Happy New Year! 新年明けましておめでとうございます。 It is my great pleasure to celebrate a new year day with you today. Thank you very much for joining us. On this occasion I also have to say thank you for your continuous support and friendship since the inauguration of the campus back in 1990, for more than 22 years. Last year, the number of MFWI graduates exceeded 10,000. We could not make this amazing success without the everlasting support and heartfelt friendship of the people of the Spokane community.

Now let me talk a little about ‘O-Sho-Gatsu.’ ‘O-Sho-Gatsu’ is a very special time of the year for the Japanese like the Christmas time of the West. Schools and many businesses close and family members get together from all over the country. People celebrate a new year having special food and drink to pray for the health, happiness, prosperity and success of every single member of the family.

We also talk about the ‘Eto’ of the year. ‘Eto’ consists of 12 signs represented by particular animals according to the Oriental Zodiac cycle originated in China. What is important about the ‘Eto’ of the year for the Japanese is that we can approximate people’s age by their ‘Eto’ without asking their age directly. So we often ask people ‘What is your Eto?’ or ‘In what ‘Eto’ year were you born?’ For example, if you were born in the year of the SNAKE, which is the ‘Eto’ of this year 2013, you will be a multiple of 12 this year, either 12, 24, 36, 48, 60, 72, 84, 96, 108, or 120 and the like.

We also believe that there would be a close relationship between people’s personality traits and the characteristics of the ‘Eto’ animal. We can roughly guess their personality traits as well by the person’s ‘Eto.’ I was born in the year of the MONKEY. Monkeys are fun-loving. So the people of the ‘MONKEY’ year like jokes but sometimes make jokes which rather stir up trouble. They are curious creatures. They are imaginative, interested, creative but sometimes too nosy. Now you can guess my personality traits. Ron, where are you? Yes, he is one of my colleagues. I know Ron and I were born in the same ‘Eto’ year so we share many of those personality traits. Right? And his age is the same as mine or a multiple of my age, say, 12 years younger or 12 years older.

As for ‘Eto’ we also connect what a new year will be like and the ‘Eto’ animal’s characteristics. As I mentioned, the year 2013 is the year of the SNAKE in the Zodiac order. As you know, one of the prominent characteristics of snakes is that they shed their skin in one continuous piece. The main purpose of their shedding is to allow for growth. So it is often said that in the year of the SNAKE we can greatly and steadily grow in both quality and quantity of various aspects of our lives.

I hope this year will bring us a lot of growth. May the Year 2013 be happy, successful and fruitful. Happy New Year! 新年 明けまして あめでとうございます。 Welcome to our O-Sho-Gatsu Celebration! Thank you.
Hello, everyone. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of the people who have offered their help to prepare this party and to everyone here who gathered to celebrate the coming of the new year of 2013.

I came to Spokane last August. And I started to work as director at the beginning of this month. I have taught English for many years in Japan to high school students and university students. And this is my new challenge to be a director of this kind of cultural center to promote friendships and enhance mutual communication and understanding between the States and Japan.

When I started my job at the beginning of this month, I thought about the official beginning of the diplomatic relationship between the States and Japan. It started in 1853, when Commodore Matthew Perry and his fleet came to Japan. They urged Japan to open contact with the United States and start negotiation for trade agreements. The very interesting part of this historical event to me is that the actual negotiation started with a few English words spoken by a Japanese interpreter named Tatsunosuke Hori. He said in English, ‘I can speak Dutch.’

The Japanese government in those days limited contact to only a few countries, so Tatsunosuke was fluent in Dutch, but his English was not good enough. I like this story of Tatsunosuke Hori very much. He avoided using English by using English. That is, he suggested a neutral means of communication in a very tactful way, intentionally or unintentionally, which would not allow either side to get advantages or disadvantages at least in terms of the language they used.

One hundred and sixty years have passed since Tatsunosuke opened the negotiations by saying, ‘I can speak Dutch,’ and now we don’t have to use Dutch any more. The present world is completely different. How nice we can directly talk to each other like this! How precious that we can directly experience different cultures like this today!

I came to Spokane last August. And I am experiencing what Tatsunosuke and people in those days never imagined. I find new things and experience what I would never do in Japan. For example, I have learned that we can get a driver’s license for only $75 in Washington State. I spent $105, though. In Japan, it costs more than $3000 to get a driver’s license.

