

Niimi Sister City New Paltz Village, U.S.A. Official Visit Report



Sunday, May 12 – Friday, May 17, 2024

Niimi City

1 Purpose of Visit, Summary, etc.

(1) Progress

Niimi City and New Paltz Village, New York, USA concluded a sister city agreement in October 1998, when the former Osa Town was in existence. From 2005 onward, Niimi City as it is now began student and citizen exchanges with the sister city.

In October 2023, the Niimi City International Exchange Association held a photo exhibition and commemorative ceremony to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the agreement. The ceremony was attended by Dave Caccamo, then President of the New Paltz International Exchange Association, and others, and marked the resumption of exchanges, including a direct visit that had been postponed by the Corona Disaster. In the same month, New Paltz Mayor Tim Rogers and his family visited Niimi.

In November, Mayor Rogers and new President Brandon Vera extended an invitation to Mayor Ebisu to visit New Paltz, which made this visit possible.

(2) Purpose of Visits

Since the sister city agreement was concluded and exchanges began, there had been active exchanges between junior high school students and Niimi Public University's training program in the U.S., etc. However, the Corona pandemic led to exchanges being suspended.

The purpose of this official visit was to resume exchanges that had stalled due to the pandemic and to create new exchanges, such as those between high schools, which had not been conducted before.

(3) Outline of New Paltz Village, U. S. A.

Population: 7,324 (2020)

Area: 4.66 square kilometers

Mayor: Mayor Tim Rogers

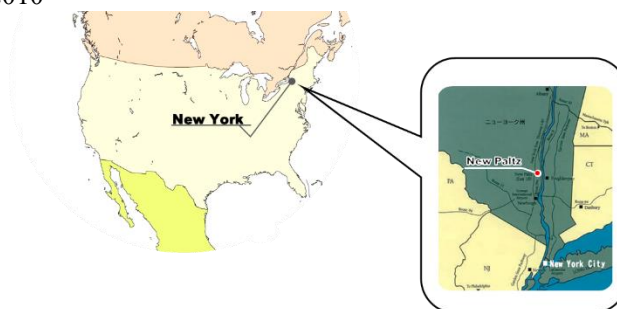
Outline: Located approximately 120 kilometers north of the center of New York City.

New Paltz was founded in 1678 and is an agricultural and tourist city that takes advantage of the rich natural environment of the Hudson Valley and is home to the State University of New York at New Paltz, making it a thriving academic city.

Sister city affiliation with the former town of Osa was established on October 9, 1998.

Re-signed with Niimi City on November 1, 2010

〈Location of New Paltz Village〉



2 Visit itinerary, etc.

Sunday, May 12 through Friday, May 17, 2024 (6 days)

Date	Places visited, etc.	Contents
Japan time 5/12 (Sun)	Departure from Niimi City Okayama Airport to Haneda Airport Haneda Airport to John F. Kennedy International Airport	
Local time 5/12 (Sun)	Arrival at John F. Kennedy International Airport Transfer to hotel in New Paltz	
5/13 (Mon)	Village Hall Elting Community Cemetery New Paltz Middle School State University of New York at New Paltz Former President Dave Caccamo's home Reformed Church	Meeting with Mayor Rogers, presentation of city flag, old fire station, tour of monuments Commemorative tree planting Meet with Superintendent Gratto and Principal Sheldon, tour of the school Meeting with university faculty and staff, tour of the school Welcome reception and signing of Friendship Agreement
5/14 (Tue)	New Fire Station Rotary Club Member's Home New Paltz High School Elting Memorial Library	Internal Tour Showing thanks for a donation Meeting with Principal Sims and tour of the school Farewell party
5/15 (Wed)	Departure from New Paltz John F. Kennedy International Airport to Haneda Airport	
Japan time 5/17 (Fri)	From Haneda Airport to Okayama Airport Arrival in Niimi City	

3 Official Delegation: 6 members

Hitoshi Ebisu, Mayor;

Hideo Enoki, Council Chair;

Masanori Shomura, Superintendent of Education;

Akihiro Sunada, President of Niimi City International Exchange Association;

Kei Yamauchi, Niimi City International Exchange Association;

Yasuhiro Nishikawa, Lifelong Learning Division

4 Itinerary of the Visit and Its Outline

Day 1: Sunday, May 12

From Okayama Airport, the participants connected at Haneda Airport and traveled to John F. Kennedy International Airport (approximately 13 hours by air).

Day 2: Sunday, May 12 (local time)

We arrived at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York City and went by private car to New Paltz Village. At the hotel where we were staying, we were greeted by Mayor Tim Rogers and his family, New Paltz International President Brandon Vera, and Vice President Ethan Torres.



