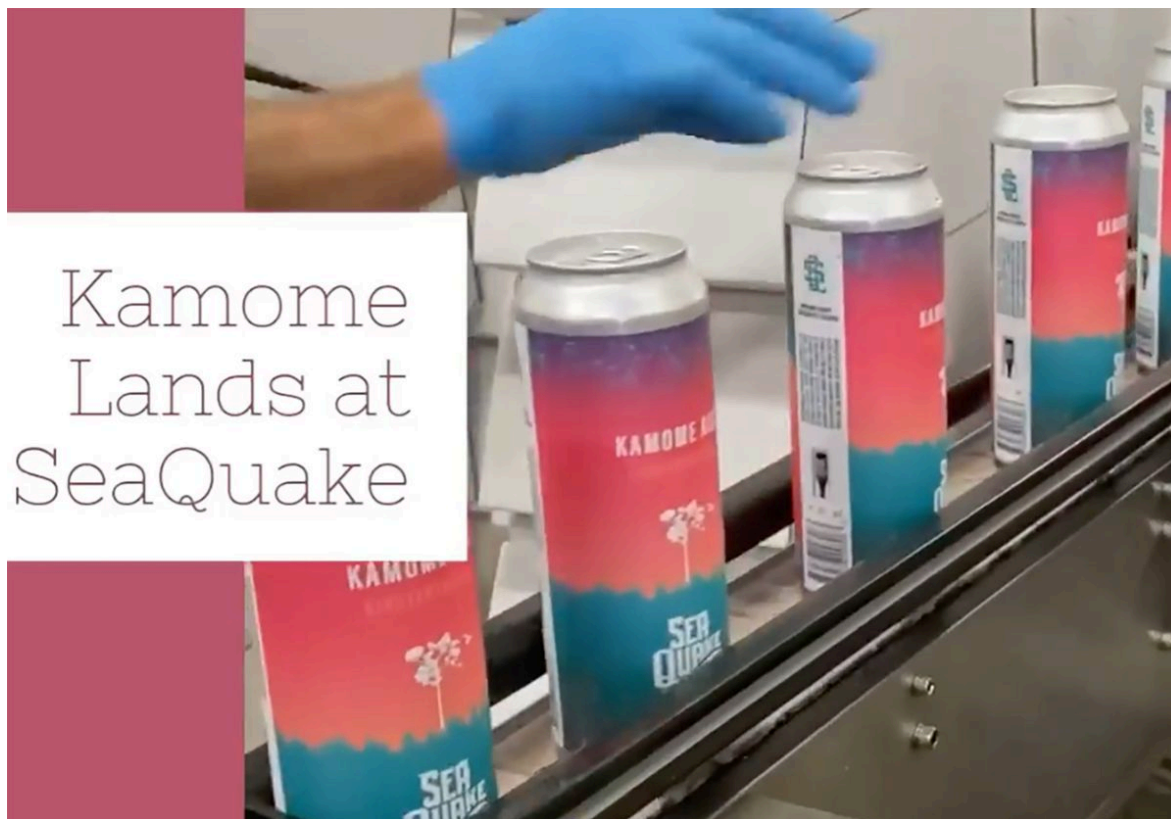


Leaders celebrate sister city on tsunami anniversary

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Ten years later, local and national leaders are remembering the silver linings to come from the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and the tsunami devastation that followed.

Crescent City's sister city relationship with Rikuzentakata, Japan, was highlighted last week in an online celebration of the "unshakable friendship beyond borders" sparked by the earthquake March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9.0 which struck off the northeast coast of Japan's Tōhoku region and triggered a massive tsunami and a meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

"As we look back over the last 10 years, and especially the last four years, so many things have happened that we could not have imagined," said Blake Inscore, Crescent City councilor and former mayor.

The relationship between the two cities started when Del Norte County students and community members discovered a boat from a Takata High School in Rikuzentakata had washed up on South Beach two years

after the tragedy. Upon the discovery, they set out to return the boat, Kamome, to its home in city, which had been all but leveled in the disaster.

