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Kumagaya Visit 'Opened Doors'

A recent visit to Invercargill's sister city, Kumagaya, by a team of Invercargill city councilors and officials has been hailed a real success.

All agreed that they were delighted with the groundwork done on this month's visit, which had a strong business focus.

"A number of cultural exchanges have taken place over the past eight years. Last week's visit to Kumagaya by the Invercargill party was the first time we had approached this relationship from an economic standpoint, and I am pleased to report that the delegation really has opened some doors," says Invercargill Mayor Tim Shadbolt.

Mr Shadbolt says the trip was marked by a sense of teamwork and cohesion.

"This is fantastic to see. We can all achieve so much more by working together, and there is very definite strength in numbers. From an economic development point of view, the Kumagaya visit is a real milestone."

The Invercargill group included Mayor Tim Shadbolt, Councillors Joe Bagrie, Norman Elder and Thelma Buck, Invercargill City Council Treasurer Les Pullar and Prospect Southland Marketing Manager Matt Hoskin.

The team approach worked well according to Councillor Bagrie. "We were accepted and appreciated as ambassadors for the city. The strong business element was greatly assisted by the fact that the Mayor of Kumagaya has made it clear he wants to see business links develop. Such a statement carries enormous weight in the city."

"After years of very important cultural exchange the trip was an extremely timely kick start for the process," says Prospect Southland Marketing Manager Matt Hoskin. "There

are very positive signs that real economic ties will be developed. Through trust, the building of rapport and an understanding of each other, a strong and eventually profitable sister city relationship continues to develop.”

Councillor Thelma Buck felt that there was a genuine warmth towards the Invercargill visitors, while Norman Elder says he is looking forward to the region putting in place a long-term strategy to build on where we are now both economically and culturally.

“Since the Kumagaya visit there is sense that things are starting to move. We all returned to Invercargill feeling the sister city relationship had been rejuvenated and that there are real economic opportunities ahead. These things do take time and persistence, however.”

Key achievements include:

- The likely creation of an honorary consulate position in Kumagaya.
- Brick pavers from local company Southtile being passed on to relevant Kumagaya city officials. This is likely to lead to a significant order for the brick and paving producer as part of a city upgrade in Kumagaya.
- Passing on of samples of locally grown carrots from Pyper’s Produce.
- An expression of interest in the Southland Rugby Team visiting Kumagaya. Saitama province, which Kumagaya sits at the heart of, has the strongest provincial rugby team in Japan.

Prospect Southland will visit Kumagaya within the next six months to build on the achievements of the visit.

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