

U.S. independence day

Building a future with our friends in Japan

John V. Roos
U.S. AMBASSADOR

Every year, on the Fourth of July, Americans gather together to celebrate our Independence Day. We celebrate the spirit and determination of past generations of immigrants who traveled to America to seek new beginnings and opportunities for a new life. We also celebrate the strength of



people who, to this day, come to America with the hope that they may fulfill dreams that they cannot achieve elsewhere. As President Barack Obama said, "We may come from different places and have different stories, but we share common hopes, and one very American dream."

Despite living thousands of miles away from our communities in the United States, those of us who reside in Japan also celebrate those American values that are handed down from generation to generation. On July 4, we recall the principles

that our founders fought for and which were encapsulated in the Declaration of Independence 236 years ago. In spite of the challenges we may face today, we continue to draw inspiration from the founders' vision of a country dedicated to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The United States can be described as a country where people strive to help their friends and neighbors, in times of peace as well as in times of trouble. This same spirit motivates Americans wherever we perceive a friend in need, as was the case most

recently with our friend, Japan. More than a year has now passed since the devastating earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis of March 11, 2011, but Americans will never forget that terrible tragedy, or the remarkable strength of the Japanese people. As Japan continues to rebuild, the United States will continue to assist in any way we can.

In order to assist in the rebuilding process, we launched the Tomodachi Initiative, a public-private partnership designed to invest in the future generations of Japanese and Americans committed to our mutual friendship. The Tomodachi Initiative seeks to create and enhance educational, artistic, athletic and leadership exchange opportunities for youth from the communities in Tohoku and for the people of Japan as a whole, in order to strengthen the U.S.-Japan partnership in the long term. I am very proud of what the Tomodachi Initiative and our partners in this initiative have achieved thus far. With the support of some of the most well-known companies in both Japan and the United States, the Tomodachi Initiative has raised several millions of dollars to create educational exchange opportunities to benefit young people in the Tohoku region.

As a result, several hundred students this summer will be traveling to and experiencing the United States. American and Japanese baseball players, ranging from Hall of Famer Cal Ripken Jr. to current Texas Rangers pitcher Yu Darvish, have also committed

to share their talents with young Japanese ballplayers through Tomodachi Initiative-supported sports clinics. A variety of cultural groups and entertainers have come on board to join the effort, including Fukushima's Yamakiya Taiko drummers who enthralled American audiences with their skill and enthusiasm during this year's Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington, D.C. The Tomodachi Initiative has only just begun, but through its activities, I look forward to seeing the long-term relationship between our two countries grow even stronger in the future.

Programs like the Tomodachi Initiative underscore the importance of people-to-people exchanges, but we can only reach so many people through these types of initiatives. My hope is that more Japanese and Americans will take the time to re-discover each other's countries and cultures through tourism. There has never been a better time for Japanese to explore the natural wonders that the United States has to offer; to witness the sights and visit the monuments that represent our history and shape us as Americans; and to celebrate the diverse ethnicities, traditions and cultures that define the United States. With 50 states to choose from, I can confidently state that there is "something for everyone" in America. And as someone who has visited all 47 prefectures in Japan, I know that this is a fascinating country that I wish every American could experience as well. Let us continue to expand the interactions be-



Night to remember: Fireworks light up the sky near the Iwo Jima Memorial in Arlington, Virginia, during the annual Fourth of July display in 2011. AP



Something for everyone: U.S. President Barack Obama and his family visit Arcadia National Park in Maine. OFFICIAL WHITE HOUSE PHOTO / PETE SOUZA

tween Americans and Japanese in order to learn about each other — and to further enrich and inspire one another.

As the U.S. ambassador to Japan, I would like to send my best wishes to all of my fellow Americans on this Fourth of July. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Japanese people for their continued friendship, support and hospitality. May our two nations continue to prosper and deepen our friendship as we move forward into a promising future.

*Congratulations to the American People
on Their Independence Day*



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