The Japan America Society of St. Louis was awarded a grant from the Tomodachi/NAJAS Grassroots Exchange Program with the goal to invest in the next generation of Japanese and American people and deepen relations between the two countries through grassroots level people-to-people exchanges. Our program, St. Louis/Ishinomaki Friendship Program, brought ten Japanese to St. Louis for one week from August 28 to September 4, 2013. Ishinomaki is located in Miyagi prefecture, which is north of Tokyo and near Sendai. Ishinomaki is one of the most devastated areas in Tohoku from the March 11 Earthquake/Tsunami of 2011. It was the city with 160,000 people but lost nearly 4,000 (3,938) people or 2.5% of the population in the disaster, including 182 school children. All the participants from Ishinomaki have relatives who were killed by the mega disaster. Ishinomaki has made a steady recovery in the past two years. However, two of the five children in our program still live in temporary housing units without access to the internet.

The Japanese visitors stayed with American host families and participated in the Japanese Festival at the Missouri Botanical Garden during their one week visit to St. Louis. The Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis features the largest Japanese Garden in North America and one of the oldest Japanese festivals in the U.S. The festival takes place for three days over the Labor Day Holiday weekend and is attended by more than 30,000 people very year. The venue provided a wide range of opportunities for the Japanese visitors to interact with the people of St. Louis.

The St. Louis/Ishinomaki Friendship Program 2013 achieved a number of significant results:

- The program forged new friendships between the people of Ishinomaki and the people of St. Louis. Despite language limitations, the participants of the two countries bonded quickly and enjoyed sharing many activities.
- High-quality educational exchanges took place between the Ishinomaki students and St. Louis students.
- Home stay experiences provided valuable experiences to both the Japanese visitors and the St. Louis families.
The local participants gained additional awareness of the magnitude of the disaster and the plight of the victims from the Tohoku earthquake/tsunami of March 11, 2011.

The program gave the Japan America Society of St. Louis high profile publicity, including the invitation to the opening ceremony at the St. Louis Cardinals game and two live shows on a local TV channel.

The program strengthened the relationship between the Japan America Society of St. Louis and local organizations and groups.

The program enabled the Japan America Society of St. Louis to connect to new individuals and families with interests in Japan. We were impressed by the number of young volunteers who came forward to participate in the program.

Background

The Japan America Society of St. Louis worked with other Japan-related organizations in St. Louis and raised $13,217.01 after the disaster of March 11, 2011. We continued to inform interested individuals and community groups of the Tohoku recovery efforts. We organized a lecture event by Edson Kodama informing the community about the recovery efforts in Tohoku on February 14, 2012. Mr. Kodama is Secretary General of the Junior Chamber International. This is the organization that coordinates disaster recovery through JCI Operation Hope in different parts of the world. He himself visited Tohoku twice and worked on the ground after the disaster.

In August 2012, Chikako Usui, President of Japan America Society of St. Louis and Dr. Richard Colignon, a member of the Board, visited Tohoku. Hiromi Ishida from Tokyo arranged a guided tour by Hiroshi Abe of the Lions Club International in Ishinomaki. This arrangement gave Usui, Colignon, and Ishida the opportunities to get acquainted with Abe while receiving a comprehensive tour of the three affected areas: Ishinomaki, Onagawa, and Ogatsu. Usui, Colignon, and Ishida were introduced to disaster volunteers and met with the members of Lions Club Ishinomaki. From these interactions they gained better understanding of tsunami and the challenges involved in the reconstruction efforts. In the fall of 2012 the Japan America Society of St. Louis published a special edition of JAPAN NOTES “The Road Ahead: Recovering from March 11” featuring Ishinomaki (available at: http://jasstl.wordpress.com/japan-notes-tohoku/ PDF version available at: http://jasstl.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/japan-notes-special-edition.pdf).

