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Promoting Grand Rapids as a welcoming city since 1986

1980-1983: Grand Rapids Public Schools initiated the Global Education Project.

1983-1985: State of Michigan Sister State Program connected GR to the Shiga Prefecture, Japan.





GVSU Video





The JW Marriott Project



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Photography

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DAN WATTS PHOTOGRAPHY

The JW Marriott Sister City Photography Project

When Dan Watts was a student at William James College in the 1970's, Bob Burns (filmmaker Ken Burn's father) was one of his photography professors and his academic advisor. Dan remembers telling Bob he would like to concentrate on anthropological photography, combining his two loves into one. Even as he said it, Dan wondered how on earth a photographer could make a living doing such obscure and exclusive work. But it just felt right to him.

After graduation he went to work for a production company that specialized in multi-screen, multi-projector slide shows for office furniture showrooms across the United States. As the skills required for this specialized work evolved, he became proficient in the art of conceptualization, in scripting, soundtrack production, studio and location photography, editing and staging.

Dan has now traveled to 34 countries on corporate, magazine and personal projects, spending a total of more than three years on the road in the Orient, Europe, Africa and Latin America. All these experiences, skills and abilities made Dan the perfect match for a very unique photographic project for the new JW Marriott in downtown Grand Rapids. His photography now decorates the walls of all 330 guest rooms, the corridors and a large one-man photo-gallery in the new luxury-class hotel.

To complete this massive project, Dan spent a year planning out and traveling to four different continents to complete extensive photo essays of each of the five Grand Rapids' Sister-Cities. Cherry blossoms and the Fire Festival in Omihachiman, Japan, the amazing architecture of Perugia, Italy and Bielsko-Biala, Poland, and the people of the Ga District of Ghana in West Africa and Zapopan Mexico all make up the largest single collection of Sister-City photography in the world, a total of 16,855 photographs.

This was without a doubt the most difficult and demanding project he had ever taken on. The combination of his photographic skills with his knowledge of geography, travel planning, organization, social skills and yes, anthropology has culminated in a truly spellbinding collection of images. And now, three decades later, his work as a photographic storyteller has confirmed his status as an anthropological photographer.

BACK



DAN WATTS PHOTOGRAPHY

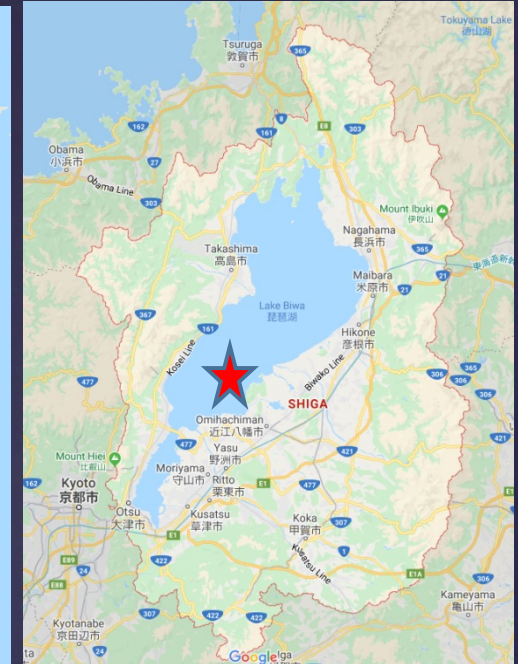
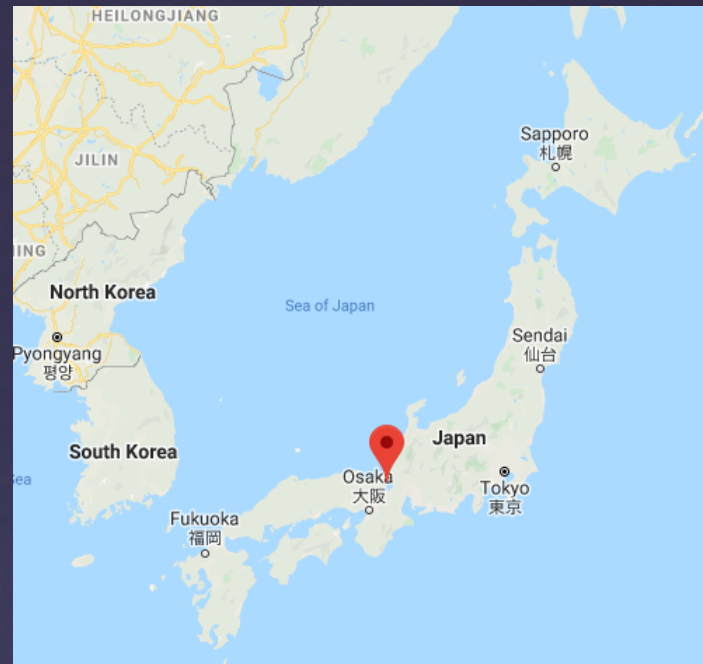
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Omihachiman, Japan -1986

