

**PRESS RELEASE**  
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**Japanese Government Awards Ms. Leigh Wieland**

On March 28, 2012, the **Foreign Minister's Commendation** (*Gaimudaijin Hyosho Award*) was awarded to **Ms. Leigh Wieland** by Mr. Koichiro Gemba, Foreign Minister of Japan. On this remarkable occasion of the *Centennial Celebration of the Gift of Trees*, Ms. Wieland is recognized for her exceptional contributions in developing and strengthening the friendship between Japan and Tennessee through business and cultural programs such as the Nashville Cherry Blossom Festival.

The Foreign Minister's Certificate of Commendation was introduced in 1983 to honor those who have acted with distinction in the promotion of friendly relations with foreign countries and international cooperation. The annual conferment ceremony for the honor coincides with the anniversary of the establishment of Japan's Foreign Ministry, which was founded on July 8, 1869. Due to the special circumstance of this year being the "Centennial of the Gift of Trees," recipients have been chosen for their relentless dedication in this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Ms. Wieland has been the CEO of the Japan-America Society of Tennessee since 2004. Highlights of Ms. Wieland's service include successful implementation of the annual Nashville Cherry Blossom Festival, having completed its fourth year attracting thousands of visitors each year. Proceeds-to-date have funded the purchase of over 400 Japanese cherry trees toward the goal of planting 1000 total over ten years. Following the 2011 Great Tohoku Earthquake, Ms. Wieland greatly contributed to the transition of the "Cherry Blossom Japan Relief Event" in addition to establishing the Tennessee *Tomodachi* Fund through which more than \$200,000 has been raised for relief efforts to aid victims. Other highlights include collaborating with members of the Board of Directors and government and community partners to establish the Mitsui USA Scholarships in Tennessee Program, now in its ninth year; the Tennessee Area Japanese Speech Contest, having completed its 5<sup>th</sup> year. Also under Ms. Wieland's tenure, a West Tennessee Center has been established at the University of Memphis. In October 2010, the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Joint Meeting of SEUS/Japan Association in Nashville was successfully executed under Ms. Wieland's direction.

In 2011, the Japan America Society of Tennessee was awarded the **Foreign Minister's Commendation** (*Gaimudaijin Hyosho Award*) by Mr. Takeaki Matsumoto, Foreign Minister of Japan in recognition of its contributions to the deepening of friendship between Japan and Tennessee, promoting cooperation through business, cultural, educational, and social programs.

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