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FREE THE CLIPPER WEEKLY

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Friendship Force of Japan tours Brokenhead

By Mel Stefaniuk

The Friendship Force of Manitoba lived up to their name recently when they hosted the Friendship Force of Oita, Japan for a week of Manitoba sightseeing earlier this month.

Friendship Force International (FFI) is a non-profit organization which provides the opportunity for its members to explore new countries and cultures by bringing people together on a personal level. A total of 377 Friendship Force clubs in 60 countries around the world alternate between hosting and visiting their fellow clubs allowing members to both share their corners of the world and venture off to explore new ones.

FFI was founded by Presbyterian minister and missionary Wayne Smith and made official when first introduced by President Jimmy Carter at a White House gathering of state governors in 1977. President Carter hoped that the program would promote global understanding and peace by connecting the world one friend at a time.

The organization was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for its effective means in contributing to international goodwill and highlighting people-to-people diplomacy.

The Friendship Force of Oita's visit to Manitoba was a reciprocal exchange as the Manitoba club had visited the City of Taketa and its surrounding countryside in



Photo by Barbara Main

Members of Friendship Force of Oita, Japan toured a series of farms in the RM of Brokenhead.

the fall of 2012.

Barbara Main, codirector for this exchange was part of that trip two years ago. She has become a frequent guest since first visiting the country in 2000 as part of the club.

"It was my first time in Japan but it was like I was staying there with family," Main said. "Not only did they celebrate my birthday, they celebrated after I received news that I had

become a grandmother. It was only a week but we all became very close."

Tomoji Tanabe, the exchange director on Oita's side, was excited to finally make it to Manitoba and even more excited by its flatness.

"In our cities there are many mountains. Here the ground is straight and you have lots of space to get to high speed. There are too many hills at home. You'd

just get into an accident!"

The Manitoba club had a full week planned for the Oita members including trips to the Assiniboine Zoo, the Forks and a three-hour guided tour through Winnipeg revealing the history of the city.

Rural excursions included a trip to Oak Hammock Marsh and a series of farms throughout the RM of Brokenhead. A farewell barbecue was held at the

farm of Diana Hansell on one of the final nights before the visiting club returned home.

Despite the packed itinerary, which took them all across the region, the biggest attraction for the visitors may have been the local cuisine.

"I served perogies," Manitoba member Linda Walker said as the host for some of the Oita guests. "They loved them so much

that I know I'm going to have to make them again."

Those interested in learning more about The Friendship Force of Manitoba club can visit www.friendship-forcemanitoba.org.

The next Friendship Force of Manitoba meeting is at the Winnipeg Masonic Temple, located at the corner of Donald & Osbourne. Those wishing to attend can call 204-661-6199 or 204-237-7856.

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