Our first sister city relationship was developed with the city of Omihachiman in the state of Shiga, Japan. Omihachiman is in the Shiga Prefecture of Japan on the southeastern shore of Lake Biwa. The area is known for its beautiful waterways.





Omihachiman, Japan 1986

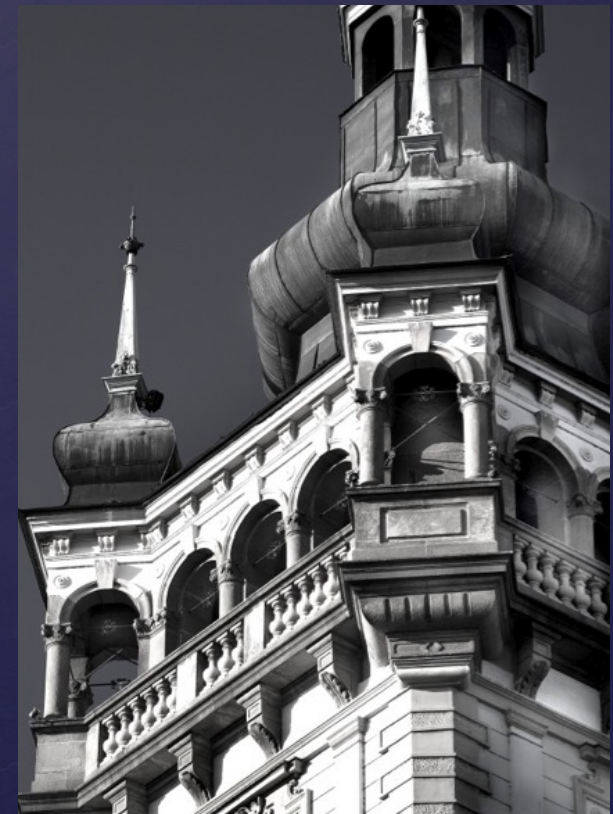


The fabulous Sagicho Festival is held in mid-March, as it has for hundreds of years.





Bielsko-Biala, Poland- 1991





Bielsko-Biala, Poland- 1991





Perugia, Italy – 1993



The city of Grand Rapids just recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of being a Sister City with the city of Perugia. A representative of the city of Perugia, Ms. Severini, joined the mayor of Grand Rapids in October 2018 to renew this long-standing Sister Cities relationship.





Perugia, Italy – 1993



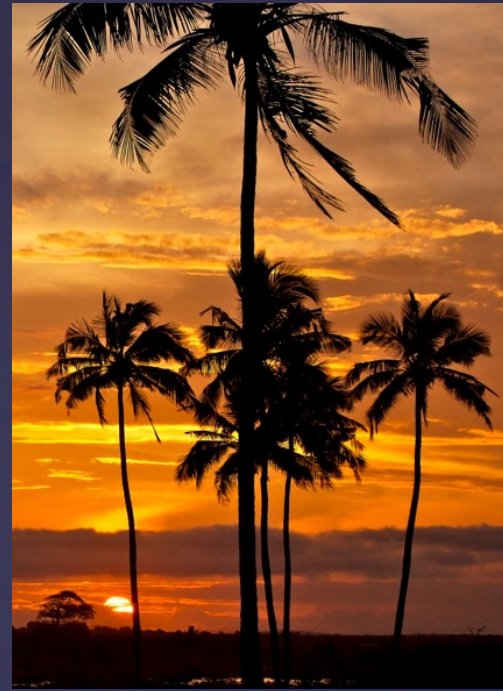


Perugia, Italy – 1993





Ga District, Accra, Ghana – 1994





Zapopan, Jalisco, Mexico - 2008





Zapopan, Jalisco, Mexico – 2008





Zapopan, Jalisco, Mexico – 2008

