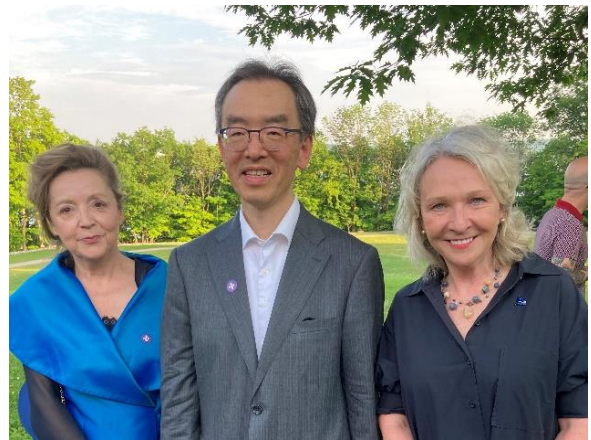


With countless events related to Japan and to our Consulate General being held this summer, I have become acutely aware of the ever increasing interest in Japan. I have been told of the important role played by volunteers at those events, and knowing of Canada's volunteering culture, please allow me to heartily applaud everyone who chooses to freely give their time to various activities. As you may know, the word *volunteer* in French is *bénévole*, and a quick search revealed that it stems from the Latin *bene* (good) and *volere* (to wish for). Such a beautiful word, isn't it?

On June 19, I met in Québec City the Minister of Immigration, Francization, and Integration, Christine Fréchette, and discussed the province's immigration and francization policies. That evening, I attended Quebec National Day celebrations hosted by Premier François Legault and his spouse. The Lieutenant Governor, Quebec ministers and government representatives, various countries' consuls general and honorary consuls general, and many more were present, and after the Premier's speech, everyone chatted convivially, and some let themselves be drawn into the performing band's rhythmic folk songs and danced together in a circle, as if at a lively town festival from back in the day. It is in this congenial atmosphere that I had the opportunity to chat with Premier Legault, Minister of International Relations and La Francophonie Martine Biron, and Minister for Health and Minister Responsible for Seniors Sonia Bélanger, who had shed their usual serious demeanour for a more relaxed one.



On June 24, Quebec's National Day, a reception celebrating the occasion was held at Montreal City Hall. There I could speak directly with Mayor Valérie Plante, Minister of Economy, Innovation and Energy and Minister Responsible for the Metropolis and the Montréal Region Pierre Fitzgibbon, Minister Responsible for Social Solidarity and Community Action Chantal Rouleau, and other provincial ministers from the region. This year marked the event's 190th edition and, alongside all the other cultural events held in the city's boroughs around that time, it culminated into a huge success.



On June 20, an information session on Quebec's Francization policy, primarily focused on the business environment and aimed at enterprises affiliated with the Montreal Japanese Association of Commerce and Industry, was held with the Government of Quebec's full cooperation. It featured a Q&A portion as well as exchanges of opinions between Japanese enterprises and provincial government representatives from the Ministry of International Relations and La Francophonie, the Office québécois de la langue française, Francisation Québec, and the Ministry of Education. This event provided a valuable opportunity to enhance both parties' respective understanding in relation to Quebec's Francization policy.



From July 4 to August 1, Montreal's prestigious International des Feux Loto-Québec featured 6 countries, including Japan and Canada. As first competitor, Japan was represented by Omagari Hanabi from the town of Daisen in Akita Prefecture. Starting at 10 p.m. and for half an hour, breathtakingly beautiful fireworks illuminated the skies in a magnificent display of the pyrotechnicians' incredible skills. The audience sat captivated for those thirty minutes, bursting in gasps of amazement and cheers, and once the show came to an end, gave the team a well-deserved standing ovation. In addition to the fireworks' colorful splendor, it was



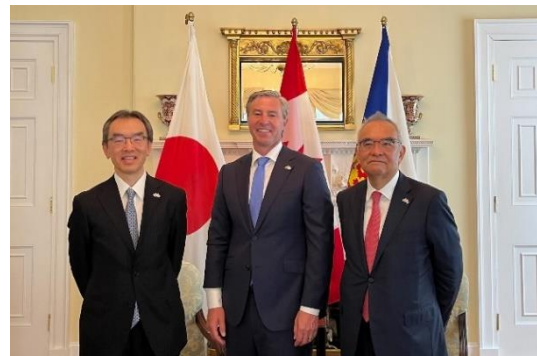
impressive to witness the advanced technology that for instance allow the remote coordination of launches with the music and rhythm being now so common.



