

## Aki Matsuri Closing Reception 2011

### I. Congratulations

Good evening distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to tonight's reception.

First, let me express my congratulations on the success of Aki Matsuri over the last two days. We had beautiful fair sky days and flooded people in the campus.

This is my second Aki Matsuri, and I rejoiced at the sight of the *omikoshi*, performances, exhibits and booths as much as I did last year. It wasn't until this weekend that I felt that autumn had arrived. I am happy that many Americans gather each year at Bellevue College to enjoy Japanese culture –traditional and modern. I was particularly pleased to see so many kids on the campus enjoying themselves.



## II. Many Thanks

I have many thanks to deliver this evening.

My first ‘thank you’ goes to Mr. Tom and Mrs. Katsuko Brooke for organizing the festival with love and dedication since 1998. I would also like to express appreciation to Ms. Nora Lance, the Associate Director of Bellevue College, which kindly hosts Aki Matsuri each year.

*Arigatou gozaimasu* to this year’s special guests from Japan, including Ms. Keiko Murakami, whose exhibition “the Wonderful World of Leather” featured some of her original work. Ms. Yu Ugawa and her party made fascinating kimono presentations. Ms. Fumiko Ogata, had an interactive display of traditional *Yanagawa* balls. This festival was fortunate to be graced with a variety of beauty you all brought from Japan.

Last, but not least, thank you to the volunteers, performers and exhibitors for making the festival fun, educational and accessible to all.





### III. March 11<sup>th</sup>

This year, Aki Matsuri took place exactly six months after the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. I would like to reiterate my sorrow over the tragedies and express my gratitude to Washingtonians for your many messages of sympathy and your support through donations.

Over the weekend Peace Winds America screened the documentary film “Great Grandfather’s Drum” to raise money for victims of the disaster. For those of you unable to make it, the story was about an immigrant from Fukushima, Japan. This year, the Consulate organized a haiku contest. One of the themes was “Kizuna: the Bonds of Friendship.” We received many touching entries.



#### **IV. Back to Normal**

Thanks to the outpouring of help we have received from the United States and around the world, the tsunami-stricken areas along the coast have made important strides toward recovery. Aki Matsuri are beginning to take place in the Tohoku region. Lives are returning to normal. Japan is open for business and leisure travel. Aside from a 20 mile radius around Fukushima Dai-ichi, you can safely go anywhere in Japan.

After all our hard work and worry, tonight we can all breathe a sigh of relief and relax. *Otsukare-sama deshita!* I look forward to seeing you at Aki Matsuri next year!

Thank you for listening.

