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Japan-America Society of Tennessee Public Awareness Initiative

Impact: Japanese Business Investment in Tennessee

In association with the Tennessee World Affairs Council

Verbatim Transcript

A Conversation with Leigh Wieland

Member of the Board (2019-present) & former
CEO (2003-2018) Japan-America Society of Tennessee

Video Recording on the JAST YouTube Channel

Patrick Ryan [00:01:07] Hello, I'm Patrick Ryan of the Tennessee World Affairs Council, but I'm here today to talk about the Japan-America Society of Tennessee project on the impact of Japanese businesses in Tennessee. And with me today is Leigh Wieland, who has been with the Japan-America Society of Tennessee for 16 years as a leader of that organization, as the CEO and several years as a board member. So we're going to talk with Leigh today about the foundation that was built in her early days with JAST and the predecessors in the relationship between Japan and Tennessee and where that led to the current time. Hi, Leigh. Thanks for joining us today.

Leigh Wieland [00:01:53] Thank you, Pat, for including me.

Patrick Ryan [00:01:56] Well, we wouldn't want to not get your voice in this. You are at the center of the Japan-America Society for the last going on 20 years and have insights and experiences and perspectives that really bear on this topic significantly. Before we get into that, though, tell us a little bit about your background. I understand you were raised in Smyrna, Tennessee, so all this kind of circles back, but let's start at the beginning.

Leigh Wieland [00:02:26] Well, I am a military brat from Smyrna, Tennessee, where my Midwestern parents were located shortly after I was born. And consequently, the relationship with Japan started actually at conception because I was conceived in Tokyo. So it seems that I haven't been able to outrun my connection to Japan. But growing up in Smyrna in the 60s and 70s and early 80s, it was a very small town and I was very grateful to have a couple of years spent in Taiwan with my father. And when he was, well, you know, located there during the Vietnam War, and that really set me on the course for my interest in Asia. And once I came back to Smyrna to complete my high school education and go on to college at Georgetown, I studied Chinese there, which ultimately took me back to Taiwan, and then back to Smyrna. And at that time, Japan was a hot property. So recruiting investment from Japan was what everyone was abuzz about. Nissan by that

time had located, had announced its location in Smyrna, and I had the opportunity to work with the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development because of my Asian studies background. So China was close enough to Japan. And so there I was. So that that really is, in a nutshell, how I found myself in the thick of the Japan Tennessee relationship.

Patrick Ryan [00:04:10] So Smyrna, in your days growing up, how would you describe the community in terms of the level of businesses there, the community activity that might have been altered later on by the arrival of an automotive giant building that plant in Smyrna? What was what was growing up like there?

Leigh Weiland [00:04:34] Well, you know, the expression of one-horse town that really was Smyrna. It was best known, I think, as a speed trap at the time. And there really was very little commerce there. There was a Canadian investment, I believe, or most of the available manufacturing jobs were, but the jobs were few and far between. You really had to go farther afield to Nashville. Laverne had, I think, had a few also manufacturing jobs, mainly building appliances, washers and dryers, that sort of thing. But it wasn't a thriving community with amenities like movie theaters, even, you know, we didn't even have McDonalds, the kind of the kind of thing that you think every, every home town these days has. It was very provincial, very limited. You know, the one thing about Smyrna, however, and of course, was that it had the Air Force Base and so it had the airport. So Smyrna, as well as having the community that had lived there for generations, it did have a kind of transient community also because of the Air Force base that had been there, which the town of Smyrna did in fact take over when that broke down. But even so, it was very much a small southern town where if you had not lived there for generations, you were an outsider.

Patrick Ryan [00:06:10] And then you were off to Taiwan in the exotic orient, where apparently the international bug started nibbling at you and then on to Georgetown. Tennessee Economic Community Development was your first position after Georgetown.

