

## From the Board

### Message from President Mayor Grant Smith

*Kia ora and warm welcome to 2025.*

**Here in New Zealand we finally saw a Summer, even if a month or so late. International events and festivals have started the year well, with Lunar or Chinese New Year – the ‘Year of the Snake’ certainly being well celebrated in most New Zealand cities.**

In this edition; we look back on anniversaries with Japanese cities Minoh and Hutt City’s 30 years, while Otaru and Dunedin celebrated 45 years as port sister cities. Staying with the South, it was great to round out the year with our GCNZ One-Day Southern Forum in Christchurch in mid-December.



Visiting Christchurch’s Songpa Garden at the Southern Forum

In the North Island, Palmerston North’s international Festival of Cultures continued to pull the crowds into their city square, along with 30+ Ambassadors and High Commissioners of the diplomatic corp. This festival run by the Manawatū Multicultural Council pulls upward of 18,000 people over the three days.

Great to see international activity also featured from Invercargill City to Warkworth, just north of Auckland,

## Warkworth’s Global-Towns

By Dave Parker, Chairman Heritage Mahurangi Inc

**As a township within Auckland City we refer ourselves as a Global-Towns now with formal Agreements with Warkworth Northumberland UK (1992), Furudono - Prefecture of Fukushima, Japan (1999) and Warkworth Ontario Canada 2003. We also have Friendship-Towns of Warkworth Singleton NSW and Warkworth Banbury UK.**

We have been active over all those years, originally through our International Relations Group and now the Heritage Mahurangi Inc community group in our township. We have had several exchanges of citizens including students from Furudono, Japan and a number of residents between UK & Ontario. During the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of our township in 2003, all three countries sent delegations to attend a fiesta of activity.

while Christchurch and South Korea continue their long standing relationship.

As your national President, I too have been busy representing GCNZ, and presented a paper at the International Sister Cities Forum in Kunming, China in late November. Accompanied by Auckland GCNZ member John Hong, it was great to be part of 750+ delegates from 40 nations. Of particular pleasure was seeing Christchurch City awarded an International City Award alongside several other Asian, European and American cities. Proof that New Zealand bats way above its weight.

We are also gearing up for the 3<sup>rd</sup> NZ-China Mayoral Forum to be hosted by our Chinese counterparts the CPAFFC in Chengdu in late May, where we expect 6-8 New Zealand and Chinese sister cities to link up.

We are aiming to deliver three newsletters this year, and with the revamped website and linked social media, communicate much more with our members. But that relies on you, feeding us interesting stories and snippets of your activities. Please send these to Caroline Pope (editor@sistercities.org.nz).

So thank you to you all, for continuing to promote internationalism and people to people connections. It is very much needed in our challenging world at present. On behalf of the GCNZ Board wishing you all a prosperous 2025.

*Ngā mihi nui,*  
Mayor Grant Smith, JP, GCNZ President



Relationship with Furudono, Japan

Our recent visitors from Warkworth Northumberland were Mayor Jeff Watson (retired) and his wife June. An informal reception was held along with visits to many local places of interest over a two day period. We now have an education and sports liaison person actively encouraging exchanges of primary school liaison and someone who now visits on a regular basis and assists coaches cricket in our district.

As co-ordinator since 1992, I have found encouraging international relationships worldwide, to be extremely beneficial and rewarding, especially in this day and age.



Legendairy Farm



Murihiku Marae



Tiwai Visit

## Invercargill welcomes delegation from Japan

By Graydon Hayes, Invercargill City Council

**Invercargill has once again welcomed a delegation from Japanese sister city Kumagaya, marking the latest official visit in a sister city relationship spanning 31 years.**

The Invercargill-Kumagaya sister city relationship was formalised in 1993 and has since sparked student exchanges, reciprocal official visits, and the formation of the Kumagaya Friendship Association.

Kumagaya, about 60km from central Tokyo, is an agricultural town known for cherry blossoms, wide open spaces, and a love of rugby.

Five city councillors from Kumagaya made the visit to Invercargill and Bluff last week, visiting several attractions and businesses around the city alongside Invercargill city councillors, including Queens Park, Te Moutere Tuatara Island, Tiwai Point, Transport World, The Seriously Good Chocolate Company, Bluff Distillery, Space Ops, Ocean Beach, and a dairy farm.

The councillors also enjoyed a formal dinner and kapa haka performance at Murihiku Marae.

