

Sunnyvale sister city program looking to connect professionals with Japanese city

By VICTORIA KEZRA

Sunnyvale professionals have a chance meet like-minded people from the Land of the Rising Sun with the Sunnyvale Sister City Association's first adult exchange program with Iizuka, Japan.

The program is open to adults ages 21 or older who are also willing and able to host when their Iizuka counterparts come visit the Bay Area. Participants will stay for a week, and while they will need to cover expenses such as airfare and souvenirs, accommodations will be free.

The program evolved as a result of the sister city association's successful student exchange program that began in 2014. The goal is to connect people in Iizuka with Sunnyvale residents who have similar occupations or similar hobbies.

Other than traveling and experiencing a new culture through the lens of a local, the hope is that participants can see how professionals in another country do their job.

"One of the driving ideas from a professional perspective is that you'll see things done differently, and what things maybe you can take back to your organization. It may be some thing you can't implement here, but you can see how they work in context in Japan," says Sunnyvale exchange program manager Ron Zielinski, who

became involved with the program after his daughter participated in the city's student exchange program.

The organization hopes to get 10 participants in the form of five pairs, each made up of one participant from Sunnyvale and one from Iizuka, for 2016. Zielinski says that both Sunnyvale and Iizuka are very motivated to kick-off the program and are invested in continuing the student exchange.

The overall goal is to some day forge an official sister city relationship between the two cities. The Sunnyvale City Council could consider making the relationship official later this summer. Such a move would link the cities through Sister Cities International.

Applications are being accepted on an ongoing basis with no cut-off date and will be valid for nine months. Once a Sunnyvale resident is paired with an Iizuka resident, the organization will help organize the dates for both exchanges.

Iizuka was founded as a city in 1932 and as of 2008 had a population of more than 132,000 people. It is located in the central portion of Japan's Fukuoka Prefecture.

For more information and to apply, visit sunnyvalesistercity.org. For more information about the city of Iizuka, visit city.iizuka.lg.jp