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**Hot Springs Sister City Program wins *Sister Cities International's*  
Best Overall Program Award**

WASHINGTON, DC – Hot Springs Sister City Program has won *Sister Cities International's* 2011 Best Overall Program Award for a city with a population between 25,001 and 50,000. The award recognizes sister city programs that demonstrate outstanding accomplishments in advancing the goals and mission of the sister cities movement.

Hot Springs' program is multi-faceted and includes citizen exchanges, cultural exchanges, and educational exchanges with sister city Hanamaki, Japan. In 2011, in the wake of the devastating tsunami in Japan, Hot Springs also included the "Compassionate Exchange". Hot Springs assisted Hanamaki in caring for more than 1000 evacuees from the coastal area that streamed into the city. The program raised \$25,000 through fundraising efforts. Their efforts were widely recognized by local and international media as well as the U.S. Department of State.

2011 also included student and teacher delegation visits. A 10 member citizen delegation from Hot Springs was fortunate to receive the warmth and hospitality of the people of Hanamaki. The program therefore rallied a wide-variety of community members in 2011 and was successful in bringing the two cities closer.

Hot Springs Sister City Program is a public/private partnership involving the City of Hot Springs, Visit Hot Springs (formerly the Hot Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau) and Hot Springs National Park Sister City Foundation.

The *Sister Cities International* Annual Awards are awarded in several categories. Award winners will be honored at a special luncheon ceremony on July 14 during the *Sister Cities International* 56<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in Jacksonville, Florida.

**About *Sister Cities International***

*Sister Cities International* facilitates nearly 2,000 partnerships in 136 countries on six continents between 600 communities in the United States with similar municipalities abroad. *Sister Cities International* represents citizen diplomats who work tirelessly to promote the organizations' mission of creating world peace and cultural understanding through economic and sustainable development programs, youth and education projects, arts and culture, and humanitarian assistance.

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