

IN BRIEF

Toys For Tots

The 190 branches of the Farmington Hills-based Michigan National Bank are participating in the U.S. Marine Corps annual Toys For Tots program by offering its buildings as collection points for donations.

Toys For Tots is the Marine Corps Reserve's annual Christmas campaign to collect and distribute toys to disadvantaged children across the country. Toys For Tots was founded by the Marines in 1947.

Michigan National branches will collect toys through Dec. 20. Donors are asked to bring a new, unwrapped toy to any Michigan National branch to assist in this charitable cause.

"This is the fourth year we have participated in this program," said Robert J. Mylod, bank chairman and president. "Our customers and team members have been most generous in responding to this worthy cause. This is a real community effort, and we're pleased to help the U.S. Marine Reserves distribute toys to local needy children."

To locate the Michigan National Bank branch nearest you, call 1-800-CALL-MNB.

Seasonal sing-along

Larkshire Elementary School's holiday sing-along is scheduled for 7-7:30 p.m. Monday, Dec. 16, at the Farmington City Park, Shawawasee and Power. The public, especially youngsters, is invited to attend. Refreshments will be served by the Larkshire PTA.

New Year's Eve ball

B'nai B'rith and the Men's Club of Adat Shalom Synagogue will host a New Year's Eve ball at the Farmington Hills synagogue.

The cost of \$48 per person includes hors d'oeuvres, a kosher sit-down dinner, sweet table, party favors, cocktails, champagne toast at midnight and dancing to the music of the Encore Band.

For more information or to register, call the B'nai B'rith office at 552-8177.

2nd vice president

Don Wolf, Oakland County commissioner and former Farmington Hills mayor, was elected second vice president of the Michigan Association of Counties.

Wolf was elected at the 53rd annual conference of the association. More than 400 delegates attended the four-day session held in Traverse City. Wolf, a Republican from the 37th District, was elected to the committee in 1989 and the MAC Board of Directors in 1990. He has many years of service with local government in various elected positions.

Teacher tells kids about life in Japan

Fourth graders look at similarities, differences

By Tim Smith
staff writer

Japanese children go to school 240 days a year, including Saturdays; sleep in the same room with their parents; eat pickles for breakfast; and get up at 8:30 a.m. to exercise — during summer vacation. Beyond that, they're just like American kids.

That's partly how they were portrayed to Maple Elementary School fourth graders Monday by Iwao Okamura, one of two teachers visiting schools in the Walled Lake Consolidated School District this week through the Michigan-Shiga Japan Teacher Exchange Program.

Also discussing life in the Asian country this week is Kenji Kitagawa. Both Okamura and Kitagawa are staying this week with teachers of the Walled Lake district, one of many they will visit in Michigan during the 1991-92 school year.

"I want the students in the United States to know something more about things Japanese," said the 38-year-old Okamura, following his presentation, which included visual aids and slides. "Because, when we watch TV or listen to the radio, Japanese news can't be heard at all."

"Except last week, when we saw a lot of films about Pearl Harbor," he said with a chuckle.

THROUGHOUT HIS lecture, Okamura — who teaches high school in Shiga Prefecture — passed Japanese items around for perusal, including a newspaper and McDonald's coupon — the latter featuring Japanese text as well as familiar pictures of Big Macs.

Okamura held up a copy of a Japanese newspaper. "The content is almost the same as a U.S. paper. There's TV listings, domestic news, entertainment... sports."

Of particular interest to the youngsters was a plastic sheet containing various bills and coins which make up the Japanese system of money, known as yen.

"This is Japanese money," Okamura said, holding up the display. With a laugh, he added, "which is more beautiful than American money."

Student Lorenzo Parker, 10, asked about the yen coins at the bottom of the sheet. "Why do they have holes in them?"

According to Okamura, the coins of today resemble those of long-ago times because of tradition. He said the holes originated during times when change purses did not exist, hence coins had to be strung together.

A SUBSEQUENT slide show helped students take a

'I want the students in the United States to know something more about things Japanese.'
— Iwao Okamura
visiting teacher



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Guest teacher Iwao Okamura explains the Japanese alphabet, known as "hiragana," to fourth-grade pupils at Maple Elementary School. Okamura and Kenji Kitagawa are visiting sev-

eral schools in the Walled Lake district as part of the Michigan-Shiga Japan Teacher Exchange Program.

glance at snippets of Japanese life.

"They found out: Children sleep on mats with their parents until they reach the age of 10 or 12; gasoline costs four times more than in the United States; a typical breakfast consists of green tea, pickles, tomatoes and rice; and homes in Japan have many windows."

"We need many windows because it's hot and humid," Okamura said. "It's to let the fresh air in."

Another slide showed the front entrance of Okamura's home, with a row of shoes stretched across the floor.

"We must take off our shoes here and change into slippers," he said. "You (students) don't have to. That's a cultural difference between the two countries."

That difference came through on yet another slide, featuring a bathtub.

"WE USUALLY wash ourselves outside the bath tub," Okamura said. "That's why you see the drain outside the tub, not inside."

The fact was amusing to Lorenzo Parker. "That's weird, very weird."

Okamura, explaining another slide, said vending ma-

chines can be found everywhere in Japan, selling a variety of items, including cold beer.

"We have much more vending machines than in the U.S., not only in buildings but out on the street."

As far as school is concerned, Okamura said Japanese youngsters go 240 days a year, from April to March except for a 40-day break from July 21 to the end of August. They attend classes on Saturday, too.

"A Japanese student must memorize more than 2,000 Chinese characters by the end of the ninth grade," Okamura said.

EVEN THOUGH the Japanese way of life differs in many ways from that in the United States, Maple Elementary principal Scott Little said Okamura's visit showed similarities also exist.

"I think that they (students) got an understanding about how different life can be in Japan," said Little, whose school has about 25 Japanese students. "... but he showed a lot of things that are pretty similar. There's not that much difference. Just appreciate one another as human beings."

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