Japanese Participants

The St. Louis/Ishinomaki Friendship Program brought ten Japanese to St. Louis: Five middle school and high school students and two adults from Ishinomaki and three adults from Tokyo. Five students from Ishinomaki were chosen by Hiroshi Abe in consultation with several school principals and teachers in Ishinomaki. Below is a description of five students along with a summary of their experiences with the Earthquake and Tsunami of March 11, 2011:
Teru Abe (Male, age 13, Middle School Freshman)
His house was flooded 1.5 meters (4.9 feet) above the floor level and half of the house was badly damaged. The house has been restored, and the family now lives in it. His father lost his aunt from the disaster.

Ami Mogi (Female, age 14, Middle School Junior)
The great earthquake came when she was at school. As she hurried home, the tsunami rolled in. Ami and her friend(s) fled to the roof top of an apartment building nearby. It was a cold day. They stayed there and it became dark. Some tenants of the apartment building invited them into their apartment and they slept there over night. The next day she moved to a shelter where she was reunited with her mother. Their house was completely demolished. They lived in the shelter for six months before they moved to temporary housing. Ami and her mother still live there.

Ami Kataoka (Female, age 12, Middle School Freshman)
The earthquake and tsunami hit her house and destroyed half of her house. Since then, the house has been fixed up and the family moved back in. Her father lost two aunts with the tsunami.

Yurika Kimura (Female, age 15, High School Freshman)
Yurika was hit by the tsunami right at her home. It killed her grandfather who at that time was on the first floor of the house. Her grandmother and Yurika were saved because they were on the second floor. The first floor of the house collapsed and the second floor was sitting on the demolished first floor. They stayed on the second floor overnight. Next day a Defense Force helicopter saved them by lifting them up from the wreckage. Her parents, both school teachers, were busy with the operation of a shelter as their school became an emergency shelter immediately after the disaster. Her school girl sister had to live in another shelter a while. It was two weeks later after the tsunami when all the surviving family members of five reunited. Yurika’s grandfather’s body was recovered and taken in a month later. With all of their possessions washed away, the family is now living in an apartment.

Keisuke Takahashi (Male, age 13, Middle School Junior)
He did not feel well enough to go to school and was resting at home. When the earthquake and tsunami came, the house was completely destroyed. He and his family got out of the house and lived in a car parked on the second floor of a super market. They stayed there for a few days. The family then moved to a shelter and lived there for one month. Since then, the house has been fixed and the family moved back to the restored house.

Usui selected two adult participants from Ishinomaki and three adults from Tokyo based on her tour of Ishinomaki in 2012. They were Akemi Abe and Naoko Fujisoe from Ishinomaki and Hiromi Ishida, Max Nohara, and Chosei Takahashi from Tokyo.
Akemi Abe (Female)
In our original plan, Hiroshi Abe was to serve as the chaperon of the Japanese group. Unexpectedly, he became unable to travel to the U.S. and his wife, Akemi Abe, traveled with the Ishinomaki students to St. Louis.

Naoko (Kinako) Fujisoe (Female, age 36)
Kinako Fujisoe is a professional photographer. She is originally from Fukuoka, Kyushu. She went to Ishinomaki as a volunteer worker immediately after the Tohoku disaster and has settled in Ishinomaki. She has remained in Ishinomaki to achieve long term recoveries. Her latest volunteer work has focused on psychological healing of the children. She helped the young children make photo albums and re-construct lost family memories.

Hiromi Ishida (Female)
Hiromi Ishida assisted Chikako Usui in coordinating the Japan side arrangements for the program. She translated all the correspondence from St. Louis into Japanese and communicated to the Japanese participants. She worked with Hiroshi Abe in making travel arrangements and organizing orientation meetings for the school children and their parents. She has also been an active supporter of Tohoku recovery efforts. For example, she raised cash donation and collected kimono and yukata (summer cotton kimono) for the people of Isinomaki. In addition, she donated yukata worth over $500 to the St. Louis/Ishinomaki Friendship Program.

