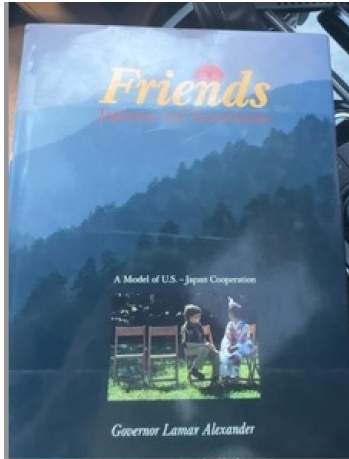


Takahashi/Alexander Scholarship Program

Building Tennessee-Japan Friendship, One Story at a Time



Kin Takahashi and the 1895 Maryville College football team — WBIR

2026 Call for Applications

The Takahashi/Alexander Scholarship Program recognizes the extraordinary history of friendship, cooperation, investment, and person-to-person relationships between Tennessee and Japan. Timed to coincide with the 48th Gathering of SEUS in Nashville, the program seeks to rekindle the person-to-person relationships that built Tennessee's relationship with Japan.

Seven winners will be selected based on short essays on various areas of Tennessee/Japan cooperation. Each winner will receive a scholarship of at least \$700. In addition, winners will be invited to a reception at Southeast U.S./Japan Association (SEUS) in Nashville in 2026. At the reception, winners will be encouraged to meet each other and to meet some of the "heroes" from prior generations who helped forge Tennessee's bonds with Japan.

Sponsors include the Tennessee World Affairs Council, Mission Value Partners, and Thierry Porte.

Contest at a glance

Eligibility:	Students age 13+ on January 1 who study in Tennessee
Award:	Scholarship of at least \$700. Invitation to a reception on October 27 in Nashville
Format:	Submit an essay of no more than 500 words addressing one scholarship category
Deadline:	Essay must be emailed by noon, October 1 to takahashialexanderscholars@gmail.com
Notification:	Winners will be notified by October 15, 2026

Context

Tennessee and Japan have a long history. It began in the 1880s when a Japanese missionary named Kin Takahashi coached and quarterbacked Maryville College's Scouts in the first-ever football game in Tennessee, against UT. A hundred years later, Maryville native Lamar Alexander built on the foundation of Japanese investment in Memphis to kindle a statewide manufacturing boom. Governor Alexander's work spread throughout the Southeast thanks to key investments by Nissan, Denso, and others. These investments were not simply in factories, but in communities and people. Individually and collectively, they tell a story of redemption and reconciliation after World War II.

Today, over 200 Japanese companies directly employ more than 50,000 Tennesseans. Oak Ridge has become a model of partnership, where Japanese engineers co-lead a renaissance of peaceful nuclear power with America. Looking ahead, over \$20 billion of Japanese investment has been announced in and around Tennessee in the past two years. These investments require new skills in industries ranging from steel and robotics to nuclear power, quantum computing, and medical research.

Despite this strong history, person-to-person interchange between Tennessee and Japan has declined in recent years. The reasons are complex and match national trends. The solution is straightforward: education about the past and investment in the future by individuals willing to ask their schools and communities, "Why not Japan?" Tennessee has always been led by individuals willing to change their communities for the better. From Luke Wright to Howard Baker to Lamar Alexander to Shigeko Uppuluri, the Tennessee-Japan relationship has been built from the bottom up. 2026 offers Tennesseans another opportunity to lead the nation in building partnerships with friends who value individual liberty alongside community responsibility.

Process

Applicants should select **one area of Tennessee–Japan cooperation** from the categories listed below and submit an original essay of **no more than 500 words**. The essay's category and brief title must be mentioned in the subject line of the email submission.

The essay may address the **past, present, or future** of the Tennessee–Japan relationship.

