

Young Japanese visitors to experience "Alfred, NY"

3/17/06

For years, Alfred University students and alumni have gone to Anan-cho Nagano-ken, a community in Japan; some have taught ceramics, while others have taught English as a Foreign Language. They've stayed with Japanese families and experienced Japanese culture. Next week, a delegation of six junior high school students from Anan-cho will have an opportunity to experience in a few days what life in Alfred, NY, is like. The visit resulted from a brainstorming session between Petra Visscher, director of International Programs for the University, who spent two years living in Japan, and Dr. Choichiro Yatani, a professor of Psychology at Alfred State College and an adjunct associate professor in Modern Languages at AU. The AU program with Anan-cho was established through Yatani's efforts, and "we were talking about how to possibly expand it," explained Visscher. "The best way to encourage students to participate in international programs is to start them young, while they are still in high school. If they have a good experience, they are more likely to be involved" when they are in college. The goal of exchange programs, such as the one that will bring the youngsters to Alfred next week, is to promote understanding of and appreciation for other cultures, Visscher stressed. Visscher said she is particularly interested in building relationships with schools and communities in Japan because a \$10 million gift from the Kyocera Corporation created a \$10 million endowment for what is now the Kazuo Inamori School of Engineering at Alfred University, named in honor of the founder of Kyocera. The gift will permit establishment of a nanotechnology research center at Alfred University, and that, in turn, will create opportunities for research partnerships with Kyocera engineers and scientists. With the desire for stronger ties with Japan, she and Yatani began talking about the possibility of forming a "sister city" relationship between Alfred and Anan-cho, a process they found much easier because AU alumnus Anthony Franciscutti is now teaching English in Anan-cho. The goal of exchange programs, such as the one that will bring the youngsters to Alfred next week, is to promote understanding of and appreciation for other cultures, Visscher stressed. Franciscutti, along with some of his fellow teachers and the six students, will arrive in Alfred on Tuesday, March 21. While the teachers will stay at the Saxon Inn on the AU campus, the students have been placed with area families who also have junior high school-aged children, said Visscher, who found recruiting host families for the Japanese visitors to be remarkably easy. "I sent out one cry," and had all the students accommodated within a matter of hours. At 10 a.m. Wednesday, Alfred Mayor Craig Clark will host a reception at the Village Hall. Among the invited guests are former mayors Virginia Rasmussen, William Hall and Gary Ostrower. Franciscutti will have an opportunity to show his alma mater to his current students during a tour of the AU campus at 11 a.m. Wednesday. At 12:30 p.m., the visitors will walk across Main Street for lunch and a tour of the Alfred State College campus. That afternoon, the Japanese students will have their first glimpse of an American high school when they tour Alfred-Almond Central School, where their host siblings attend. Principal Rich Caulkins has been wonderful, said Visscher, making arrangements for the Alfred-Almond students to learn about Japan in their social studies classes so that they are prepared for their visitors. Following a tour of the building, the Japanese students will be able to either attend after-school activities with their host siblings, or ride the buses home with them. The Japanese students will spend the entire day Thursday attending Alfred-Almond so they gain a better understanding of what the school day is like, including lunch in the cafeteria. In the meantime, their teachers will be visiting classes at Alfred University. On Friday, March 24, the guests will travel to Niagara Falls, one of the country's top tourist destinations. The daylong trip will include sightseeing, as well as shopping, said Visscher. Saturday will be spent with their host families with a special get-together being planned to bring everyone together on the visitors' final day in Alfred. They depart Sunday.