Masashi (Max) Nohara (Male, age 58)
Max Nohara is a professional cook. He worked at a sushi restaurant in New York for a few years. In addition to his skills as sushi chef, he holds a license for cooking fugu, meaning he is a highly skilled chef. He speaks some English. As a native of Asakusa in Tokyo, he has been a committed volunteer for recovery efforts of Ishinomaki. Asakusa is known for its traditional, close-knit community ties. The people are willing to and generous in helping others. Max has organized periodic fund-raisers and delivered goods for the people of Ishinomaki by driving a truck to Ishinomaki.

Choose Takahashi (Male, age 61)
Mr. Choose Takahashi is President of Tokyo Rescue Lions Club in Tokyo and has worked with Hiroshi Abe on many projects. He has led active relief efforts in Kesen-numa. He accepted the role of chaperon when Hiroshi Abe asked him to take his role.

Selection of Host Families
The Japan America Society of St. Louis received host family applications from 15 families. We visited each home to meet with the family members. These visits took place from June 10 to 19, 2013. Each home visit gave us some understandings of family character, including their interests, life style, sibling relations, pets, and Japanese language skills. We were able to focus on matching between the Japanese visitors and American host families because we had more families to choose from. Below is a list of host family placements along with sex and age of the participants:
The St. Louis Cardinals invited the Ishinomaki group to participate in the opening ceremony of throwing out the first pitch. This gave us an opportunity to hold a welcoming event at the Cardinals/Reds game on August 28, 2013. Altogether 70 of us, including the Japanese visitors, their host families, members of the Society and their friends joined the event. Peter Kelley,
President of the National Association of Japan America Societies, traveled from Washington, D.C. to welcome the Japanese visitors at the Ballpark. In addition, Mr. and Mrs. Yoshida, Consul General of Japan at Chicago and Mr. Buckland, Honorary Consul General of Japan in St. Louis hosted a special reception for the Japanese visitors and the host families on August 30 in St. Louis.

We worked with the St. Louis Japanese Language School, St. Louis Bon Odori group, St. Louis Kimono group, and St. Louis Osuwa Taiko and arranged special programs at the festival. These local groups/organizations provided special roles for our visitors to play at the festival. They created excellent exchange opportunities between the Japanese visitors and the people of St. Louis.

We recruited three local coordinators to manage daily schedule and logistical issues. In addition, we recruited twelve volunteers to assist the Japanese visitors in their daily activities.

**Daily Coordinators:**
- Chip Meyer
- Hitomi Salini
- Tony Salini

**Volunteers:**
- Junko Ikeda (F)
- Paige Jouglard (F)
- Aya Kawasaki (F)
- C. Durran Kelly (M)
- Miyabi Komatsu (F)
- Ryan Krapfl (M)
- Dolores “De” Krapfl (F)
- Linda Lindsey (F)
- Mike Nolan (M)
- Shawn Spicer (M)
- Marc Vanacht (M)
- Sophia Xu (F)

A minimum of three volunteers each day escorted our guests to ensure smooth communications and active interactions with the people of St. Louis. Some volunteers participated in the program for more than a couple of days. Below is the program along with the names of daily coordinators and volunteers.

**St. Louis/Ishinomaki Friendship 2013**
*(Funded by NAJAS/TOMODACHI)*

**August 28: Arrival to St. Louis** (with H. & T. Salini as coordinators for the day)
**Welcoming event at the Cardinals/Reds Ballgame with Peter Kelley, NAJAS President**
The cardinals has invited the Ishinomaki students to throw out the first pitch. All Japanese visitors were invited to the opening ceremony.
- 6:30 PM Opening ceremony
- 7:15 PM Game

**August 29 (Thursday): Preparations for the Festival** (with H. & T. Salini as coordinators)
**Volunteers:** P. Jouglard; A. Kawasaki; R. Krapfl; M. Nolan; and S. Spicer
- 8:15 -11:00: Preparations for the Japanese festival (Shoenberg Theater)
- 11:00– 3:30: Sightseeing (Riverboat Cruise and the St. Louis Arch)
4:00-6:00 PM: Bon Dance rehearsal (Shoenberg Theater) (led by Y. Montgomery)
6:30-7:30PM: Visit to Osuwa Taiko Dojo.

