

Tsunami ‘made us neighbors’

By [Laura Jo Welter, The Triplicate](#) January 06, 2015 03:47 pm



Takata High School students, visiting from Japan, flash the “peace” sign during an assembly Monday at Del Norte High. Del Norte Triplicate / Bryant Anderson

Japanese visitors share similarities of coastal community

The talk at the Del Norte High School assembly on Monday was of being connected.

Five thousand miles of ocean separate the small coastal community of Rikuzentakata, Japan, from Crescent City. And yet it’s the ocean which has the two connected. In just under three years, the fishing boat that made the journey here and back home again following the March 2011 tsunami in Japan carried with it a budding relationship between the two communities.

“It has made us neighbors,” Principal Tokota of Takata High School told the school-wide assembly.

The assembly was among the first of the activities planned for the delegation of students visiting from Takata High School, a year after a group from Del Norte High School made its own visit to Japan.

The assembly began with a screening of a short video produced by Facebook called “Recovering Hope,” which told the story of the recovery and return of the boat.

After the town of Rikuzentakata was leveled by the March 2011 tsunami, Takata High School suffered devastating losses. Twenty-two students and a teacher died. Everyone in the community lost someone. The 20-foot boat belonging to Takata High School that washed ashore in Crescent City two years later seemed an apt symbol of recovery.

Wooden plaques picturing the fishing boat and an inscription of Rikuzentakata and Crescent City made by wood shop students at Del Norte High were given to the Takata delegation, while they presented their hosts with the electric-blue flag of Takata High School and a book of photographs of Rikuzentakata before, during and after the tsunami.

The delegates from Takata High School and Del Norte High School were also presented with certificates signed by state Sen. Mike McGuire thanking them for their work developing the relationship between the two high schools.

In the coming week, the group from Rikuzentakata will be touring Del Norte County. They will walk under the redwoods, attend classes at the high school and spend an afternoon getting acquainted with Yurok history and customs. They’ll also work with Del Norte High School students to find a way to maintain the connection between the two communities.

“We’re going to let the kids be a part of that design,” Principal Randy Fugate said. “Let them decide what they want to do and how they want to use technology.”

Rikuzentakata’s public relations representative, Amya Miller, was hopeful about what the students would get out of the coming week and the relationships they’d establish. She said that the Takata High students were a bit nervous, as this was the first time most of them had ever been out of their region, let alone Japan, but she was

sure they'd do well.

“These are small communities that are getting direct exposure to foreign communities and foreign languages,” Miller said. “This isn't something that just happens. This is going to change their lives.”

Out of the tragedy came a miracle, Miller said.

“And it keeps getting more and more beautiful.”

It's not just the fishing boat. It's a deeper connection between two communities.

“This exchange represents people working together to save something important,” said Park Ranger Todd Hisaichi, who made the trip up from Muir Woods National Monument to spend the week with the Takata High students.

“It's conservation work,” Hisaichi said, and it's a connection. After all, he said, “We share an ocean.”

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