Leigh Weiland [00:06:28] It was, yes, at the time, unbeknownst to me, Lamar Alexander, who was governor then was looking to establish relationships with China. And because of my background in speaking Chinese the Commissioner of Economic and Community Development saw that I might be helpful in that regard. So I did have the good fortune of getting a job in the research division and worked on the growth report. So I, in that capacity in a very administrative role, got to see the numbers, you know, and work with the number of employees and investments that were coming in from Japan. So it was it was actually an exciting, exciting thing to see at the time because the Department of Community Economic and Community Development was all about job creation. And so I knew that what I would be doing in that department was bringing jobs, more jobs to people around the state. It's hard to imagine what it was like, really, you know, looking at it being in 2021. Looking back to 1985, even jobs were not that plentiful and Japanese investment really changed that in Tennessee. Not only did the Japanese, through their investments, bring manufacturing jobs, but they put us on the map also for other investors looking to the south and looking at distribution, looking at manufacturing, and it went so far beyond just the direct jobs that the Japanese companies were providing. So it was very exciting for me to be part of that and bringing an improved quality of life to my hometown as well as to other people in Tennessee.

Patrick Ryan [00:08:24] So Leigh, how would you characterize the level of engagement at that point the year you started at ECD with the Japanese businesses? And as you said, it

became a magnet for other foreign direct investment as well. But give us a sense of the expansiveness of Japanese businesses around the state. What kind of impact it might have started to have in communities like Smyrna and elsewhere?

Leigh Weiland [00:08:51] In my experience, you know, in the in the mid 80s. At the time, also, when put in context, there was a lot of resentment. You may remember the Japan bashing of that era as well because of that trade deficit that, you know, we're so skewed in favor of Japan, the trade surplus, I suppose you would say. And so there was while there was this great opportunity and the marketing division within the state of Tennessee was working with local chambers and industrial development authorities to really go after all these projects that were coming in with the suppliers to Nissan and suppliers to other Japanese investments in the South. It had to be tempered a little bit because there was a lot of resentment from people around the state believing that their jobs were being exported overseas as well. So it was a bit of a balancing act at the time. So for all of the successes, there was still a sense that it wasn't enough. So I recall that very much and the balancing act that the governor had to play in attending the announcements and making sure that the long view was still being touted and that it was going to take time for investments and jobs to come to all areas of Tennessee, rather than these metropolitan areas that seem to be getting most of the attention. But there certainly was a full court press for Japanese investment at the time. By that, by that time. Well, the mid-seventies Lamar Alexander had made sure through his relationship with the consul general of Japan in Atlanta that Tennessee was part of the Southeast U.S. Japan Association. So since the since about 1976, Tennessee had been part of this regional economic development association. So when I came in, it was about 10 years down the road. And that was already in full swing. So, you know, annual well, I guess maybe twice annually there were recruiting trips to Japan from the professional teams with the governor, you know, from ECD presenting and the governor going to recruit Japanese investment. And I think it's also important to realize at the time most communications were done by telex and fax machine. There were no PCs in the Department of Economic and Community Development until about 1986. And so I think you factor in that communication and you realize how much effort it took and how closely the Central Agency, the Economic and Community Development had to work with these local communities, many of whom, you know, had a phone on a desk in a building somewhere, you know, for their industrial development office to many, many of the industrial belt or draw volunteers. So you know you're up against that too, and you realize how important the Department of Economic and Community Development was as the liaison for any kind of interest of Japanese investment and for really leading the charge on behalf of Tennessee. That's really what I think about it really was the hub for any kind of activity from Japan. Any inquiries at all. Compounded by that also was the fact that we really had no professional Japanese interpreters that we could call upon readily - just we weren't quite there yet. I think we had to, we had to search far and wide for assistance. So everything was, you know, is not the Google Translate of today. And it's not it wasn't the community where you had such diversity. So it took, it took quite a bit to reach across the pond and sell Tennessee in a way that was palatable, I think, to Japan.

Patrick Ryan [00:13:42] So, no email, no Google Translate. It's hard to imagine how things got done in those prehistoric days. Governor Lamar Alexander - tell us a little bit more. You mentioned that he was keen on developing Asian investment. You mentioned China. And he was involved in the Southeast U.S. Association. But give us a little more flavor about his level of interest. And was it was it going against the grain of the national trend? You talked about Japan bashing. Was his strategic plan to get Japanese businesses here to Tennessee and obviously the auto manufacturing, we saw it

countrywide. The shift from what is now known as the infection is the rust belt. Jobs move south and manufacturing moved south. Give us a little flavor of how that evolved from your recollection of where the pieces were when you got involved. Governor Alexander's moves towards Japan and China.