(second from left) Vice President Torres, President Bera, Mayor Rogers and family

Day 3: Monday, May 13th

■ New Paltz Village Hall (city hall)

The group visited Village Hall and presented Mayor Rogers with the Niimi City flag.



(Second from the right) Sue Sherburne of the New Paltz International Association



Presenting the city flag to Mayor Rogers

■ Old Fire Station

We visited the old fire station behind the Village Hall. At an online meeting held in April 2021, one of the topics discussed was that each city was planning to rebuild its own fire station.

Mayor Rogers also toured Niimi City's fire station when he visited Niimi City in October 2023.



Former fire station equipment storehouse

■Monument 〈Odo Gorge〉

We visited the monument "Odo Gorge " located in the Peace Park near Village Hall. "Odo Gorge" was created in 2003 as a monument of friendship by Professor Kazuhiko Kanayama of Niimi College.



Monument: Odo Gorge

■Commemorative tree planting at Elting Cemetery

The visiting group, along with Mayor Rogers, Chairman Bera, Vice Chairman Torres, and Ms Sherburne, planted a pin oak in a section of the cemetery managed by the Village.



■New Paltz Middle School

The group visited New Paltz Middle School and met with Superintendent Stephen Gratto and Principal Ann Sheldon. During the meeting, they reviewed the past youth dispatch programs conducted by both cities and confirmed that they would continue to discuss the details of future dispatches and exchanges, including the timing.

Afterwards, they toured classes and facilities such as the gymnasium. New Paltz Middle School has over 500 students from grades 6 to 8 (ages 11 to 14), and in addition to basic subjects, the school focuses on music, art, and technology education.



(From left) Principal Sheldon and Superintendent Gratto



A lesson was held using scientific calculators.



Tour of the gym

■State University of New York at New Paltz

The group visited the State University of New York at New Paltz and met with Beth Vargas, Executive Director, center for International Programs, Nathan Clerici, Japanese Language Program Coordinator, and Shimada Akira, Director of the Asian Studies Program.

Until now, New Paltz has had exchanges with Niimi College, where students studying mainly



(From the right) Director Shimada, Coordinator Clerici, and Director Vargas

nursing and social welfare conducted training together. Section head Yamauchi was in charge of U.S. training for Niimi College from 2002 to 2016, and visited New Paltz 10 times. According to Director Vargas, the nursing department at New Paltz has since moved to another campus, but there are still students studying childcare-related fields, so he said he hopes to see educational exchanges in various forms, including with that community. Afterwards, the group was given a tour of the laboratories and other facilities by Chairman Bera, a teacher at the New Paltz campus. Here, Mayor Rogers' father, Ed Rogers, joined the group. Ed has been actively involved in exchanges with Niimi, having visited the city in 2010 when the Niimi City-New Paltz Village agreement was renewed and hosting visitors from Niimi as a host family. Vincenzo Agostaro and David Huerta, who worked as ALTs in Niimi City from 2022 to 2023, also came along and we were all delighted to see each other.



Ed Rogers (right)



(From left) Mr. Huerta and Mr. Agostaro

■Dave Caccamo's house

We visited the home of Dave Caccamo, former president of the New Paltz International Association. Mr. Caccamo has been participating in sister city exchanges since around 2005, and served as president of the New Paltz International Association for approximately 15 years from 2008 to October 2023. Mr. Caccamo is interested in Japanese culture, especially gardens, and has renovated his own home and garden in a Japanese style. Mr. Caccamo was also in charge of maintaining the rock garden around the Odo Gorge monument in the Peace Park.

Also in attendance was Craig Shankles, an artist who created the New Paltz Forest Monument on Mount Osa in 2003.



(From left) Craig Shankles and Dave Caccamo

■Welcome party at the Reformed Church

A welcome party for the delegation was held at the Reformed Church. At the reception, Mayor Ebisu and Mayor Rogers signed a "Confirmation of Sister City relationship agreement," agreeing to continue the relationship of trust between the two cities, which are celebrating their 25th anniversary since the sister city agreement was concluded.

In addition, party attendees signed softballs and each city shared three as a memento.



The mayors of both cities signed the "Confirmation of Sister City relationship Agreement"



Sign and exchange of softballs



A welcome cake was prepared



Village of New Paltz and Niimi City

Confirmation of sister city relationship agreement

The town of Osa, Okayama Prefecture, Japan, and the Village of New Paltz, New York, USA, entered into a sister city relationship on October 9, 1998. After the municipal merger that formed the city of Niimi, Okayama Prefecture, the Village of New Paltz and Niimi became sister cities, concluding an agreement on November 1, 2010. On October 8, 2023, a ceremony commemorating the 25th anniversary of the original sister city relationship was held, demonstrating the trust between the two municipalities that had been built up through past exchanges.

