



Then and Now

A Place to Call “Home”

Early one September morning in 1997 a group of people, including 16 Japanese landscape gardeners from Kameoka, stood outside the north entrance to the Stillwater Community Center waiting for two shipping containers to arrive.

These two containers filled with 22 tons of materials to construct a Japanese landscape garden on the north side of the Community Center were shipped from Japan around a month earlier and were scheduled to arrive at the Community Center at approximately 9:00 AM that morning.

At 9:00 AM plus or minus a few minutes two 18-wheelers, each carrying a shipping container arrived. To say that the local folks were surprised at the amazing accuracy of arrival time established in Japan a month earlier would be an understatement, but the gardeners were very confident they would arrive on schedule. That was the first of several rather amazing events over the course of the next couple weeks as we watched a beautiful Japanese landscape garden come together.

The gardeners, who were in competition with one another for business in Kameoka, worked together like a well-oiled machine. The gardeners rented a large crane to move very heavy stones. The company that owned the crane stipulated that one of their employees had to operate the crane so it was interesting to watch an English-speaking crane operator and a Japanese-speaking gardener communicate with hand signals to place the stones exactly where they were to be. And it was great to watch hundreds of local people go by to say “thank you” for the garden that was being constructed.

At the end of two weeks a beautiful garden, a gift from the citizens of Kameoka to the citizens of Stillwater, was complete. The garden is outside the windows of a room in the Community Center where the Sister Cities Council now conducts monthly meetings and other functions related to our sister cities program. That room is now called the Kameoka Room.

The Japanese people are very generous, not only to foreign visitors, but to one another. It’s just an innate part of their culture. As a result, the Kameoka Room is filled with items from Japan which were given as gifts from the City of Kameoka to the City of Stillwater.

Throughout the years, mayors from Kameoka have sent gifts to their counterparts in Stillwater, mayors and other elected officials in Kameoka have sent gifts to people who visited Kameoka as members of Sister Cities delegations and people in Kameoka have sent gifts to their Stillwater friends.

If you haven’t visited the Japanese landscape garden, a type of garden for which the Japanese are world famous, or the Kameoka Room please take the opportunity to do so.



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Larry Jones was born and raised in Payne County. However, since graduating from Perkins High School, he has worked in each of the four time zones of the US, as well as Japan, Africa, and the Middle East. He retired from OSU’s College of Engineering, Architecture and Technology. His primary interest in the future of the SCC is due to the Kameoka Room and the Japanese gardens.

The Stillwater Community Center Foundation and the Friends of Stillwater Community Center strive to provide supplemental resources for the Stillwater Community Center to ensure its accessibility, affordability and sustainability for its use by residents and visitors of Stillwater and surrounding area. Visit www.sccfriends.com for more information.

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