Leigh Weiland [00:15:04] When I started at the Department of Economic and Community Development, it was towards the end of Alexander's second term, so I started in March of 85. But he had already, you know, for many years, been working with the Japanese at that time. And I think probably his vision was the most important in the legacy that that we inherited. You know, in future administrations, because he, from the earliest days of taking office, set the tone of putting the welcome mat out and making sure that relationships were the most important things, you know in bringing in investors to Tennessee, whether they were from Japan or elsewhere. But he saw the opportunity and really went after, I believe, as I recall, hearing stories about that time that his involvement with the National Governors Association was really important in gathering information and making connections with executives and diplomats from Japan. And I think that was one of the sparks that propelled him forward with this vision and passing it along to those in charge of creating jobs in Tennessee. But all along, he set the tone for that. And again, I came in towards the end. And by that time, he also saw the opportunity in China. So he worked with the people to people organization took to organize a delegation to China at the time, and the result was we developed a sister state relationship with Shaanxi province in China in those early days. So as he was leaving office in 1986, we were signing the documents for that. But, you know, luckily in Tennessee, I think one of the reasons we've also been very successful in attracting Japanese investment is between administrations. There was always a very cordial and congenial passing of power. And it was always clear that the new governor would join hands with his predecessor and reach out to Japanese and other investors from abroad to reassure them of the stability and the commitment to the relationship. And I think that really served us well. I remember, you know, drafting letters and ensuring that they went out to all of our key contacts to make sure they understood that Tennessee would not waver in supporting their investments in Tennessee, even with the transfer of power. So again, stability, you know, making sure the relationships were intact, were key to supporting the investment. It's not all about geography, but it helps.

Patrick Ryan [00:18:28] Yeah, you've I've heard the R word relationship several times here, and that carries down to current day. Apparently, the authors of this relationship of this business-to-business connectivity focused on relationships, and you mentioned about community reaction to Japanese investment, not initially in some places being finally looked at with the 80s Japan bashing and so forth. Walk us through the - how that dynamic evolved towards the middle time towards the 2000 era through the 1990s. Was it your sense that the more that business got on the ground and produced jobs and prosperity for communities that the - any stereotypes or the perception that these investments were exploitative that seemed to wear away?

Leigh Weiland [00:19:38] At the time, I think there were lots of preconceived misconceptions about these outsiders coming in and I think, you know, they could have been from anywhere but certainly because they were from Japan and that that perception that you mentioned about their jobs being absorbed elsewhere certainly didn't help. I believe one of the things that really did help was the receptivity of the Japanese investors to showing their support for the community, this idea of the corporate social responsibility became a really big buzz word. And so the advisers, the project managers at economic and community development, worked with the companies, with the mayors of the local communities, with county executives to identify ways that these companies could give

back, could support financially important activities or infrastructure projects in the community. And I think the success of that effort, the local officials working closely with the pioneers really and Japanese investment went a long way to easing these suspicions and changing people's minds. Even today, the idea of corporate social responsibility carries through with the early investors Bridgestone, Nissan. They're still very, very much committed to corporate social responsibility. Matsui Brother, all of those early investors in Tennessee have maintained that legacy because it was so important at the beginning to say, hey, look, we are here, we're part of your community. We're going to become so embedded in the community that in the future, you're not even going to know we're not homegrown. And I think today so many people are unaware that these manufacturing facilities, these companies in their community are in fact Japanese. They are accepted as as homegrown companies and that, I think that shows the success of that strategy. But ultimately over the years, the Japanese investments have been managed increasingly by non-Japanese individuals. And so there is this sort of, well, invisibility of the fact that that these are in fact Japanese owned facilities, much like any other investment from abroad or at home. You don't really know the origin of the investor. Nonetheless, at the time, in the 80s, 90s in particular and even the early 2000s, you know, we were still very much interested in broadcasting, I should say, that these investments were from Japan. I'm not sure these days how important that is, but I personally feel that it is important to remind people that we have benefited greatly in Tennessee from foreign investment in a particular Japanese investment. We shouldn't forget it, particularly as has there are initiatives from time to time to exclude those from abroad from coming into our communities. So let's not forget how important Japanese investment has been to Tennessee, the improved quality of life.