Both municipalities pledge to continue this exchange, to cooperate in a wide range of fields such as culture, education, sports, economy, and tourism, and to develop their friendly relationship into the future. As proof of this, they sign this confirmation of agreement.

May 13, 2024

Mayor, Village of New Paltz

Tim Rogers

Mayor, City of Niimi

Hitoshi Ebisu

Day 4: Tuesday, May 14th

■ New Fire Station

The new fire station is located about 2.3 kilometers away from the Village Hall and the old fire station. During the tour, it was explained that the parking space for emergency vehicles, which was previously cramped, has been expanded, and that the building itself is designed to use sustainable energy with consideration for the environment. Also, unlike in Japan, the fire department and rescue department are separate.



The new fire station will have ample space to accommodate large emergency vehicles.

■ Rotary Club of New Paltz

Following the heavy rains that hit western Japan in July 2018, we received a donation from the New Paltz Rotary Club.

We visited Geraldine Kelly of the New Paltz Rotary Club at her home and expressed our gratitude to President Cathy Sifre.

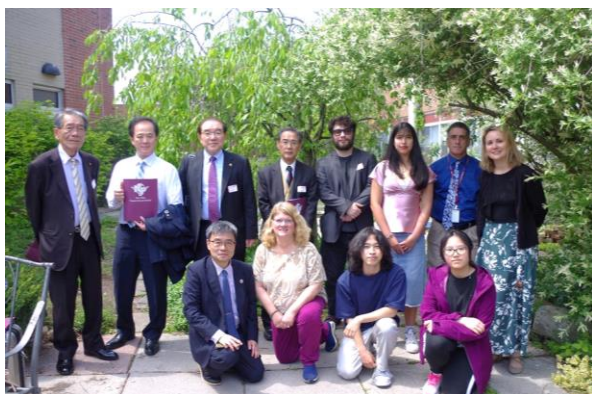


(Left) President Cathy Sifre

■ New Paltz High School

New Paltz High School is the only high school in New Paltz, with approximately 700 students from grades 9 to 12 (ages 15 to 18). The school is equipped with a music hall, gymnasium, and other facilities for learning art, music, and technology.

The delegation was welcomed by students from the Asia Culture Club and had a tour of the school. In the courtyard, there is a friendship tree commemorating the 10th anniversary of the sister city agreement in 2008, and they could also see a plaque installed by former high school teacher, Ms. Sherburne.



Principal Simms (back row, right) in front of the Friendship Tree



Friendship Tree Wood Panel

In addition, we met with Principal Samuelle Simms, who explained that the high school has students from various countries taking advantage of one-year study abroad programs, and since arts and technology classes are a better way to overcome language barriers, participating in the curriculum that way is an option. In addition, there is a school affiliated with New Paltz Village that offers a wide range of vocational training, including



(Center) Principal Simms

industry, technology, economics, medicine, and aviation, and it was suggested that we learn the differences between Japanese schools and other schools there.

■Farewell party at Elting Memorial Library

The event was attended by Mayor Rogers, many citizens who have been involved in past exchanges, and many people, mainly from the younger generation, who have an interest in Japan.

At the farewell party, artist Craig Shankles presented us with a panel combining the city emblems of Niimi City and New Paltz Village. Shankles visited Niimi in October 2003 as part of the New Paltz Art Exchange Group and created the "New Paltz Exchange Forest Monument" at the Dainichi Plateau on Mt. Osa. Since then, he has been involved in exchanges, mainly through artistic activities.



Everyone gathered at Elting Memorial Library



The monument unveiling ceremony in 2003

The venue, Elting Memorial Library, houses photographs and books that show the exchanges between the two cities to date.



(Left) Books about Japanese folk tales and culture are stored

(Right) Photographs and letters showing exchanges from the Osa Town days

We also received two picture books from Sue Sherburne. "Who Sees Who at the Zoo?" was written by Sherburne's aunt, Patricia Lacey, and included a message that she hopes the children of Niimi City will enjoy it. "WHOO-KU HAIKU" is written in a 5-7-5 rhythm when read aloud, and this style of writing is popularly known as HAIKU, which is similar to Japanese haiku.



The two picture books we received from Ms. Sherburne can be read at the Central Library.



(From the right) David Palmiter, who worked as an ALT in Niimi City 25 years ago, and his family



(From left) Dave Caccamo, former president of the New Paltz International Association, Mayor Rogers and his family

Day 5: Wednesday, May 15

After completing the itinerary, we traveled from New Paltz Village to John F. Kennedy International Airport, and then from John F. Kennedy International Airport to Haneda Airport (approximately 14 hours by air).

Day 6: Friday, May 17 (Japan time)

We transferred from Haneda Airport to Okayama Airport and returned to Niimi City.