



The Power of Lakes, which Connect People beyond National Boundaries, and Different Cultures and Customs

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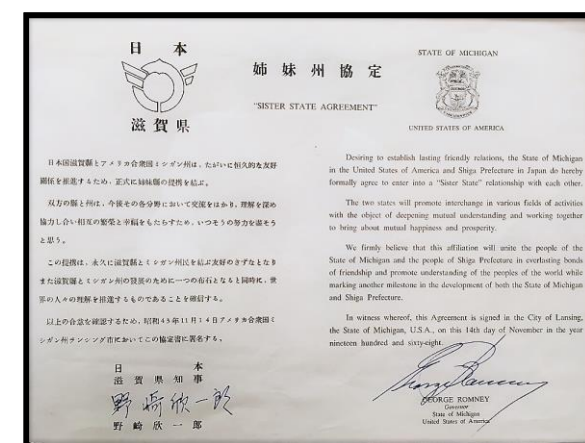


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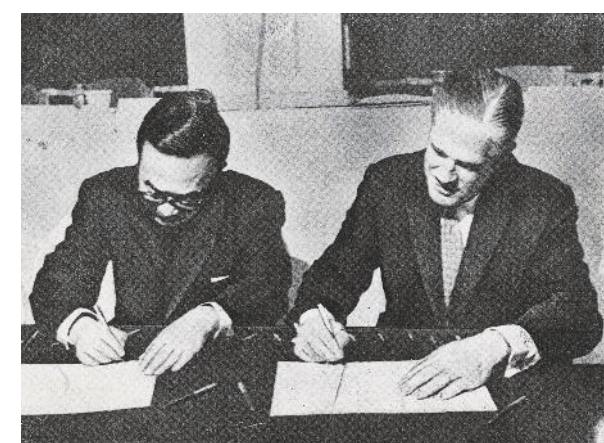
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United Through Lakes

The Michigan-Shiga sister-state relation began in 1968 through the connection of their lakes, the Great Lakes and Lake Biwa. Since then, Shiga and Michigan have been bound by strong ties, sharing concerns and worries related to water and boosting each other up. The sister-state relationship promotes friendship and goodwill through economic, educational, and cultural exchanges. The bond created by the lakes is one of the most comprehensive relationships between Japan and the U.S. today.



The Sister-State Agreement



The two governors signing the agreement

From Two States to the World: “Save the Lakes”

Initiated with the common vision to “Keep the lakes clean”, the exchanges between Shiga and Michigan have been developed to build a common awareness of lake-related concerns with lake-bearing self-governing entities worldwide. In 1984, the first International Conference on Conservation and Management of World Lake Environment, LECS 1984, was held in Shiga to straightforwardly address these concerns. The second World Lake Conference took place in 1986, in Michigan. At the 8th World Water Forum in Brazil, in 2018, Michigan, Rio Grande do Sul (another of Shiga’s sister states) and Shiga held a discussion during the Lake Session over lakes and water environment conservation. In this way, the lake-focused network has become wider and wider.

Promoting the Value of Freshwater Lakes

In January 2020, Shiga and Michigan signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU). The MOU not only allows both states to share expertise and knowledge in order to protect their lake Basins, but to emphasize the value of conserving and restoring freshwater lake environments for present and future generations worldwide. In 2021, the two governors agreed that both states would exchange information about the impacts of climate change on the Great Lakes and Lake Biwa and promote awareness about the growing effects of the climate crisis on lake environments, a key issue they both face.



The then-Crown Prince's speech at the 1st LECS in Otsu, Shiga in 1984



Representatives of Michigan and Shiga signing the MOU in 2020



Governors discussed the impact of climate change on the lakes in 2021

Fostering Globally-Minded Youth

The friendly ties go beyond conventional government programs, and foster the young leaders of tomorrow’s diverse society.

- The Japan Center for Michigan Universities, JCMU, was built in 1989 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the sister-state agreement. It offers a unique international exchange program operated by a consortium of public universities in Michigan in facilities constructed and managed by Shiga. The Center is committed to offering instructive programs to both states, while promoting exchanges between students from Michigan and the local community in Shiga. JCMU continually cultivates talented individuals acting as a bridge between Japan and the U.S.
- The high school student mutual exchange program began in 1990. Every year, around fifteen students from each state are selected to stay at each other’s houses, expanding the exchange to their families. The students gain a deeper understanding of each other’s cultures and lifestyles through diverse experiences.



The inaugural students of Japan Center for Michigan Universities in Hikone, Shiga in 1989



Michigan and Shiga High school students enjoying kayaking in Lake Biwa in 2017

Toward the Future

The friendship built through the lakes has lasted over 50 years and has become a type of cultural heritage in both states. We hope to pass it on to future generations, and to see it used as a model for international exchanges that empower many people across the world.