Patrick Ryan [00:23:55] Well, you know, until we started this project, I was not aware that Calsonic was a Japanese company, I knew that they had constructed the Calsonic Arena down in Shelbyville, which is the home of The Celebration, The Walking Horse festivities every summer. And I've gone to that and I've attended the celebration at the Calsonic Arena. And it wasn't until just recently that I learned that they were Japanese company. Obviously, there are some that, you know, it's the name is a giveaway, but some not so much. But you're right, we probably don't appreciate enough the foreign direct investment and what it's what it's meant to Tennessee. Okay, well, we've spent a lot of time walking you through history before you got involved in the Japan-America Society of Tennessee. Let's talk a little bit more history, but your beginnings at JAST and tell us how JAST got organized, and what your initial role there was, and what was going on in those days.

Leigh Weiland [00:25:03] JAST was really the brain brainstorm idea of Arnold Pearl and John Gregory, who was the director of Asian investment at ECB at the time. And they brought the idea to Don Sundquist, who readily embraced it. And Arnold had the idea that Japan-America Society of Tennessee should affiliate with the National Association of Japan-American Societies so that we could institutionalize the stewardship of Japan-Tennessee relations so that the relationships would remain intact regardless of changes in administration from the governor of the State of Tennessee and changes in personnel from time to time and an increasingly politicized government, then there would be a nonprofit, nonpartisan entity to really cultivate, nurture, preserve the relationships that so many had invested such time and effort and finances to cultivate it toward, you know, up to that that point. It really was a visionary idea, and I, you know, every day I am grateful that that they did that. So, you know, up to that point, there had been a kind of a loosely affiliated group that was called the Tennessee Japan Society and that started back during Lamar Alexander's stay. And what they primarily did was provide hospitality for prospects, the Japanese prospects that came into town or to sponsor hospitality related events in Japan

so that we could show Tennessee in the best light possible way. We could show that we were very, very hospitable. And these were resources that were provided by the private sector because the public sector could not, could not readily provide those kinds of resources. And so that's really how it started out with the private sector support for the efforts of the state of Tennessee to recruit Japanese investment. And so really, there was twofold it - was to institutionalize the relationship stewardship, but also to provide a hospitality arm for the state of Tennessee going forward so that we could not only maintain the existing relationships, but also attract new investors by supporting the state of Tennessee's efforts - recruitment efforts going forward. So that was something, of course, that, you know, I was very familiar with having worked in economic and community development for years and through the Southeast U.S. Japan Association and the annual meetings that were held, whether in Japan or in one of the southeastern states. What you always saw there is the importance of hospitality, whether the Japanese were hosting, whether the southeastern states were hosting. What you always showed, first and foremost, was hospitality. So, you know, I saw JAST as a kind of welcome wagon in some respects. And also, on the other hand, an educational arm so that more people could come to us with questions and to dispel maybe some of the misconceptions that they might have had about these, you know, outsiders. So we really tried to emphasize the similarities, you know, we're all people first and foremost, we're after the same things for our families. We might speak different languages. We might look slightly different. But no, we're all after the same thing. But we're helping to bridge that understanding and make everyone feel welcome and at home intensely.

Patrick Ryan [00:29:23] So, this was a private public partnership, nonpolitical effort to put some structure and guidepost to the relationship. And I know that during that time, Senator of Tennessee and former Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker was the American ambassador to Japan, and that probably didn't hurt in in cultivating the Tennessee-Japan relationship, and feel free if there's anything that comes to mind and his influence on what happened in that era. Share that with us.

