

## Oregon Trail heads to Korea

Friday, April 07, 2006

Listen to George Bush and you get the feeling just as soon as we're done kicking some al-Qaida butt in Iraq, we're off next to North Korea. Time to have at some evil-doers over there.

But one guy thinks it's time we send a different message to Pyongyang, and he's convinced the missive should fly from Oregon. Sho Dozono, the Azumano Travel boss and civic pillar of Portland, made his first trip to North Korea in 2004. He's been back three times since. This week, the latest Oregon delegation, led by Sho's wife, Loen, left for Pyongyang. It wasn't armed with medicine or food. It was armed with guitars. On Tuesday, Dozono chatted about what's up.

How did all this start?

My wife, Leon, and I were invited by Mercy Corps founder Ells Culver on a trip to North Korea in May of 2004.

And Mercy Corps had been there for some time?

More than 10 years ago, they sent over more than 70,000 apple seedlings and rootstocks. Eventually, the country will have 3 or 4 million fruit trees from Oregon.

How does North Korea look?

It feels like going to any Asian country 50 years ago. Every square inch of land is being farmed -- for rice, soybeans, cabbage. In the city, eight-lane boulevards with one or two cars.

Signs of Western influence?

We saw small kiosks selling surplus food, the kind of market economy you might have seen in China 10 years ago.

Will tourists flock there one day?

A fledgling industry already is developing. We had a steak dinner at a Japanese-owned hotel. We hope to take a group of Oregonians there this fall.

So who went this week?

The Koreans asked us to send some Americans to their April Spring Friendship Art Festival. We invited musicians Marv and Rindy Ross, who put together the Oregon Trail Quartet. They'll play six shows in two weeks.

Can music make friends?

This is one of the ways we let the people there know that not every American thinks every North Korean is an evil person. Government is the problem, not the people.

Do you expect to live long enough to see a reunited Korea?

Absolutely, we'll live to see that.

What's Oregon's role in all this?

Clearly Mercy Corps has laid a base for us to build on. They bring the world to us, giving us all an opportunity to be engaged. North Koreans know Portland. Now we can lead the United States.

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