

Kumamoto Day

Kumamon Visits UTSA!



From left: Dr. Wanxiang Yao, Director of East Asia Institute; Consul General Takaoka; Kumamon; Rowdy; Dr. Zenteno, Vice Provost for Int'l Initiatives

Kumamon is a cartoon character of a rosy-cheeked brown bear designated as the official mascot of the Kumamoto prefecture in Japan. Since its debut in early 2011 as part of a tourism promotion campaign, Kumamon has become a popular character nationwide.



UTSA's East Asia Institute (EAI) hosted the first ever Kumamoto Day on Friday, October 23, 2015 in the Main Building on UTSA's main campus. The event was made possible through the office of the Consulate General of Japan in Houston, San Antonio City International Relations Office, and the Japan-America Society of San Antonio.

Over 150 people attended the event that celebrated Kumamoto, Kumamon, and Japanese culture, which began at 2:00 p.m. In addition, the guests were invited to visit cultural and educational booths through games, craft activities, and short presentations. Each guest when entering the fair, was given a

passport. The objective was to visit at least seven of the nice booths around the fair. After visiting a booth and participating in an activity, the participant will receive a sticker. Get seven or more stickers, the participant will receive a prize. Prizes range from Kumamon hats to small Kumamon bags. Each participant was able to choose a prize of their liking.

Kumamon, a mascot created by the Kumamoto Prefecture government in 2010, was used for a campaign to attract tourists to the region after the *Shinkansen* bullet train line opened. In the next year, Kumamon became instantly popular after he was voted the most popular mascot of Japan in a survey. As of



Kumamon delegation, Kumamon, and Rowdy Dancing

2013, he has generated ¥123.2 billion in revenue to the Kumamoto Prefecture.

At one booth, participants were able to learn about the prefecture of Kumamoto and Kumamoto University. Kumamoto, the capital's city name of Kumamoto prefecture, is located on one of the four islands of Japan on Kyushu. Kumamoto city became San Antonio's sister city in 1987. Subsequently, Kumamoto University and UTSA established an agreement of cooperation in 2010.

Consulate General of Japan in Houston sponsored the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program information booth. Here, participants were able to learn about the program and application processes.

Three other activity booths were presented to introduce Japanese culture and games. At the Japanese trivia booth, participants tried to answer questions on Japanese geography, history, society, economy, language and culture. Those that answered the questions correctly were able to spin a wheel and get a prize of Japanese candy. This booth attracted many participants eager to test their Japanese culture knowledge. Next to the trivia booth, participants played a traditional Japanese game called Daruma Otoshi but with the face of Kumamon. The game is played by using a small hammer to hit each of the colored pieces, from bottom to the top, without letting the pieces fall during the game. This simple game was not easy to do, and some participants tried several times to get the pieces out without knocking down the

top. The last activity booth was to make Origami in the shape of Kumamon's face. Many participants enjoyed cute Kumamon origami and took the origami home with them.

In addition to the booths mentioned above, UTSA's Japanese related student organizations hosted booths. The Japanese Club, Japanese Tutoring Club, Anime Club, and Cosplay Club were able to showcase their organizations, provide various activities, and fundraise for their organization. The Japanese club had provided activities including paper sumo and raffles. The Anime Club, Anime Kurabu, had anime trivia as well as button making and selling. The Cosplay club talked about the art of Cosplay and how one can participate. They also sold merchandise. The Japanese tutoring club was selling Japanese foods and drinks.

An hour after, participants were moved to the auditorium to view performances done by Kumamon, the Japanese Club, and the Anime Club. Dr. John Fredrick, Provost of UTSA, gave welcoming remarks thanking our sponsors and welcoming special guests, Consul General Nozomu Takaoka of Houston and the Kumamon delegation. Fredrick gave a brief history of the San Antonio and Kumamoto sister city relationship and his time in the beautiful city of Kumamoto.

Next on stage was Consul General Nozomu Takaoka of Houston. Takaoka gave special thanks to various people that made the event possible. He also gave a detailed history of the Kumamon mascot. He



Japanese Club dancing to pop music

hopes that people in the United States will become more interested in Japan and Japanese culture.

After the welcoming remarks, MC, Bryana Guerra, Vice president of UTSA Japanese club, introduced UTSA's mascot Rowdy to the stage. After Rowdy warmed up the audience, Kumamon was introduced and invited to the stage. After Kumamon joined in with Rowdy on the stage, the first performance Happy Kumamon was started. Along with Rowdy, both of them were exercising and dancing together. There was also a dance off between the two with Kumamon clearly being the winner.

For the second performance, Kumamon Taiso exercise, Kumamon along with UTSA's Japanese Club dancers on the stage taught audiences some dance movements so that all could dance together. A lot of the audience members enjoyed dancing with Kumamon at their seat. Kumamon had a chance to meet with the audience after the performances, so they could take pictures and say hi to him. After Kumamon left the stage, the Japanese Club performed two J-pop dances. Followed by the Anime Club, they came up to perform their Game Show skit with an anime twist. Finally, Dr. Wanxiang Yao, Director of East Asia Institute, gave closing remarks saying thanks to all who came to the event and to the sponsors as well.

After the performances, participants were treated to taste some Japanese food. The food being served were California Rolls, Edamame, green soy beans, and Tempura. The participants waited in line for their turn to eat. All enthusiastic about the food they were about to eat. Some came back for seconds and thirds! The fair also continued on for another hour with new participants filling their passports up to win prizes. "I leaned so much about Japanese culture," said a participant, "Meeting Kumamon really made me want to learn more about Japanese culture." Another participant exclaimed, "The fair was amazing and so was the food. I look forward to more Japanese related events like this in the future at UTSA."



From top: Kumamon Otoshi, Kumamon Origami; Japanese food tasting

Special Thanks



- Consulate General of Japan in Houston
- San Antonio City of International Relations Office
- Japan America Society of San Antonio
- UTSA Parking Service
- UTSA Japanese Club
- UTSA Japanese Tutor Club
- UTSA Anime Kurabu
- UTSA Cosplay Club
- UTSA