Leigh Weiland [00:30:04] You know, Senator Baker. Ambassador Baker was so, so respected in Japan and in the United States, a true statesman by all accounts. And I do recall with great fondness, several receptions that Ambassador Baker hosted for Tennessee and Tennessee's Japanese investors in Tokyo during his time as ambassador. Certainly one of the most important, I think, was at the beginning of Governor Bredesen's administration, the occasion of the Southeast U.S. Japan Association, brought an opportunity for JAST to host a reception there at the Ambassador's residence, assembled with an enormous delegation from Tennessee. Certainly made so by the invitation from the ambassador included Governor Bredesen, the new governor, Governor Sundquist, the former governor, the chairman of Tennessee Valley Authority at the time, as a real show of solidarity and support for Japanese investment. Additionally, there was then the highest number of acceptances from Japanese investors that the embassy had ever had at a reception like that. So I have to say it really showed the popularity of Ambassador Baker and also Tennessee. It was great, great to be part of that. Certainly, I look back at those photos and think, what a great, great time it was and a great legacy to have those three statesmen together for Tennessee at the time.

Patrick Ryan [00:32:08] And during this, this period, businesses like Nissan, Bridgestone were on the ground running, they had built their relationships in the community. Suppliers have been moving in from Japan to Tennessee. The acceptance of foreign direct investment was probably more amiable than it had been in the 80s, but describe for us the environment of businesses landing or expanding or becoming more involved in

Tennessee. And obviously, you know, when we look at the impact, the impact is jobs and prosperity. So what was the landscape like in 2003 when you shifted from ECD to JAST?

Leigh Weiland [00:32:57] I think at the time, in 2003. We were really excited about the prospects for the future of Japanese investment. We felt we had a firmly established base. We had leading Japanese companies supporting the effort of JAST, and I think it really at the time, if I'm perfectly honest, I had no idea that it would become what it did eventually become over the next decade. I suppose, if I'm perfectly honest, we really were at a kind of status quo point. We felt comfortable now with the investment that was here, we had had great relationships with the Japanese companies across the state, primarily because of John Gregory's efforts. He had such a wide reach because he paid, you know, personal visits to all these companies across Tennessee. And we had great relationships with the local economic developers, the chambers across the state, and they really were our conduit into the communities. So we were we were focused much more on providing protocol seminars and supporting the Southeast U.S. Japan Association meetings. I think at the time, we felt a very, a very good sense of we know each other now. What really changed during that time was that the JAST moved out of its home with economic and community development. We had been co-located in the offices of economic and community development. And in 2004, we moved out of those offices and the onus was on us to become a viable not-for-profit. We had to raise a lot more money to operate and that really was a game changer for us. As well as the relocation of the Consulate General of Japan from New Orleans to Nashville, that was another game changer for us. So we found ourselves with a lot more opportunity to support Japan related activities, and at the same time, we were in a bit of a funding challenge. So during that time, we really relied heavily on our long time supporters to help us move forward, identify new opportunities, mainly through grants, et cetera. And also the new relationship with the Consulate General of Japan and Tennessee became a much greater focal point for us. So, you know, the 2003 to 2009 was a very transitional time. And, you know, luckily, we felt a great deal of stability with the Japanese investors across the state. Of course, the thing that did happen prior to the well, the announcement was made after the Sunquist administration ended. But Nissan's relocation of their North American headquarters to Franklin also made a huge difference for us. So, you know, there was a lot of activity surrounding that, and there were expansions of so many of the existing companies, Japanese investors in Tennessee that we were we're really focused so much on supporting those and reaching out to them and letting them know that JAST was their partner. So, so that was what we really focused a lot of our efforts on during those years.

Patrick Ryan [00:37:29] Talk a little bit about these companies that moved headquarters, Bridgestone and Nissan, for example, and some others to Tennessee. Those kinds of things don't just happen. So tell us a little bit inside baseball, what goes on in seeking to attract a move of a company like Nissan from California to good old Franklin, Tennessee?