Invercargill City Council Manager Governance and Legal Michael Morris said the visit was a chance to showcase southern hospitality.

“We are very grateful to the businesses and organisations in Southland who shared their time and experiences with our guests, helping to make their stay here truly valuable,” he said.

“These visits strengthen our sister city connection and bring us tangible benefits, such as sporting, school and working holiday exchanges.”

Invercargill Mayor Nobby Clark said it was great to show the visitors some of the innovative things that are happening around Invercargill.

“We have a lot to offer in our corner of the country, whether it’s our award-winning parks, the revitalised city centre, or world-leading businesses creating products that go all over the globe.”

The delegation stayed in Invercargill for four days, returning to Japan on Thursday.

## Lower Hutt City & Minoh City celebrate 30 years

By Hiromi Morris, GCNZ Emeritus President

**Lower Hutt City and Minoh City from the Osaka prefecture of Japan celebrated their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary recently.**

At a public event at the Dowse Museum in Lower Hutt in early February, Hutt Mayor Campbell Barry welcomed Minoh Mayor Harada, Chairperson Okazawa, Board of Education Chair Fujisako and several other Minoh Council staff members to Lower Hutt, where they had spent the last three days meeting City officials, community members and Japanese connections. Former Hutt Mayors Ray Wallace and David Ogden also attended the event.

It was interesting to learn that both city leaders are young mayors. Mayor Barry was 4 and Mayor Harada was 8 years old when the relationship between the two cities was established.

From the Japanese side, a special red *happi* coat with Minoh City mascot characters, was especially made for the celebration.



# 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Christchurch and Songpa-Gu of South Korea becoming sister cities

By Gabriel Kim, Deputy Chair, Christchurch Songpa-Gu Sister City Committee

Christchurch and Songpa-Gu of Seoul, South Korea has a long standing relationship as sister cities whilst maintaining active exchanges in various fields. To commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the delegation from Songpa-Gu had visited Christchurch and was greeted with warm welcome by Christchurch City Council (CCC), Christchurch Songpa-Gu Sister City Committee (CSSC), Canterbury Korean Veterans Descendants Association (CKVDA) and Korean Society of Christchurch (KSC).

The delegation consisted of three members: Deputy Mayor CHOI Hong Yeon, PARK Kyeong Seop - Team Leader of the General Affairs, and YU Chae Yeon, member of the HR Development Team.

Arriving late in the afternoon on 5 February, the delegation had two days of official events starting from the next day.

On Waitangi Day the delegation visited many places of Christchurch including Tūranga (Central Library), the Arts Centre, EPIC Innovation Campus, Botanic gardens and Hagley Park – where a lamp post gifted by Songpa-Gu was installed. That evening, they attended a dinner hosted by Christchurch-Songpa Sister City Committee at a local Korean restaurant.

The dinner was attended by all delegation members, along with Gabriel Kim (Deputy Chair of CSSC), Alana Pidgeon (Deputy Chair of CSSC, President of CKVDA), Adam Curtin (Former Chair of CSSC), Hal October (member of CSSC, CKVDA), Tyla Harrison-Hunt (Councillor for Riccarton Ward), Samuel Marshall (CCC Civic & Int'l Relations Advisor) and Simon Oe (President of KSC).

On 7 February, the delegation has visited 'Songpa Garden' in Halswell Quarry Park, a symbol of friendship between the two cities for a tree planting ceremony to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. They were accompanied by Mayor

of Christchurch, Phil Mauger, Councillor Tyla Harrison-Hunt and the most of those who had attended the dinner previous evening. The delegation has also visited 'Songpa Street', a newly established street in nearby residential development.

Later that day, after visiting the Council Chambers, a luncheon hosted by the Christchurch Mayor Phil Mauger was held at the Canterbury Club, where Mayor Mauger and Deputy Mayor Choi delivered speeches and exchanged gifts in the presence of the invited guests including Ali Adams (CEO of Christchurch NZ) and Phil Tappenden (Honorary Consul of the Republic of Korea).

In that evening, a dinner hosted by the Korean Society of Christchurch took place, attended by Simon Oe and other members.

Gabriel Kim, Deputy Chair of Christchurch Songpa-Gu Sister City Committee has expressed hopes that this meaningful 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary year would help further publicise the history of exchanges and the current relationship between the two cities. Additionally, the committee announced plans to visit Songpa-Gu for the upcoming annual 'Hanseong Baekje Cultural Festival' in around September alongside Christchurch's Kapa Haka group, and also to strengthen cooperation and lay the foundation for broader economic exchanges.