Another new experience is about the fireplace. We are now living in an historic district and our house was built around 1900. We can still use the fireplace. We not only used the fireplace for the first time, but bought firewood for the first time. One thing I didn’t know about firewood was that it is sold by the “cord.” It is a simple word but I didn’t know the word is used for firewood. It seems they used to use a cord of a certain length to measure the quantity of wood cut for the fireplace. So, you count one cord of firewood, two cords of firewood, and so on. And we bought half a cord of firewood for this winter.

Some other new experiences are at the supermarket. It’s nice that I can buy a lobster for $5 instead of nearly $9, if I have an “XX” club card. I have never heard about this kind of card in Japan. We are also happy to be asked if we need “help out” at the cashier. Because they ask me at the right time with a big smile while I am paying, that makes me feel it’s OK to spend some more money there. Another interesting thing about shopping is that I often see a “buy 1 get 1 free” sign, which we don’t see in Japan. I wish it were for cars, too.

These are all little things. But I like finding these little things in my daily life. It is fun. Everything is made up of little things. And every little thing we find about another culture makes our life rich and expanded, doesn’t it?

So I would like you to find new things about Japan, and experience something Japanese here at the JCC. JCC is always open to you. Candie gives a nice and informative Japanese culture tour in the exhibition room. We are go-

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ing to start Japanese flower arrangement lessons. We are planning to have an afternoon teatime of Japanese green tea. They may be new experiences to you, so please join us.

Today we have prepared Japanese food to celebrate a new year. Celebrating a new year is the biggest family event of the year in Japan. It is as big as your Thanksgiving, Christmas and birthday combined. We usually start getting prepared for a new year when December comes. We start to write one hundred or two hundred New Year cards. We start to plan year-end parties with friends, co-workers and some other friends. We clean every corner of our house, and go shopping for the new year such as food, decorations, and year-end presents for family and friends.

We usually have holidays from the 29th of December to 3rd of January. This is when all of the family members get together, and enjoy a big dinner on New Year’s Eve. We also visit a shrine together and wish a happy and healthy year full of good luck.

Let me tell you something about the new year food we prepared today. Ozoni is something you can’t miss for a new year celebration in Japan. It is a soup with rice cake, Omochi, and some vegetables. We eat Kuromame, or black beans, “Beans” is “mame” in Japanese. And it means “bean” and “good health” as well. So we eat black beans wishing good health for the year. We also eat shrimp, because it symbolizes long-life, as a shrimp is bent like old men and women. Sake is associated with a new year. It is made from rice, and there is a good reason to drink sake to celebrate a new year after the harvest season of the autumn.

Especially for us Mukogawa Fort Wright people and Nishinomiya-Spokane sister city people, it is important to appreciate sake, since there are as many as 13 sake brewers in Nishinomiya. Some food prepared today may not be purely traditionally Japanese, but I hope you will feel some Japaneseness in all of the food. Also please enjoy Japanese tea in the entrance lobby. Hiroko is here today to serve Japanese tea in a very formal way.

Lastly, I should tell you that students are especially most grateful to host families for the precious cultural experience of real American life. They always have a great time with their host families and some students still keep in touch with their host families even many years after they graduate from Mukogawa. So if any of you here are interested in hosting our students, please do contact Nicole. She would be very happy to find a host daughter for you.

To conclude my speech, I wish you a very happy and prosperous 2013 with good health. Thank you very much for your attention.

MFWI Homestay

MFWI is in great need for families willing to share their homes with a pair of students for one weekend of their semester. If you are interested, please contact Nicole Tamura at 232-2071 and she’ll guide you through the process. Zaida (pictured to the right with Eriko) says, “the students are a lot of fun because they are really nice to me.” Homestay weekends this semester will be in March. Call today to get involved!

Ikebana
Art of flower arrangement

Monday 5-6pm at JCC
March 4th—May 13th (no lesson 4/1)

No lesson fee, but flowers cost $7-10 every time. Donations are appreciated and goes to Ikebana International Chapter #230. We have flower vases and kenzan, but if you have, please bring your own. Registration deadline February 25th, maximum participants 25. Please attend more than five lessons. Contact Candie at 328-2971.

Japanese Cultural Center @ MFWI

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