Leigh Weiland [00:37:56] Well, I can tell you behind the scenes, there were lots and lots of meetings, the meetings that were not necessarily on anyone's schedule. But you know, first of all, all this talk a little bit about Nissan because, you know, in my memory that was about seven years of courtship, trying to get Nissan to relocate from California to Tennessee, to Middle Tennessee. And during that time, I was not involved in those meetings. I'll just be perfectly clear. But I was facilitating the logistics of those meetings and ensuring that gifts were purchased. So gifts, hospitality was still very, very front and center. It's a Japanese company, of course, at the time, it was not led by a Japanese individual. The Renault Nissan partnership with Carlos Ghosn at that at the forefront. But there was a lot of personal inner interaction, I have to say on behalf of Tennessee by the

governor and the top management of economic and community development. As I said, I was not involved in the meetings, but certainly there was a lot of care taken with exactly how the meetings were orchestrated and what particular Tennessee gift might be selected to really showcase the best of Tennessee. And this was during -

Patrick Ryan [00:39:54] This was this was during the administration of Governor Bredeson and Commissioner Kisber. Is that right?

Leigh Weiland [00:40:00] It was during Governor Sundquist actually. The decision was made prior to Governor Sundquist leaving office, and the announcement was made when Governor Bredeson had taken, hardly taken his oath. There was another. This was about Mitsui. I don't know if you are aware, but Mitsui also relocated its headquarters, it's certain Trade Department headquarters from New Jersey. And at the time, the president of Mitsui, when he took the information to the board for them to approve the relocation from New Jersey to a southern location, the numbers from all of their due diligence pointed to relocating to Georgia. But the president of Mitsui insisted that the best move would be to Tennessee. And that was purely because of Don Sunquist efforts. Governor Sundquist, every project for Japanese investment that took place, that was an opportunity during his time, he made it personal. And in this case with Mitsui, it was all about the relationship. The president and I'm sure you know, Mike Fidelio, who runs this Matsui office. He talks about that when he makes his presentations. Sometimes, you know, it's about more than the numbers. In this case, it proved to be that that way. And he will say again and again, that was the right decision to move to Tennessee and again, it does become personal. So much at the time and with Bridgestone also, I wasn't involved in that at all. But I do know that the governor at the time, working with the Nashville Chamber and the mayor, were instrumental in ensuring that Bridgestone put its headquarters in Nashville, even up to the last minute. Their involvement was critical.

Patrick Ryan [00:42:37] And we've seen now with the Bridgestone building downtown on Demonbreun and Third or Fourth, between Third and Fourth, that you can't draw - connect the dot - but with the arrival of a major corporate headquarters downtown, it did signal to others that downtown Nashville was in the game.

Leigh Weiland [00:43:04] Exactly. I mean, my goodness. 10 years ago, look at downtown Nashville and look at it today, it's just radically changed, and I believe Pat you live downtown and you're seeing the changes, you know, by the minute, I think. It's astounding to see the changes that have been brought about by these decisions. Nissan and Franklin Bridgestone in Nashville. And we're still benefiting from those decisions.

Patrick Ryan [00:43:40] Let's talk a little bit around the state, and I don't want to put you on the spot with the anecdotes or case studies here. But can you give us a taste of what you've seen over the years? You know, our focus here is the impact of Japanese business, and we talked about the businesses developed and relationships and so forth between officials and Japanese business leaders. But there's also the relationship at the ground level between plant managers and the head of a Chamber of Commerce or the mayor of a county in rural Tennessee. Tell us, tell us some stories that you've seen over the years of the acceptance and collegiality between and among the communities that have taken in Japanese businesses and what the impact has been.

Leigh Weiland [00:44:36] One of the most compelling representations I think of these acceptances and the forever, changing communities is the sister city relationships - the sister city relationships that have developed around this state, not only in Nashville, which

is one of the newer, you know, relationships Nashville and Kamakura, but you know, Hendersonville has one of the longest running sister cities organizations in the state. I think they're probably close to 40 years now. And in East Tennessee, there are also several Oak Ridge, Knoxville, Athens, McMinnville, Chattanooga, Smyrna. The exchanges between students, between professionals have made such an impact on the lives of the people in the community. And, you know, there have been exchanges of choirs. There have been, you know, exchanges of students almost on an annual basis, and the whole community rallies around them. From what I've seen, too, is perhaps the festivals that have developed through JAST over the last several years, like the National Cherry Blossom Festival, as well as actually not through JAST, but through an individual, the Knox Asian Festival in Knoxville, and the Memphis Japan Festival through JAST in Memphis. It's amazing to see the number of people who show up already with such love and passion for Japan, and I do believe this at the grassroots level has been developed through their connections to people in their community. Of course, the advent of the internet has only further fueled that people can gain access to more and more information. But it is over time this this long continuum of investment in Tennessee that people have accepted the people from Japan, you know, as their neighbors, as their friends, as their family, and this passion has really surged. We see it at the attendance at the festivals, not only for the food, but for the traditional costumes, for the entertainment. It's really heartening to see all of that.