**August 30: Preparations for the Festival** (with H. & T. Salini as coordinators)
Volunteers: J. Ikeda; P. Jouglard; R. Krapfl; L. Lindsey; M. Nolan; and B. Williams
8:30-10:30 AM: **Live Interview by Fox Channel 2**
10:30-11:30 AM: Preparations for the Japanese festival (Shoenberg Theater)
11:30-3:00 PM: Sightseeing (Students: City Museum; Adults: Anheuser-Busch Brewery Tour)
3:30 -5:00 PM: **Welcoming reception for the Japanese Visitors and Host Families** by Consul General Yoshida (at Chicago) and Honorary Consul General Buckland (St. Louis) at the Racquet Club Ladue

**August 31: Japanese Festival** (with C. Meyer and H. Ishida as coordinators)
Volunteers: P. Jouglard; D. Kelly; M. Vanacht; and H. Breshnahan
8:15 – 8:45 Preparations
9:00-10:15 AM: Panel Discussion - Ishinomaki students and the St. Louis Japanese Language School students
10:25 AM: Opening parade
11:00-Noon: Opening Ceremony (all Japanese visitors invited)
1:30-2:00 PM: Hana Choral Music (Ishinomaki students with the Japanese Language School students)
5:30-6:30 PM: Bon odori (all Japanese visitors)
5:30-7:00 PM: Max Nohara, Cooking Demonstration

**September 1: Japanese Festival** (with C. Myer and H. Ishida as coordinators)
Volunteers: Y. Takahashi; B. Williams; S. Xu; and H. Breshnahan
11:00 – 12:30 Preparations
1:00 – 2:00 and 2:30-3:30 PM: Kimono Fashion show (Ishinomaki female students)
5:30 – 6:30 PM: Bon odori (all Japanese visitors)
5:30 – 7:00 PM: Max Nohara, Cooking Demonstration

**September 2: Japanese Festival** (with C. Myer and H. Ishida as coordinators)
Volunteers: P. Jouglard; D. Kelly; and D. Krapfl
Host families spend the day with their Japanese guests at the Festival
11:00 – 12:30 Preparations
1:30 – 2:30 PM: St. Louis/Ishinomaki Tomodachi (Friendship) Yukata Show
2:30 – 3:45 PM: Reception with the Bon Dance Group

**September 3: Free day** (with C. Myer as coordinator)
Volunteers: P. Jouglard; M. Nolan; M. Vanacht; and B. Williams
9:30 AM-12:30 PM St. Louis Zoo
12:30-3:00 PM: Shopping

**September 4: Departure**
AA #0497 9:00 AM St. Louis, arrive Chicago 10:10 AM
AA #0153 1:30 PM Chicago, arrive Narita 4:40 PM (September 5)
Results
The Japanese visitors traveled 7,000 miles to meet the people of St. Louis. They participated in various activities at the Japanese festival, including a panel discussion with the Japanese Language School students, bon odori, cooking shows, and the St. Louis-Ishinomaki Tomodachi Yukata show. Nearly 30,000 people came to the Japanese festival at the Missouri Botanical Garden this year and enjoyed watching authentic performances by our guests from Japan. The visitors connected to St. Louisans quickly, and the people of St. Louis gained better understanding of the ongoing reconstruction efforts in Tohoku. The host families and the program volunteers expressed the joy of sharing activities and learning from each other as friends.

The panel discussion with the St. Louis Japanese Language School was most impressive as it involved youth educational exchanges. The panel discussion challenged the students on both sides in front of a large audience. The moderator skillfully solicited questions and answers. The students from Ishinomaki spoke about their experiences with the earthquake and tsunami and shared their feelings with the St. Louis counterparts.