The competition's results were announced on August 1 with Omagari Hanabi placing third. I offer my congratulations for making it to the podium despite the many talented rivals and hope that this achievement will prove to be a motivating force for numerous people from around the world to visit Daisen for those stunning fireworks.



On the occasion of an official visit to Nova Scotia with Ambassador Kanji Yamanouchi on July 9 and 10, he and I, guided by Honorary Consul General of Japan in Halifax Mark J. Surrette, had the opportunity to meet with various people including Lieutenant Governor Arthur LeBlanc, Premier Tim Houston, Minister of Public Works Kim Masland, Minister of Economic Development Susan Corkum-Greek, Legislative Assembly Deputy Speakers Nolan Young, Lisa Lachance, and Danielle Barkhouse, and Halifax Mayor Mike Savage. During the various discussions, we reiterated our request for their continued collaboration in ensuring the safety of Japanese nationals in the province, and as we exchanged on the strengthening of Japan-Nova Scotia economic and cultural relations, the topic of how to further increase the number of JET Programme participants in the province also came up.





On July 17, a ceremony was held at my official residence to confer the Order of the Rising Sun upon Ms. Sonia Dandaneau. As Cultural Officer of the Montreal Botanical Garden's Japanese Garden and Pavilion for over 20 years, Ms. Dandaneau has shared various facets of Japanese culture, contributing to its introduction, dissemination, and understanding in Montreal. Additionally, she worked at the Consulate General of Japan in Montreal as local staff for approximately 15 years, thus fostering better appreciation and understanding of Japan in the metropolis. The Consulate General would like to extend its heartfelt respect and gratitude to Ms. Dandaneau, who was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays, in recognition of her contribution to introducing Japanese culture in Canada and promoting friendly relations between Japan and Canada.



On July 28, the Association d'amitié Québec-Japon hosted under clear skies in Québec City its 4th annual Sakura Matsuri, allowing a record number of visitors to experience a typical Japanese summer festival's lively atmosphere. In addition to a large variety of kiosks – showcasing tea ceremony, painting, ink wash painting, origami, kimono and yukata, Japanese food, sweets and cakes, tea, pottery, Japanese-style accessories, sake,

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manga, and more –, the festival's extensive program also included outdoors taiko (Japanese drums) performances, traditional dances with audience participation, Japanese film music singalongs, and lectures on onsen (hot springs), and manga. As for our Consulate General, in addition to me giving a speech, we also held an information kiosk as well as a presentation on the JET Programme and MEXT Scholarships. The interior venue was by no means small but the room was crowded with men and women of all ages, their strong interest in Japanese culture palpable. Therefore, I would like to thank all the organizers and exhibitors who so deftly presented various aspects of it.



On July 29, we held the Japanese Foreign Minister's Commendation conferment ceremony for the 2023 fiscal year in honor of the Fantasia International Film Festival, taking advantage of the fact that the festival's 28th edition was underway.

Every summer since its inception in Montreal in 1996, Fantasia screens films of every genre, its program largely focused on Asia, including Japan. In addition to annually showcasing many Japanese works, the festival also organizes a large variety of activities, such as inviting directors, actors, and other Japanese film industry representatives to attend and take part in Q&A sessions. Through this, it has greatly contributed to the promotion of Japanese culture in Canada, fostering the local dissemination and deeper understanding of Japanese films and culture, as well as the introduction and recognition of Japan's film technology.

It is in acknowledgement of these accomplishments that the Japanese Foreign Minister's Commendation has been conferred upon the Fantasia International Film Festival. I would thus like to commend its path so far and offer my sincere congratulations for this well-earned distinction.



In addition to the above, I was able to exchange ideas and opinions with various Japanese and Canadian people and organizations, making for a meaningful month.