

Japanese students share their culture at Tigard High

Shukutoku Yono High School students enjoy THS experiences as well

BY BARBARA SHERMAN ✉

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CULTURAL CELEBRATION — While Tigard High School students look on, students from Shukutoku Yono High School in Japan put on a rousing performance in the THS cafeteria Friday as part of a welcome ceremony

TIGARD – People driving by Tigard High School on Friday afternoon might have wondered why it looked like a scene from a different country.

Piling out of a bus were dozens of Japanese high school students dressed in their school uniforms – plaid skirts, black knee-high socks and black blazers – and toting large pastel-colored suitcases.

They were in the United States for a week to experience U.S. culture as part of a program organized by Azumano International, a division of Azumano Travel Service Inc.

Now in its 10th year, this year's tour included 380 students traveling in nine motor coaches visiting seven Portland area high schools, according to Rie Nakata, Azumano senior manager for marketing and planning who organized the tour.

"It's a really unique tour as it involves home stays," Nakata said in the THS cafeteria as the Japanese students performed for their American counterparts. "We have 44 students at Tigard High, and they flew in yesterday."

Many of the Japanese students, who attend Shukutoku Yono High School, changed into red T-shirts and navy pants with red-and-white stripes before entering the cafeteria, where they were joined by THS Japanese-language students, the THS cheerleaders and some guitar and other foreign-language students.

In front of a big sign welcoming them, Principal Pam Henslee spoke to the students as her words were translated into Japanese, "I hope your trip to Oregon has gone well, and I hope you have a good time today," she said. "I love your uniforms. I want the same uniforms for THS in green.

"At THS, every Friday we dress in casual clothes because we have athletic events to go to after school to cheer on our teams in cross-country, football, soccer and volleyball. Go, Tigard!"

Henslee told the students a little about the school's history – it is 78 years old, it has more than 2,000 students and more than 100 teachers, and it has been recognized for its learning strategies and academic achievements.

"We believe in the four As – academics, athletics, activities and arts," Henslee said. "We offer International Baccalaureate classes, and many students take advance-level classes. We offer four languages – Japanese, French, Spanish and German. Over 1,000 students participate in one or more sports, and we have a strong student-leadership program."

Mika Shinoki, a Shukutoku Yono High School teacher, responded, "Thank you, Mrs. Henslee. We appreciate the host families. This is a precious experience for our students and is an immeasurable benefit to them. The memories will stay with them the rest of their lives."

Gifts were exchanged, and several THS students spoke, including three foreign-language students who welcomed the group in French, German and Spanish.

A Shukutoku Yono student said in English, "We are glad to meet you. We would like to communicate with you as much as possible and find out about each other's culture."

The Japanese students then performed several rousing dance numbers and got some THS students involved in playing a Japanese version of Pin the Tail on the Donkey, which was likely called Pin the Features on the Face. Finally, the THS cheerleaders performed, followed with music performed by guitar students.

Once the assembly ended, the Japanese students met their host families, and some went down to Cook Park for a picnic while others took off to do some touring. Then many went on to the football game or other activities.

Nakata said that THS was chosen to participate in the exchange program because of its strong Japanese program, which is led by Noriko Roberts.

"The Japanese program is nationally recognized, and Principal Pam Henslee is so enthusiastic," Nakata said. "It is so important to have the total involvement of the school, which we have today. It's not just the Japanese classes but also the cheerleaders and music program – they provided a great welcome.

"I was grateful. I was so touched. I've been to other high schools, and this welcome touched me the most. I would love to do this again here."

Roberts, who teaches the Japanese language classes at THS and is the advisor to the Japanese National Honor Society, said Monday that "the visit went very well."

"I heard the homeroom teacher (Shinoki) comment that THS gave the most enthusiastic and warmest welcome of all the high schools," she said. "It was such a positive experience. My students had a wonderful time with them and said they spoke Japanese a lot, although the Japanese students were here to speak English!

"It was a very good learning experience for my students. For them to be able to speak Japanese was a real asset. And it was so nice to receive support from the ASB and other language students."

During their three days in Tigard, the Japanese students spent time with their host families and also toured many Portland-area sights before leaving Monday morning to spend a couple days in Seattle before flying home.