The Ishinomaki students also participated in the Hana Choral Music program and sang five songs with students from the St. Louis Japanese Language School. The last song was "Furusato" (My home town) with the scenes of Ishinomaki, before and after the disaster, projected on the theater screen. One of the Japanese Language School teachers made these slides. They were very professional. Some adult audience reported that they broke out in tears when they heard the song and saw the scenes of Ishinomaki.

The Japan America Society of St. Louis organized the St. Louis-Ishinomaki Tomodachi Yukata Show at the festival. The show provided the opportunity for the Japanese visitors and host family members to appear together in the show, dressed in yukata. The host families appreciated a gift of yukata from the Japanese group and enjoyed participating in the show. The audience watched a variety of yukata, learned about roles and functions, and how to wear it.

The Ishinomaki group also made a contribution to Bon odori at the Japanese festival by dancing Tairyobushi, a popular song in celebration of harvest fishing in Ishinomaki. They practiced the dance with a dance teacher in Ishinomaki. The Bon odori group in St. Louis also practiced the Tairyobushi dance after they received a copy of the video and music from Ishinomaki. These preparations gave them an opportunity to come together at the festival to showcase the dance. The Ishinomaki group wore a traditional dance uniform they brought from Ishinomaki. It added vivid colors and a festive appearance. The bon odori group also organized a special reception for our guests and host families. They brought home-made Japanese food and everyone had a wonderful time.

The Ishinomaki group appeared on the local TV on August 30, 2013. The Fox Channel 2 aired two shows, one with three Ishinomaki students dressed in Yukata, and the other, Max Nohara making sushi. See: Japanese Festival: Japanese Culture at:
Host Family and Volunteer Experiences

All the host family arrangements worked well. They reported that their families had a lot of fun and meaningful cross-cultural experiences. They submitted the following comments:

“This was a wonderful experience for my family. We have hosted Japanese guests for a weekend every year for more than 13 years. However, I felt I learned more about Japan with Ami [Kataoka]. She brought us a photo album of the tsunami damage and a scrapbook of her life. We communicated through an on-line translator but she seemed very comfortable. Her mother says that she didn’t want to return. The Japanese Festival was wonderful, as usually. I really appreciate my daughters’ being able to participate in the Yukata fashion show. I also enjoyed the gatherings with the other host families and their Japanese guests. It was nice to be able to join in any activities. I went to the Zoo with the group, which was very fun. I thank the sponsors for their generosity. No one knows how deeply exchange programs affect cultural understanding. The young generation in particular has knowledge for a lifetime and also friends to visit.” (Denise Mussman)

“This was an amazing experience that I will never forget. I learned lots of little Japanese words that I never knew before, and I got very interested into the culture. Maybe someday I will learn the language. Ami was an EXTREMELY nice girl. We had fun attempting to speak back and forth through a translator, because the translator would make lots of mistakes. One example was: Ami tried to tell us that she couldn’t find her socks. The translator wrote: "The socks do not appear"... Ami took the time to make a HOMEMADE scrapbook that was typed and colored! And then gave it to us! I am planning to mail her one of me to make it up to her, but school has been very busy so far. All in all, I loved this exchange very much and would LOOVVEE to see Ami again.” (Camille Mussman, age 12)

“Thank you for choosing us to be Yurika's host family. We had such a fun time with her and the other visitors. When we first met Yurika [Kimura] at the ballgame, I could tell that she was very tired but also very excited. During the game we went to get some food and I noticed she was looking around at all the people. I asked her if she had ever seen so many white and black people in one spot and she said "only on TV". So it was nice to expose her to a more mulch-racial and cultural environment. In addition to this Yurika really seemed to enjoy American music. Whatever was on the radio would have her bobbing her head up and down whether it was rap, country or rock music. I made a couple of mix CDs for her as a souvenir... We took her to Dierbergs and browsed the store. She couldn't believe how big and full the market was, especially the size of butter! When it came to communication, I think it really helped that we were able to speak Japanese with her. Yurika was able to confide stories to my wife about the disaster and
relationship problems with survivors...I hope that her experience here with us and the festival will help her grow.” (Ryan Krapfl)

