

Vermont, Japan share environmental ideas

TOTTORI CITY, Japan. — A delegation from Vermont, including educators from Mount Abraham and Harwood union high schools and a legislator, met with Gov. Shinji Hirai of Tottori Prefecture, Japan, this month.

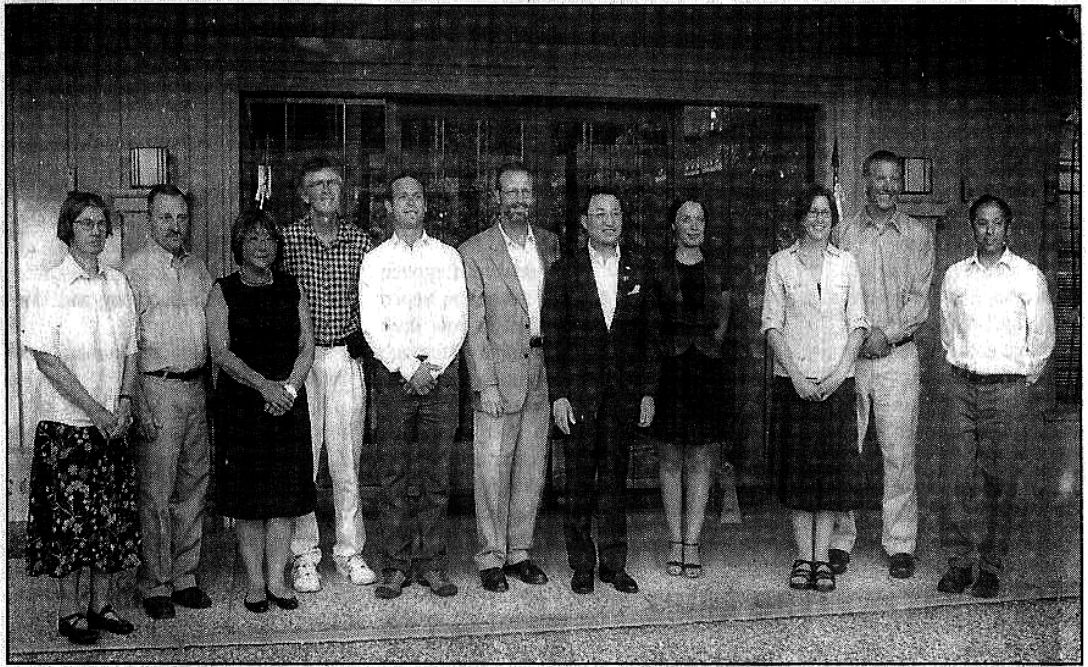
The Japan-America Society of Vermont (JASV) has been encouraging friendly relations between Vermont and Tottori for nearly a decade. Vermont Gov. James Douglas and Gov. Hirai signed an International Friendship Agreement in Montpelier in 2008. Since then, Tottori officials and high school students have visited Vermont on two separate occasions to initiate an Environmental Leadership Exchange program.

Green Across the Pacific (GATP), an educational and environmental nonprofit based in Shoreham, organized both Tottori delegations as well as the current Vermont delegation.

Tottori Prefecture, with a population of just under 600,000 inhabitants living in a rural landscape of forested mountains and farmland along the Sea of Japan, is similar to Vermont with its record of environmental leadership.

Mount Abe Principal Andy Kepes and Harwood Principal Duane Pierson, along with Mount Abe teachers Gabe Hamilton and Bruce Babbitt and Harwood teacher Tedin Lange, are visiting Tottori to expand this Environmental Leadership Exchange program for high school students from Vermont and Tottori.

"Last year's Vermont host students found the experience educational, culturally enriching, and lasting friendships were formed. Hosting a Japanese student was one of the highlights of their high school



A GROUP OF Vermonters stand with the governor of Tottori Prefecture this month during a trip to expand contacts between the Japanese prefecture and the Green Mountain State. Shown, from left, are Stephanie Solt, Larry Solt, Reiko Kida, Bruce Babbitt, Gabe Hamilton, Peter Lynch, Gov. Shinji Hirai, Vermont Rep. Rachel Weston, Tedin Lange, Andy Kepes and Duane Pierson.

years," Kepes said. Following a highly successful program in which students from Tottori visited Vermont last March, students from Mount Abe and Harwood will visit Tottori next April.

"The power of this exchange lies in creating a door to Asia. It's important for Vermont students to have their global and local horizons expanded through collaborative relationships with their peers in other countries," Pierson said.

In addition to meeting with Gov. Hirai, the Vermont delegation is meeting with members of the Tottori prefectural government and

the Tottori Board of Education to consider options for the future of exchanges between Vermont and Tottori.

"Tottori and Vermont are both renowned for supporting the environment and local food production," said Vermont Rep. Rachel Weston, D-Burlington. "Our young people are invested in a sustainable future on both sides of the ocean, and this collaboration provides them with international skills that will be necessary in future job markets." In addition to the meetings, the Vermonters are visiting a number of places of environmental

and educational importance within Tottori, including Tottori University for Environmental Studies, Tottori-Nishi High School, rare sand dunes, rugged coastline, a traditional paper factory, and a mountainous agricultural village.

GATP, JASV, and Tottori Prefecture, Japan, are supporting this effort.

Other members of the delegation are GATP Executive Director Peter Lynch of Shoreham, JASV President Larry Solt, and Reiko Kida, who sits on the GATP and JASV boards.

More information is at www.gatp.org and www.jasv.org.