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Tomodachi Inouye Scholars Visit Hawai'i

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TOMODACHI Inouye Scholars from Matsuyama University (in white T-shirts) with their counterparts from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa visit the Ehime Maru Memorial at Kaka'ako Waterfront Park.

Twenty-three students from Matsuyama University in Japan's Ehime Prefecture recently visited Honolulu, where they met with students from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa as part of the TOMODACHI Inouye Scholars exchange program.

The program was created last year by the U.S.-Japan Council in honor of the late U.S. Sen. Daniel K. Inouye, who believed that the bilateral relationship between the United States and Japan was the most important in the world. The TOMODACHI Inouye Scholars exchange program is part of the council's KAKEHASHI Project, a youth exchange between Japan, the United States and Canada that strives to increase interest in Japan.

Participants in the TOMODACHI Inouye Scholars program learn about Sen. Inouye and his contributions to Hawai'i, the U.S., his heritage and the U.S.-Japan relationship. The U.S.-Japan Council was created in late 2008 by Sen. Inouye and other Japanese American leaders. His widow, Irene Hirano Inouye, serves as the council's president.



(<http://thehawaiiherald.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/CommFocusTomodachi-small-group.jpg>)

University of Hawai'i students, from left: Nalisha Arakaki, Stanley Chan, Sergey Russu, Nicole Mercado and Chelsie Takasaki, with Matsuyama University students Wataru Ishiki, Ryohei Nishioka and Miki Ozawa.

The TOMODACHI Inouye Scholars program is part of the TOMODACHI Initiative, a public-private partnership between USJC and the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. The TOMODACHI (meaning "friend") Initiative strives to cultivate a new generation of American and Japanese young people through cross-cultural educational exchanges and leadership development.

The TOMODACHI Inouye Scholars from Matsuyama spent 10 days in Hawai'i, learning about the various institutions that Sen. Inouye impacted, such as the East-West Center and the University of Hawai'i, making presentations and interacting with their Hawai'i counterparts. It was the last stop of a packed itinerary that had taken them to Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and finally, Honolulu.

On Feb. 9, the student-scholars from both UH and Matsuyama University visited the Ehime Maru Memorial at Kaka‘ako Waterfront Park. Visiting the memorial was especially meaningful for the Matsuyama students because it was erected in memory of nine people from Ehime Prefecture, where Matsuyama University is located. The nine were killed in the February 2001 collision between the Ehime Maru, an Uwajima Fisheries High School training ship, and the USS Greeneville, a nuclear-powered submarine off Oahu’s south shore.

Four of the Matsuyama students were born and raised in Ehime and were in elementary school when the accident occurred. After learning about the tragedy, they said they came to understand the importance of creating relationships based on peace. They said the Ehime Maru Memorial serves as a symbol of peace.

“We must remember how sad [the tragedy] was, how horrible it was, but the monument made a bridge between Japan and America/Hawai‘i,” said Matsuyama student Wataru Ishiki.

For the UH students, who visited Matsuyama University last year, the Ehime Maru Memorial symbolizes an ongoing relationship between Japan and Hawai‘i.

Chelsie Takasaki, who spoke on behalf of her fellow UH-Mānoa students, said memorials are usually associated “with sad feelings, feelings of hurt. I think what’s good about this [Ehime memorial] is that it is a continuous reminder that the people of Hawai‘i care about the people of Japan, of Ehime.”

Takasaki said the fact that volunteers clean the memorial on a regular basis and that the anniversary of the accident is commemorated annually “shows that we want to continue the relationship with Ehime and we want to foster friendship with them, despite the tragedy that happened.”

Ishiki said the trip gave the Matsuyama students an opportunity to see and experience the United States, firsthand, and to understand the lasting legacy of Sen. Inouye.

“It is because of him that we are able to visit [different] memorials, said Ishiki. “A lot of us didn’t know about America or memorials. I’m sure we can learn about the history and connection between Japan and Hawai‘i and, with TOMODACHI, can be a bridge between the peoples,” he said.

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