Christchurch and Songpa-Gu became sister cities in February 1995, when former Mayor of Songpa-Gu, KIM Sung Soon had visited Christchurch, by signing an agreement with the Mayor of Christchurch at that time, Vicki Buck.

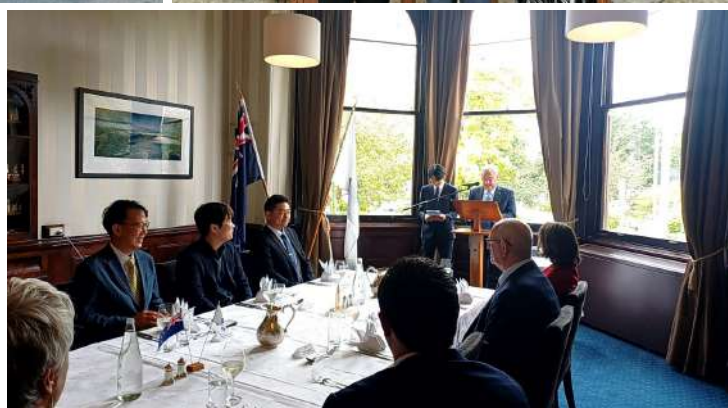
Below left: At the dinner hosted by CSSC  
Below right: Songpa Garden, by Songpa Pavilion



Left: At the tree planting ceremony - Mayor Phil Mauger, Deputy Mayor Choi Hong Yeon



Right: Luncheon hosted by the Mayor at Canterbury Club





## 2025 Festival of Cultures: Showcasing Palmerston North as a Centre for Solutions

By Gabrielle Loga, International Relations Manager, Palmerston North City Council

Palmerston North once again came alive with the 2025 Festival of Cultures, a vibrant celebration of the city's diverse and multicultural community. Over three days, from 21 to 23 February, the festival transformed the city centre into a dynamic showcase of international music, dance, cuisine, and cultural exchange.

The festival kicked off with a multicultural carnival and parade on Friday, 21 February, filling the streets with colourful displays of heritage and tradition. This was followed by the ever-popular World Food, Craft & Music Fair on Saturday, 22 February, where visitors indulged in global flavours while enjoying live performances from Palmerston North's many ethnic communities. The celebrations concluded on Sunday, 23 February, with a unique Teas and Coffees of the World session, offering a sensory journey through global traditions of hospitality. Throughout the festival, cultural workshops, storytelling, and interactive activities encouraged a spirit of connection and inclusion.

This year's festival was especially notable for the participation of over 30 members of the diplomatic corps representing more than 20 nations. The diplomatic delegation embarked on a city tour that highlighted

Palmerston North's role as a Centre for Solutions, visiting leading business and key innovation hubs such as Novolabs, the Australian Defence Apparel logistics hub in Te Utanganui, and New Zealand Plant and Food Research.

Positioned at the crossroads of New Zealand's logistics and distribution network, Palmerston North offers seamless access to domestic and international markets through its extensive road, rail, and air connections.

The city is home to world-class research institutions such as Massey University, AgResearch, and FoodHQ, driving advancements in AgriTech, food science, smart farming, and sustainable production. Strong partnerships between government, industry, and iwi create a collaborative environment for innovation, economic growth, and sustainability. With investment-ready infrastructure, a skilled workforce, and a commitment to global trade partnerships, Palmerston North is a compelling destination for businesses looking to expand and innovate in New Zealand and beyond.

The Festival of Cultures reflects Palmerston North's dedication to fostering international collaboration, celebrating diversity, and positioning itself as a city that connects people, ideas, and opportunities on the global stage.





## Visit to the 2024 International Sister Cities Conference in Kunming, China

By Mayor Grant Smith, GCNZ President

**In late November, Auckland-based GCNZ member John Hong and myself as GCNZ President were invited to attend the International Sister Cities Conference and Forum in Kunming City, in southern China.**

Also in attendance were 750+ other delegates from approximately 40 nations, and it was the first 'face-to-face' gathering since the COVID pandemic.

My role included presenting a conference paper on behalf of GCNZ members, reconnecting with some longstanding and likeminded organisations like CPAFFC - Chinese Peoples' Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, and seeing what other opportunities lay for New Zealand with various delegates and our Chinese hosts.

