a salesman who can restore confidence in the business sector and can bring attention to Osaka internationally.

(6) Last Words

FBNC members wrote words of encouragement to Mayor Hiramatsu through a feedback form that they filled out after the meeting. In addition, a number of interesting suggestions were also presented.

According to members, municipal government reforms and promotion of Osaka to international business should come first on the list priorities for the new mayor. As we heard in the Mayor's speech, municipal government reforms are one of his key commitments, and through his promise to be Osaka's salesman, Mayor Hiramatsu is placing great emphasis on promoting Osaka to the world.

One member suggested that "There is an opportunity to put Osaka ahead of Tokyo in the area of education. Why not push Osaka and its Universities ahead by making the system easy for international students in Osaka." In fact, this is now a priority for Osaka City. A number of

foreign universities have opened or soon will open campuses in Japan. In February, the Osaka branch of Carnegie Mellon University's Entertainment Technology Center opened. Tongji University has also decided to open a campus in Osaka City, and Keio University will be opening a campus in the fall.

Another member suggested that the City "Use the foreign business community to raise [Osaka's] profile and awareness." That is also a good point. Osaka's foreign

business community and the Foreign Business Networking Club are powerful allies. Our combined knowledge and experience in international business combined with our intimate knowledge of business practices in Osaka make us a powerful tool. That, combined with a dynamic and energetic new salesman for Osaka, bodes well for the future of our City.

THE END