“Nathan and I had a fabulous time with Kinako [Fujisoe]. Talk about a perfect match! It was great learning Japanese from her and teaching English to her, though she already has a good grasp of that! Everyone in the group was so friendly and receptive. I love the yukata that the group gave me. Kinako, Nathan, and I had many conversations about America, Japan, and the world in general. We had a lot of fun taking her to different restaurants, but on her last day I got to show her even more of St. Louis. We went to an animal shelter (her request), thrift store (which she bought and old Japanese book from 1986) LOL, dollar store, Galleria, downtown library, and walked around downtown, etc. What was also awesome was how receptive Americans were to Kinako and how once they found out she was from Japan would ask her lots of questions. I told her to come back anytime to stay with us and we really want to thank you for such a great experience!” (Emily Schubert)

“We thoroughly enjoyed the experience and are happy to add Max [Nohara] to our family! We hope he had as good a time as we did and we plan to mail him some hard copies of this week's Saint Louis American newspaper because he is featured in one of the party pictures.” (Aliah Holman)

The Japanese-side coordinator (Hiromi Ishida), three local coordinators (Hitomi Salini, Tony Salini, and Chip Meyer), and fourteen volunteers did excellent jobs. They developed a strong bonding because the coordinators and volunteers spent much time with the Japanese visitors. Some of the volunteers spoke excellent Japanese and impressed the Japanese youths. We can hear their unique experiences from their testimonials:

“One cannot put a price on what a life-enriching experience this was for the children, one that will be part of them for the rest of their lives. I was especially touched by how fervently one of them (Yurika Kimura) was reading the English display inscriptions at the Gateway Expansion Museum. She understood only a little, but I could feel the intense desire to learn, to soak everything in. I am gratified to know that some extremely lucky young people from St. Louis will also be able to enjoy a similar life-enriching experience next summer. I deeply appreciate the Japan America Society of St. Louis in organizing this program.” (Mike Nolan)

“I feel very honored to have been able to help show our visitors the city of St. Louis. Volunteering for the Tomodachi program has meant so much to me, more so than I first realized. Although I had only known everyone for five days, I had just started bonding with them and I was sad for the experience to end. I wanted to go back to Japan with them! I have subscribed to JASSTL and I will join as soon as I get my new student ID. I hope to keep in touch with JASSTL and I plan on
participating in any activities or events JASSTL offers. Again, thank you so much. I am extremely grateful and I will remember this past week as one of the best of my life.” (Paige Jouglard)

“I had such fun meeting and visiting with our Japanese visitors; it was such a pleasure. Having the Ishinomaki Group here made the Japanese Festival even more special. I enjoyed meeting the children; they did such a fantastic job in the yukata fashion show. It was wonderful to see their faces light up at the after-show luncheon, knowing they had seen such devastation of their home town. I enjoyed talking with Nohara-san; he's so fun and enthusiastic; Takahashi-san - so upbeat and committed and Fujisoe-san, what a wonderful photographer. I have such great respect for them all. I know I have a better understanding now and feel I have made new friends. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to volunteer.” (De Krapfl)

“I definitely think the visit of the 10 Japanese folks to St. Louis helped raise awareness and renew concern about the plight of the victims of the earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011, as well as engender personal relationships among Americans and Japanese. Highlighting the visitors at the Japanese Festival at Missouri Botanical Gardens and including them in several of the events (e.g., cooking demonstrations, kimono and yukata show, bon odori, public Q&A) ensured that a large audience of St. Louisans were able to see the Japanese visitors and kindle interest in them and their situation. Moreover, having the visits from Japan emphasized and enhanced the "authenticity" of the festival. The multi-day homestays, likewise, created deep personal relationships among a few Americans and the Japanese visitors. This visit was much more - and much meaningful - than a "tour" of St. Louis. Definite and genuine friendships were forged among the participants and their American counterparts. Moreover, the team of coordinators, volunteers, and host families also built relationships among themselves, further strengthening the network of "Japanophiles" in the St. Louis area. In short, the program was a resounding success.” (Chip Meyer - coordinator)