I presented a general paper, one of a dozen speakers on the first day, under the GCNZ banner, on our organisation's and New Zealand's approach to internationalism, especially around Sister Cities and their value to our country. Not only the obvious promotion of diversity and people to people connections, but business and trade, education, sport, arts and cultural exhibitions and gave some specific New Zealand case studies. This was well received amongst a very international line-up of speakers.

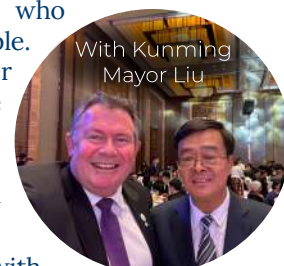
The second day included Awards and Cities Partnership signings and several site visits in the beautiful Yunnan Province capital of Kunming city, including their world famous flower growing sector and auction house, the workshops and head office of Kunming-Laos Railway company and the city's Free Trade Zone facility.

It was great to see Christchurch City also attending and

being presented with a Chinese Partnership City Award in good company alongside European, Asian and American cities.

Other highlights included a fruitful meeting with our Chinese Association equivalent CPAFFC and their Chairman Yang Wanming. We spoke about our two organisations working closer together again, with officials specifically mentioning the 3<sup>rd</sup> NZ Chinese Mayoral Forum, which was China's turn to host, and asking for GCNZ's assistance on the New Zealand side.

At the final banquet dinner I was fortunate to sit beside Kunming City Mayor Liu Jiachen, who governs the city of 8.5 million people. Kunming is New Plymouth's Sister City, and I sent a photo and message from Mayor Liu back to New Plymouth Mayor Neil Holdam. The Chinese cultural performances and food were superb.



After some local media interviews with Yunnan TV and newspapers, John Hong and I departed for the capital Beijing. There we stopped in for a final two days, saw our NZ Education, NZTE and NZ Embassy officials, visited Langfang City in the Tianjin Prefecture and Hebei University of Science and Technology, along with another meeting with CPAFFC officials and further conversations and planning for the upcoming Mayoral Forum in late May this year.

In all a quick yet successful trip for GCNZ and reconnection with our international partners especially the Chinese.



L to R; Beautiful Kunming City; Meeting with CPAFFC Chairman Yang. GCNZ Presenting to Conference on NZ activities

# Dunedin hosts delegations celebrating significant sister city anniversaries

By Suzanne Jenkins, Enterprise Dunedin

Dunedin hosted 12 inbound delegations from our Sister City Shanghai and sent two delegations to China visiting Shanghai and three other cities in 2024.

In addition to meetings to recover relationships in education, tourism, business and cultural cooperation that had been inactive during the COVID years, Dunedin and Shanghai celebrated the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of their Sister City relationship.

Highlights of the Shanghai exchanges included;

- signing MOU for tourism and education cooperation with Shanghai
- MOU signing for cooperation between the University of Otago Faculty of Dentistry and Fudan University
- signing several Sister School MOU and facilitating student recruitment
- an hour-long meeting between Mayor Radich from Dunedin with Shanghai Mayor Gong
- screening Dunedin movie 'Uproar' to an invited audience of 65 representatives from Shanghai screen sector
- Otago Polytechnic MOU with Qingdao University of Science and Technology

In October 2024 Dunedin hosted a delegation of 25 representatives from Otaru, another Sister City for



Kaumatua Edward Ellison, Mayor Hazama and Mayor Radich in front of the whareniui Tamatea at Ōtākou Marae.

Dunedin. The Otaru group included civic, sister city representatives, Otago University of Commerce and business leaders. The Japanese Ambassador to New Zealand, Mr Osawa also attended.

The delegation was welcomed with a pōwhiri at Ōtākou Marae, and had three full days visiting tourism, business, education, cultural, museum and public venues.

This visit by so many old and new friends celebrated 45 years of Sister City relationship with great warmth and good energy.

Otaru gifted Dunedin a significant tree that were planted in the Otaru Teien at the Dunedin Botanic Garden. The Teien has been developed progressively by both cities since its opening in 1998.



A performance by an 80-member youth choir from Shanghai at Lan Yuan to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Sister City relationship was well attended.



Guests for the civic dinner celebrating the 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Dunedin and Otaru Sister City relationship at Tūhura Otago Museum in November 2024.