Patrick Ryan [00:49:06] Yeah, that's why I ask the question, because a lot of us here in Nashville don't see it, but clearly in places like Smyrna where Nissan takes up a lot of elbow room in terms of the economic development there, the prosperity and jobs places like Maryville with Denso. And that's a large concern there and undoubtedly have an impact on the community in terms of prosperity and jobs and community relations and the things they do there and around the state to other small places where suppliers and not necessarily strictly automotive, but other businesses as well. We see, I think, close to 200 businesses around the state, not all in Middle Tennessee, not all certainly in the Nashville orbit. So it's a relationship and there's that R-word again. It's a relationship that spans from the Smokies to the Mississippi.

Leigh Weiland [00:50:09] Yeah. And yeah, and speaking of the Mississippi, you know, west Tennessee, Memphis really figures so prominently in this whole history of Japanese investment in Tennessee. Although. Toshiba was the first greenfield investment in Lebanon in 1976. The investments of Nissan forklift in a sales office originally took place in Memphis and the investments of Sharp and Brother, NKC in Memphis also really were the pioneering investments for Tennessee and at the time, you can imagine that those that came to set up these investments, whether it was in Lebanon or whether it was in Memphis - you know, there were no sushi restaurants around, just saying. There were, you know, they had to eat barbecue or whatever, you know, whatever they could find. It really took some fortitude to establish these manufacturing facilities in Tennessee. And I think we take for granted that there were there were all kinds of amenities for them. But there really weren't. I mean, you had to go to a big city like Atlanta at the time to even go to a Japanese grocery store. So, you know, with these investments, the all these other services and, you know, indirect jobs also followed in time. But at the most, I think back, you know, back in the early days, if you had a Chinese restaurant in town, well, that was really something because that was pretty exotic. So, so, you know, a little taste of home goes a long way. And I think, you know, that has occurred here in Tennessee. You can even get sushi at the grocery store. So again, that is that is really a big change. And I think also an impact the Japanese investment in the world and Japanese cuisine, of course, around the world. But believe me, we've come a long way.

Patrick Ryan [00:52:27] Well, that may be our sign up with the whole program, but I mean, you're 100 percent right. You and I have both lived abroad and those who have not traveled abroad or lived abroad assume that you just go to a foreign country and you just instantly fit in. But the expats who come to the United States, whether they're looking for work, whether they're coming here as part of a new business investment, it's a foreign environment. The food is different, the customs are different. And so there's a lot of learning. And I know the consulate is concerned about Japanese expats in Tennessee, as well as JAST in providing, as you mentioned, hospitality and in a welcome. Leigh, I've overstayed my welcome with you on your back porch there. So let me just remind everyone that we've been talking with Leigh Wieland, who worked from 1985 to 2003 in the Tennessee Economic and Community Development Department and then moved to the Japan-America Society of Tennessee in 2003, where she served 16 years, was the CEO and moved on to become a member of the board for the past almost three years. Leigh, thank you so much. I'll invite any final comments that you might have on the impact of Japanese business in Tennessee.

Leigh Wieland [00:53:58] Well, thank you, Pat. I just I really think it's important that you are pursuing this project to remind everyone what a game changer Japanese investment has been for Tennessee and our prosperity here.

Patrick Ryan [00:54:14] Thanks again, Leigh, and thank you all for watching. You can check the program notes for more information about Japan, America, Society Tennessee, the biography of our guest today, Leigh Wieland, and more information about the JAST project impact of business from Japan in Tennessee. And that'll do it for us today. Thank you very much.