Congratulations to former All Saints’ College staff member, Mrs Fudeko Reekie, on being named a recipient of the Shunju Jokun, Kyokujitsu Tanko-sho Award (called the ‘Order of the Rising Sun, Silver Rays’ in English). This is a Japanese honour bestowed on those who have rendered distinguished service for relations between the Japanese nation and its people and those of the country in which that person resides. Fudeko will receive her medal in Tokyo on May 15th from the Foreign Minister at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and later will be taken to the Imperial Palace to meet the Emperor of Japan. Fudeko, a naturalised Australian, is one of the few non-Japanese citizens to receive this particular award.

Fudeko Obazawa, born in Saku City, Nagano Prefecture, Japan in May 1936 was an academic scholar with particular interest and excellence in art, English, Japanese calligraphy and sport. Fudeko started preparing for her lengthy teaching career over half a century ago (in 1955) at Tokyo Gakugei University where she studied English literature, English language education and educational psychology. It was here as a young woman in a post-war world that Fudeko became interested in what was happening nationally and internationally and, in particular, how she could make a contribution to world peace.

Over the years after graduating from Tokyo Gakugei University, Fudeko studied in Canada (after winning a scholarship to Saskatchewan University), worked at Tokyo’s prestigious Asahi newspaper (foreign affairs department), as an art teacher and a tour advisor in Papua New Guinea and as a Japanese lecturer at Canterbury University in New Zealand.

Whilst in Canada, the Saskatchewan Education Department sought Fudeko’s assistance for the introduction of Japanese cultural studies (including Japanese history, customs, songs, dances, origami, ikebana and kimono) into the Social Studies course. The linguistic skills acquired helped Fudeko with her responsibilities at the Asahi newspaper when she returned to Japan in 1961. Responsibilities included interpreting for the company president and foreign dignitaries and translating letters from the company to other countries. Fudeko was in charge of providing hospitality for the company’s VIP visitors, including acting as an interpreter for Mr and Mrs Robert Kennedy.

Fudeko married in 1962 and in 1963 moved to Canberra. Here, Fudeko taught ikebana and volunteered to perform ikebana demonstrations on television.

After Canberra, the Reekies moved to Papua New Guinea. Whilst working as a travel consultant for Ansett Airlines, Fudeko dedicated much of her private time helping Japanese visitors, particularly those who came on a pilgrimage to honour Japanese victims of World War II. She played roles as a researcher, an interpreter, a guide and an assistant in the recovery of soldiers’ remains. She also undertook administrative work on behalf of the Japanese government which did not have a consulate in that country at that time. Fudeko hosted dinner parties for visiting Japanese dignitaries, government officials and diplomats. As well, Fudeko was interpreter for the Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare and helped a Japanese anthropologist collect PNG artefacts for the Osaka Expo Memorial Hall. She was featured as an “honorary ambassador to Papua New Guinea” on a Japanese TV programme.
In 1975, Fudeko, her husband and their three children, John, Ann and George, moved to Bathurst. Fudeko started teaching Japanese at All Saints’ College and her time there for the next 35 years was, indeed, very important in the development of Japanese in both Bathurst and beyond.

During this time Fudeko:
• established an exchange programme between the Sydney Japanese School and All Saints’ College in 1975 which is still operating today. This programme was designed to provide the opportunity for children of Japanese nationals employed in Sydney to live in a country area with a family from the partner school and to study in the language they were learning. All Saints’ students are able to live in Japanese homes in Sydney and go to the Japanese School;
• was named Bathurst Citizen of the month in May 1986 (for her contributions to tourism and international friendship) and in the following year, Bathurst Citizen of the Year Merit Award;
• initiated the building of the Japanese Centre at the College, which was opened by the Japanese Consul-General in 1992. The Centre was renamed the Fudeko Reekie Language Centre in 2010. The Osaka Expo Foundation provided most of the funds for this architect-designed freestanding building surrounded by a tranquil Japanese garden and fitted with traditional Japanese decor, computers and audiovisual facilities;
• played an important role in the formation of the sister city relationship between Ohkuma (Fukushima - Japan) and the city of Bathurst starting in 1989. The formal sister city agreement was signed in 1991. Since then annual exchange tours have successfully been running with Fudeko’s help as liaison between the two cities. In 1998 Ohkuma gifted to Bathurst a Japanese garden near the Macquarie River called the Ohkuma Garden to celebrate 10 successful years of the sister city relationship. From the planning through to its completion Fudeko liaised between Bathurst and Ohkuma on all matters. She also provided assistance and hospitality for the landscape architect and Ohkuma council member sent from Japan. In 2003 Bathurst City built an “Azumaya” (small covered rest area) in the vicinity of the Japanese Garden in recognition of the 12 year sister city relationship. After the 2011 tsunami and Fukushima nuclear disaster, Bathurst City raised considerable funds to assist Ohkuma’s recovery. Fudeko was one of the fundraising committee members. She has liaised between the two cities and supplied much needed information of the situation in Ohkuma - both in the aftermath of the disaster as well as now;
• established a sister school relationship between All Saints’ College and Yachiyo Shoin High School (Chiba, Japan) in 1992. Over one thousand students have benefited from this programme which is still running. Amongst its participants are students who achieved top 10% HSC scores, came first in speech contests, went on to study in Japan on scholarships and who became Japanese language teachers.
• received the Certificate of Excellence for Japanese Education from the All Saints’ College Council in 1995, as well as the badge for long service in 2000;
• organised and escorted a Japan tour in 2006 for students, staff, parents and friends; and

After her ‘retirement’ in 2010, Fudeko has volunteered to teach Japanese culture and language at the University of the Third Age (Charles Sturt University - Bathurst). Fudeko also promotes Australia-Japan friendship as a guest speaker at various functions.

Fudeko’s tireless work as an educator has contributed greatly in promoting understanding and friendship between Australia and Japan and she has had a lasting impact on hundreds of young people of both nations. Her accomplishments derive from generosity of spirit, imaginative vision, dedication and tireless work which are worthy of public recognition. Fudeko has been an inspiration to a succession of young people who are, or now wish to be engaged for the public good. She has worked above and beyond the call of duty to form a bridge between Australia and Japan and, without a doubt, this is a well-deserved honour for a very special lady.

Bob Poole