

# THE Lyons Mirror-Sun

November 2, 2017

## Center for Rural Affairs hosts Japanese delegation

Jessica Crimmins



The Center for Rural Affairs recently hosted delegates from Japan. The visitors came to discuss strategies to keep rural areas competitive with urban areas. *Jessica Crimmins*

A Japanese delegation looking for ideas to improve rural areas in their home country included the Center for Rural Affairs on their itinerary. Organized by the Japan Society, this visit has been in the works for over a year. Scouts visited possible host locations last year, among them the Center for Rural Affairs, which the Society discovered while conducting online searches for rural development organizations.

While all of the delegates were from different areas of Japan, Center Executive Director Brian DePew found a lot of common ground between them and our community here.

“It was really interesting to talk with them and hear how many similarities there were between rural communities in Japan, and rural communities in the Midwest and Great Plains. They have an even more pronounced trend towards urbanization in Japan, and so they are struggling with some of the same challenges around demographic and population shifts, and large elderly populations in rural areas,” said DePew.

As Japan’s land mass is quite a bit smaller than the United States, one major difference revolves around how much easier it is to get around Japan, and how quickly one can go from a rural setting to an urban one. “Some of the delegates are trying to work on projects that capitalize on that, figuring out how to attract folks back from urban areas, or even what the role of people who lived in urban areas might have in business development in rural areas,” he continued.

Searching for innovative ideas for rural development, the delegation visited Appalachian former coal mining communities in West Virginia. Their tour also included a stop in rural Ohio before continuing on to Lyons on Thursday.

There is also now some talk of perhaps trying to organize a return delegation of folks from the communities they visited in the US to the delegate’s home areas in Japan.

While in Lyons, the delegates went to Lyons-Decatur Northeast, where they were able to visit with the 10th through 12th grade students in the morning. They spent the early afternoon at the Center for Rural Affairs, where they discussed development work in community, farm, and small business areas, as well as policy advocacy work.

“That was really interesting to them because non-profit organizations in Japan don’t engage in policy advocacy in the same way that non-profit organizations in the US do,” noted DePew.

The rest of their afternoon included a visit to the Andromeda Gallery where they heard a presentation about the Senior Spotlight project given by former Mirror-Sun editor Jamie Horter, as well as a tour and visit with Brehmer Manufacturing. They finished out their visit to Lyons with a tour of Cosmic Film Studio.

“One of the things I think was really cool for Lyons is that this delegation of ten folks came from rural Japan, and they could have gone anywhere in the US. They chose to come to Lyons to visit with the Center and hear about our work, and also to see some of the innovative things that are happening locally. I think that we should be really proud of that as a community,” he said.

[http://www.enterprisepub.com/burtcounty/news/center-for-rural-affairs-hosts-japanese-delegation/article\\_c2cef7e8-bffd-11e7-b5b1-57fed8925d4d.html](http://www.enterprisepub.com/burtcounty/news/center-for-rural-affairs-hosts-japanese-delegation/article_c2cef7e8-bffd-11e7-b5b1-57fed8925d4d.html)