The Japanese young students were full of energy and engaging despite the ordeal they went through with the terrible disaster. I felt that they will bring hope and create a new Japan. I believe this program gave rare, life-changing experiences for the Japanese students. It was good to see that the Japanese students blossomed during their visit. Some students were quite shy and quiet when they arrived but they became more open and became self-confident. One student mentioned to me that she intends to become an exchange student and will come to study in the U.S. I am very thankful for all the wonderful experiences we had with the program. (Hitomi Salini – coordinator)

We had a very hectic schedule and everything had to be timed down to the minute. However, the students were very kind and respectful even though they
had jet lag. They slept in the van whenever we traveled from place to place. They enjoyed the special treatment at the ball game and had a lot of fun. They also had a good time the next day at the Arch and River boat. They had the most fun at the City Museum! We all had an awesome time. With all the fun we had sightseeing, we still had to be back to the Botanical Gardens every day so they could practice for the Japanese festival. I respect these kids very much. I believe these young students will become an asset to Japan as they get older. I had a wonderful time with this program. (Tony Salini – coordinator)

Summary
The St. Louis/Ishinomaki Friendship Program concluded successfully. The program forged new friendships between the people of Ishinomaki and the people of St. Louis. Home stay experiences gave unique experiences to both the Japanese visitors and the host families. The program provided better understanding of the Tohoku earthquake/tsunami of March 11, 2011.

This program promoted personal growth for the young students from Japan. They were given challenging tasks on a daily basis. Yet, they organized themselves, cooperated with one another and met the demands extremely well. They gained confidence, became more engaging in interpersonal communications, and made new friendship with St. Louisans. They gained valuable insights about American way of life through homestay experiences.

For host families and volunteers, the program offered rich experiences that will contribute to future US-Japan relations. These participants made active commitments to new experiences. They extended a warm welcome to the Japanese visitors, helped the Japanese visitors adjust to St. Louis, and shared each other’s countries and cultures. The program helped build strong connections between them.

For the Japan America Society of St. Louis, the program brought more visibility in the community and strengthened our relationship with other local organizations. In addition, the program gave us the tools to connect to individuals and families with interests in Japan in the community. We were amazed by the number of young volunteers who came forward to participate in the program. This experience gave us confidence and hope for the future.
Arrival to St. Louis, August 28, 2013

Keisuke Takahashi and Teru Abe

Ami Kataoka about to throw out the pitch

Teru Abe about to throw out the pitch

After the Pitches with Fredbird at the Cardinals/Reds Game Opening Ceremony

Max Nohara & Chosei Takahashi

Yurika Kimura, Akemi Abe, and Ami Mogi
Reception hosted by Consul General Yoshida and Honorary Consul General Buckland

Hitomi Salini and Hiromi Ishida

Ishinomaki Group with Ryan Krapfl

Phoebe M, Ami K, and Camille M at Yukata Show

Max Nohara at Yukata Show

Chikako Usui, Aliah Holman, and Max Nohara

Ishinomaki Group in Yukata on Air
Visit to the St. Louis Zoo

Ishinomaki Group at the Riverboat Cruise

Mike N, Page J, Hiromi I, and Akemi A

Ami M, Ami K, and Yurika K at Kimono Show

Panel Discussion with the St. Louis Japanese Language School

Ishinomaki group with the St. Louis Bon Odori Group during practice sessions

Ishinomaki group (front) with the St. Louis Bon Odori Group at Yagura Stage