Applicants may choose to:

- Research one of the individuals identified as an example in the scholarship categories;
- Select another historical or contemporary individual who has contributed to Tennessee–Japan relations in one of the categories.
- Highlight someone in their local community who exemplifies the spirit of Tennessee–Japan friendship and cooperation in one of the categories; or
- Propose an idea for strengthening future collaboration between Tennessee and Japan within one of the scholarship categories.

The individuals identified as "heroes" in the categories below are **examples only**. Applicants are welcome to write about one of these individuals or select another person, organization, initiative, or idea relevant to their chosen category.

Electronic resources may be used for research. However, **all submissions must be the applicant's original composition and must be completed without the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI)**. Please note the category of your entry in the subject line of your email.

Special Sensei Category

In this category, a student may nominate a Japanese language teacher. The winning teacher will split the prize with the student and be invited to join all activities. The winning teacher will best imitate the work of the *sensei* of the U.S. Navy Japanese Language Program: instructors in Japanese language who also built bridges between cultures.

This spirit is best articulated in Lamar Alexander's oral history:

Relationships are important in any culture, but especially in Japan. I think the relationships that we developed by so many visits, delegations of Tennesseans to Japan [mattered. For example, in 1980], Nissan invited three or four hundred Tennesseans who'd never built a car or truck to come to Japan to learn how to build [one]. And Honey, my wife, went to see them at Thanksgiving and took a turkey. Those friendships from helped to create a friendly relationship [back in Smyrna, TN].

— Lamar Alexander, 2022 [Interview](#) with the Japan Society of Tennessee

Prize Categories

Each category is anchored by one or more Tennesseans whose lives exemplify the spirit of the Japan-Tennessee relationship. Entrants are encouraged to research the heroes below, their contemporaries, or a local figure who embodies the same spirit.

Applicants can choose any category for their essay (500-word maximum). The heroes are examples. You can pick one of these examples or choose another Tennessean who embodies the same spirit. Alternatively, your essay could focus on a specific proposal to improve Tennessee/Japanese collaboration in one of the categories.

Essays will be judged on the writer's knowledge of and enthusiasm for the Tennessee/Japan relationship as expressed in the text. While electronic research is encouraged, AI cannot be used to write the essay.

Category	Heroes	Note
Diplomacy	Amb. Luke Wright Amb. Howard Baker Sen. Bill Hagerty	Tennessee has had three ambassadors to Japan. Each has served at pivotal times.
STEM	Yohei Yamada Kyoto Fusioneering staff Nissha staff	Yohei's father came to Maryville with Japan's auto industry. Yohei was the Tennessee state math champion before returning to Japan to pursue his PhD in computational neuroscience. Nissha and KF are merging Tennessee and Japan's best scientists.
Communications	Dr. Robert Feldman	Robbie grew up in Oak Ridge, visited Japan as an exchange student, and returned after earning an economics PhD from Yale and MIT with an economics PhD. He is an accomplished scholar and a gifted communicator, speaking on Japan in America and on world affairs (in Japanese) in Japan.
National Defense	Dr. James Auer Gen. Paul Nakasone	Vanderbilt has served as a center for U.S./Japan defense collaboration for decades. This work continues under the Institute for National Security.
Business/Agriculture	Celeste Wilson Randy Boyd Ed Nelson John Rose	Student exchange led both Randy and Celeste to follow the trail blazed by Ed Nelson in building business ties between Tennessee and Japan. John Rose helped with agriculture. Sample topics include investment, entrepreneurship, manufacturing, agriculture, and workforce development.
Culture	Sean Brock Byron Stithem	Chef Sean Brock and sake-maker Byron Stithem have brought Japanese and Tennessee together at the table. Students may explore food, music, art, sports, or other forms of cultural exchange.
Sensei*	Shigeko Uppuluri Eric Gangloff	Shigeko helped lead UT's Japanese program, started Sister Cities, built the Peace Bell, and worked with Eric Gangloff, founder of the Bridging Foundation.

**Special category: the student and the teacher described in the essay will share the award*