

## LEBANON HOSTS CULTURAL EVENT

### HELPS CITIZENS CONNECT TO THE WORLD



With five Japanese-owned businesses in its backyard, the city of Lebanon has seen a growing number of foreign businessmen and women migrate to the community, and it has discovered a festive way to embrace them and introduce their culture to a wider audience.

Since 1999, the Marion County Industrial Foundation has hosted a Japanese Cultural Day.

The event is held in early spring and is designed to spotlight the traditions and customs of the more than 30 Japanese families living in Lebanon and Marion County while also embracing the business and cultural ties between America and Japan.

In the years since its inception, the event has grown substantially from its initial concept of a small gathering.

“Our intention was to have a springtime picnic with our Japanese residents, but they took charge of the event and created the activities we celebrate today,” said Tom Lund, executive director of the Marion County Industrial Foundation.

The event and its activities have been a hit with residents throughout Lebanon and Marion County. Officials

estimate that Japanese Cultural Day attracts 300-500 people who come from all over the Commonwealth to attend the event. They say the feedback they have received from attendees has been overwhelmingly positive, and people always seem to enjoy themselves.

Lebanon Main Street Manager **Mary Lou Brock** believes that such displays and demonstrations, coupled with the opportunity

to experience Japanese culture firsthand, have fostered a greater tolerance and understanding among the area's diverse cultures.

“Japanese Cultural Day was designed to help the citizens of Lebanon and Marion County to better understand the culture of the Japanese people,” Brock said. “I think the community, through this event, can better understand the dedication that the Japanese people have to their culture. Although our traditions and customs are quite different, there are more similarities than meets the eye. One undeniable likeness is the pride that we all take in our heritage.”

The day kicks off with an opening ceremony and ribbon cutting that features local Japanese business leaders. Attendees can then move on to other activities such as sampling traditional Japanese cuisine, getting their picture taken while wearing a kimono or having their names written for them in Japanese calligraphy.

Other attractions include traditional paper folding, known as origami; and ikebana, or the art of arranging live flowers. Attendees also have the oppor-

tunity to take lessons to learn a bit of the Japanese language or compete for prizes in paper plane competitions.

Adults and children alike can compete for prizes in Fuku Warai, a popular game that closely resembles “pin the tail on the donkey.” Typically played at New Year's, the game requires players to wear blindfolds as they try to place cutouts of eyes, a nose and a mouth on a blank face.

For people who prefer to observe, rather than play, the event offers exhibits and displays of Japanese dolls, toys, books, tea ceremony sets, fashions and photos, among other things.

Officials also recruit skilled performers to display dance, music and martial arts to introduce residents to traditional Japanese arts.

To ensure authenticity in dance, expert choreographers are brought in to coordinate routines and to make sure body movements and ancient steps are not lost. These performers are typically women and are known as the Indianapolis Minyo Dancers. They are authentic in all aspects, including their wardrobe, which includes kimonos and accessories created to match historically accurate samples.



# Lebanon at a Glance

The group's performance of the traditional Japanese folk dance is a method of telling stories about a wide range of topics, from children's tales to the blooming cherry blossom to the work of those laboring in the rice paddies.

To give attendees a feel for the traditional sounds of Japan, organizers bring in the Cincinnati-Dayton Taiko Group to perform Japanese-style Taiko drumming. This began as folk music at Japanese festivals and demonstrates the powerful rhythms and sounds of the chudaiko and odaiko drums. Since

its creation, the music has evolved into a performance art that combines drumming with dance-like movements and coordination.

Finally, demonstrations are done on various types of martial arts such as Kendo.

Translated as "the way of the sword," it is the Japanese art of fencing. Child and adult students also demonstrate karate, judo, jujitsu and breaking techniques.

"Japanese industry in our community has had an obvious positive economic impact," said Lebanon Mayor Gary Crenshaw. "What is equally positive is the opportunity we've been given to become more acquainted with the culture and tradition of Japan. Japanese Cultural Day enriches our understanding of one another, which in turn makes our community a better place to call home."

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**Mayor:** Gary Crenshaw

**Population:** 5,959

**Location:** Lebanon is located in Kentucky's Western Knobs region and is the county seat of Marion County. According to the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, the city sits only three miles from the geographic center of the state and is within one day's travel of two-thirds of the U.S. population.

**History:** First settled in 1814, the city was named Lebanon after the biblical mountain. Its incorporation was approved by the state legislature on Jan. 31 of the following year. Decades later, in the 1860s, the city saw considerable Civil War activity. It served as headquarters, hospital and recruiting center to both the Confederate and Union armies. Three battles were fought in its streets during the war, and it was occupied by Confederate troops for almost a month in 1862. The recent resurgence of interest in the Civil War has played a part in the city's redevelopment. Its Historic Homes and Landmarks tour earned the city a spot on the Civil War Heritage Trail.

Lebanon also features a 16-foot statue of General **George H. Thomas**, the man responsible for establishing a military camp there in 1861.

For more than 100 years, the city served as an important location for the Louisville and Nashville (L&N) Railroad. Throughout the majority of the 20th century, the tracks that ran through Lebanon carried soldiers to war, ferried students to school, took shoppers to big cities and brought supplies, animals and fuels to the commu-

nity. In 1991, however, the train left the city for the last time and carried with it the crossties of Marion County's abandoned tracks.

**Special events and attractions:**

Marion County is home to Maker's Mark Distillery, a National Historic Landmark. Established Jan. 28, 1815, the distillery produces the world-famous Maker's Mark Straight Bourbon Whiskey, and its cypress vats date

back at least a century. On the southern limits of Lebanon sits the National Cemetery, the resting place of many of the Union soldiers who were killed in the 1862 Battle of Perryville. Saint Charles, approximately 12 miles from the city, is where a Belgian priest and three Kentucky frontier women founded the Sisters of Loretto, the first American order of Roman Catholic nuns. Myrtledeane Bed and Breakfast was the site where General **John Hunt Morgan** rode his horse into the house and charged up the stairs. He went on to use it as his headquarters while he was in the city.

**Native sons and daughters:**

Lebanon native **James Proctor Knott** served the Commonwealth as governor from 1883-1887. Onetime Kentucky poet laureate **Edwin**

**Carlisle Litsey** was from Lebanon. **Martin John Spalding**, former archbishop of Baltimore, was a native of Lebanon. **Wallace Kelly** received the Alfred A. Knopf Fellowship in Fiction for his novel *Days Are As Grass*. **Frank Chelf** was first elected to Congress in 1944. He went on to serve for 22 years.

**Web sites:**

[www.lebanon-ky.com](http://www.lebanon-ky.com)  
[www.lebanonky.org](http://www.lebanonky.org)

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