

Yohei Nagata Ken-do Anything!

July, 2008



The Exchange Visitor Program is pleased to announce Yohei Nagata as July's Exchange Visitor of the Month. Each month, we select an exchange visitor who has made an effort to get involved in his/her community, explore American culture or share in his/her own culture.

Yohei Nagata, 28, of Kyoto, Japan, is not your average J-1 Exchange Visitor. Outside his engineer training in Kentucky, Nagata never misses a chance to explore the American landscape. Since Nagata arrived in January 2008, he has already visited Key West, Florida to watch the sunset and swim with dolphins; the Grand Canyon in Arizona to feel the power of nature; New York to visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Cleveland Ohio to hear the Symphony Orchestra and Atlanta, Georgia to experience the Renaissance Festival. And that's just traveling! Nagata also plays golf and runs competitively. He has already completed a 10K race in Ohio as well as a marathon relay. If you're already exhausted by the mere mention of so many activities, you might want to skip this next one. Nagata is also a lifelong Kendo swordsman. "Kendo?" you ask. Yes, Kendo.

Kendo is the Japanese martial art of sword fighting. Literally meaning "the way of the sword," Kendo swordsmen traditionally fence with two bamboo swords (shinai) while wearing traditional Kendo armor (bogu). Embodying the essence of Japanese fighting arts, Kendo is a way to discipline the human character by applying the principles of the sword.

Nagata has been practicing Kendo for 20 years in Japan. Beginning at age 8, Nagata started practicing when his friends became involved. As he watched, he knew that he too wanted to learn.

Now, Nagata practices with local Kendo players at the University of Kentucky and with Japanese students at the Central Kentucky Japanese School.

"Shortly after I arrived in the U.S.," Nagata said, "I went to a few Kendo practices. I was invited to be the coach of the East Central U.S. Kendo Federation (ECUSKF). So, almost every weekend, I travel to several cities to train local Kendo players-such as Columbus, Louisville, Dayton, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Atlanta and Charleston."

Practicing on an average of three times a week and two to three hours on the weekend, Nagata competed in the 20th Annual Cleveland Tournament and won third place. He also coached a local ECUSKF team who won third place in the All U.S. Kendo Tournament in Las Vegas. Nagata's love of the art spans many aspects of his life.

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"I enjoy playing Kendo for mainly four reasons," Nagata said. "1) Any age group, gender and nationality can enjoy playing Kendo 2) Kendo broadens my relationships with a wide variety of people 3) Kendo helps me stay healthy 4) Kendo deepens my understanding of Japanese and other cultures."

But most importantly, participating in Kendo has allowed this active J-1 to build relationships with his community members, make connections and learn more about American culture.

"Teaching Kendo skills and Japanese customs to local players in English has helped me to improve my English and learn about American culture," Nagata said. "For example, my Kendo friends have shown me that hugging is their way of greeting their friends. It's important for other J1s who maybe aren't yet involved in their communities to find a class, a club or a sports team that they are interested in like tennis, basketball, dancing, cooking or photography. They can meet interesting people, broaden their experience, learn new things and improve their English."

For more information on Kendo, visit www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kendo [1].

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Links:

[1] <http://www.aif.org/www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kendo>