

# REGION

NEWS FROM NORTHWEST LOWER MICHIGAN

Monday, July 11, 2005

NEWS TIP LINE (231) 933-1472



Madeline Zimmerman, 6, tries to eat a strawberry. It was her first time using chopsticks. "They're pretty hard," Zimmerman said.

## A YEN FOR JAPANESE



Above, Karen Kirt shows her class where Japan is on a globe. At right, Sebastian Wentworth, 8, practices calligraphy during a Crafts and Culture of Japan class at the Old Art Building in Leland. "It's very interesting. It's a new language and culture to learn," he said.

**K**aren Kirt has a ready answer anytime she's asked why people use chopsticks. "People used to eat with their hands," she tells her classes. "The story is that, one day, the food was too hot, so someone picked two sticks up off the ground and used them to pick up the food."

Kirt is teaching 16 students about Japanese culture, food and language this summer. She gets a lot of questions, and she hands out a few snacks.

"This is called 'ichigo' in Japanese," she says, holding up a strawberry. "It means 'one' and 'five.'"

Kirt also explains that stabbing the fruit with a stick isn't just cheating, it's bad manners.

This is her third year teaching the class. This year it is also the first children's class of the summer at Leland's Old Art Building.

Kirt taught in Japan for years before returning to the United States, where the idea for a cultural class for kids struck her.

"I just had all of these things from Japan and I've always taught children, so it just made sense," Kirt says.



STORY  
AND  
PHOTOS  
BY LARA  
NEEL