Bill Steven, now retired, spearheaded the effort to return the boat while he was an undersheriff for the county. Steven appeared in Thursday's video presentation about the sister city relationship.

"A lot has happened in that time. We've had a lot of growth, we've had some extraordinary things happen, the sister city agreement and everything in between," Steven said. "And it all started with Kamome, that boat that drifted up to this beach all those years ago, which was kind of the seed for what blossomed into what is now today and what it's become."

Steven recounted the visits he'd made to Rikuzentakata with delegations from Del Norte County, and said the city had made great progress in rebuilding in the years since the disaster.

"It was such a tragic thing to happen to both communities, especially over there, but the boat Kamome, that washed up on our beach, which I think was referred to as the 'boat of hope', 'Kamome the boat of hope.' And there's so much truth in that — to have so much devastation and negativity occur, but then as the years go by, so many great things happen as a result of things washing up on our beach and what became years later, it's amazing. It is hope."

Rikuzentakata Mayor Futoshi Toba, who had just been elected before the disaster struck, recounted how important the boat return effort and sister city relationship had been to the city.

"I believe that if it had not been for our encounter with you, we would have surely lost hope," Toba said through a translator. "And although our connection was initiated by the disastrous Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami, we are bonded by our mutually bitter experiences with tsunamis, as well as by the similarities of our two cities alike, and I am hoping that we continue our exchanges with each other in many areas."

The relationship has gained other recognition, with a joint resolution from both the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors and city council of Crescent City recognizing the disaster's anniversary last week.

The state legislature recognized the relationship in 2019 with a resolution sponsored by Senator Mike McGuire, who also addressed attendees Thursday.

"The devastating tsunami of 2011 that struck Del Norte County, it's still fresh on all of our minds," McGuire said, referring to the damage done to the Crescent City harbor. "And while that damage and the debris have been cleaned up, it's had a lasting impact on the community here in Crescent City."

In addition to highlighting the importance of disaster preparedness across the state and world, McGuire said the disaster connected the two countries.

"The tragedies between both countries, they brought us closer together, with the hard working residents of Del Norte County leading the way," McGuire said.

Leaders from both communities expressed their intention to continue the sister city relationship.

“No one could have anticipated what would happen on March 11, 2011. And no one knows what the future holds. But we do know this: we have a shared responsibility to build a better future for our children,” Inscore said. “Sister city relationships provide that opportunity to build for generations to come.”

Event organizers spotlighted several other people-to-people programs, like the Northern Japan Earthquake Relief Fund established by the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California just after the earthquake, and the Tomodachi Initiative youth exchange program established with the U.S.-Japan Council.

Toru Maeda, the consul general of Japan in San Francisco whose office sponsored the event, addressed the audience, expressing thanks for the support the country received after the disaster.

“On behalf of the people and government of Japan, I’d like to express my sincere appreciation to those who have supported us, not only by generous funds and organized efforts, but also with warm hearts,” Maeda said. “Although Japan suffered great devastation, reconstruction is now steadily in progress and new friendships have emerged among people who were involved in the relief and reconstruction.”

John Roos, who was the U.S. ambassador to Japan at the time of the earthquake, recounted the day of the earthquake and how the embassy’s staff began its response to the devastation.

“At that moment, we knew something big was happening, though we had no idea the extent of the challenge that would unfold in the coming days, weeks and months,” Roos said. “I knew right then that we would do anything and everything in our power to help our Japanese friends.”

The U.S. support for the country exemplified the strength of the relationship between the two countries, Roos said.

“To this very day when I think about the events of 10 years ago, it is the importance of people-to-people connections that stands out to me the most. It is these connections that get us through the challenging times, and are strengthened because of them,” Roos said. “The strong cooperation between our two countries didn’t just happen on its own. It was the product of decades of working together with a shared vision and common values.”