



**Key players:** Hirozumi Yagihashi with then Invercargill mayor Eve Poole in the early 1990s before the signing of the formal Kumagaya-Invercargill sister city agreement in 1993. Mr Yagihashi remained a key figure in the relationship up until his death in January.

# Key sister city figure dies

Evan Harding and Jared Morgan

Invercargill Mayor Tim Shadbolt and city council chief executive Richard King are in Japan to attend the memorial service of one of the key figures in Invercargill's sister city relationship with Kumagaya.

Their ratepayer-funded dash to Japan for the memorial service of Hirozumi Yagihashi is costing \$7445 in airfares, plus as-yet unknown accommodation costs.

Speaking from Japan yesterday, Mr Shadbolt said Mr Yagihashi had been one of the main players in the Invercargill-Kumagaya sister city relationship and was a founding member.

"We have been coming here (Kumagaya) for 18 years and he has always been here to meet and greet us and be hospitable."

Mr Yagihashi, one of Kumagaya's most prominent businessmen, ran the city's Yagihashi Department Store and had set up an Invercargill section in the store. He had done a lot to promote Southland goods, Mr Shadbolt said.

Mr King said Mr Yagihashi, a past president of the Kumagaya International Friendship Association and member of the Kumagaya Senior Chamber of Commerce, was a great friend to Invercargill and his death had come as a shock.

He had been instrumental in bringing five Kumagaya businessmen to Invercargill in December to deepen business links between the two cities. He had also touched the lives of many high school students in Invercargill who undertook cultural experiences supported by the Kumagaya International Friendship Association.

"I am in no doubt that it is his personal championship for our sister city relationship, his unfailing loyalty and support that has made the relationship between our two cities lasting and strong," Mr King said.

Mr King and Mr Shadbolt left Invercargill at the weekend and are to fly home on Thursday.

While in Japan they will meet the Kumagaya mayor, attend Mr Yagihashi's memorial service and visit his widow.

evan.harding@stl.co.nz