

Fukushima Dreams - a triannually publication of Fukushima City — March 2016

Thanks for picking up this "Fukushima Dreams - a quarterly publication of Fukushima City."

Through this issue, we hope that you will learn more about, and be moved by the various charms that Fukushima city has to offer.

Fukushima is a city of around 280,000 people, surrounded by the beauty of nature. Due to its location, the city has a characteristic basin climate, and is famous as a fruit-producing area, producing many varieties throughout the seasons, including cherries, peaches, nashi pears, grapes, and apples.

We hope that through this edition, you'll come to appreciate even a little what Fukushima City has to offer.



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① Yamawarau - Spring is coming to the mountain

The vividly colored flowers of Hanamiyama.

In haikus, we find the seasonal word representing spring "yamawarau." It means greens are budding, flowers are blooming, birds are chirping, and the entire mountain is filled with signs of new life." When April comes, the area surrounding Hanamiyama truly rings in the season of "yamawarau." Why not visit the Hanamiyama area this spring; the place where the late photographer, Shotaro Akiyama described as "paradise in Fukushima" when he introduced the region to the country.



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① Valuing the perspective of female farmers and bringing people together for the enrichment of Fukushima's future.

Set on the farming path as a result of her marriage in 1980, her husband's decision to switch from silkworm farming to fruit farming is just one of the struggles Mikiko Watanabe has overcome together with her husband on her journey as a female farmer. Mrs. Watanabe has proactively undertaken a variety of challenges including the "Fukushima Women Entrepreneurship Research Society" to open and expand a new market for her family's handpicked produce through interaction with other business owners and consumers and the offering of farming experience. We spoke with Mrs. Watanabe about the importance of having companions and the attraction of farming and food from a female perspective.

② Mikiko Watanabe Third President

Fukushima Women Entrepreneurship Research Society

Born in Tatsugoyama district of Fukushima City in 1956, she now lives in Matsukawamachi district with her husband and mother-in-law. "Watanabe Farm," which she operates with her husband, boasts nearly 2 acres each of peaches and apples and nearly 1.5 acres of rice. They implement the "stevia agricultural method" which results in safe, reliable, delicious produce in their fruit cultivation. They have established the Watanabe Farm processing plant, "Kuwansho" (meaning "eat up" in the local dialect) as their place of work during the winter off-season. There, they make and sell confections made of rice flour, which have a unique doughy texture, and the flour is produced from their own rice.



③ A newfound awareness and farmer's pride awakened by a trip abroad

Mikiko Watanabe is the third president of the "Fukushima Women Entrepreneurship Research Society, with 21 members. It was established for women in agriculture in Fukushima City to learn about processing farm produce and merchandising while exploring new business possibilities. "There had never been an opportunity for such an extensive gathering of women in agriculture, so everyone was very pleased. The information that came together was also broad and diverse. My own world also expanded extensively." What was most eye opening was the overseas study trip to Germany and Italy, she said. "We toured a company where wine was made exclusively by women. Everyone we met on our trip had a pride in farming that was completely different from our own. It was very inspiring."

A project Mrs. Watanabe and her associates started in 2002, "Demae kyoshitsu uke tamawarimasu," is a cooking class catering service. It was born from an idea that emerged when they had no base location for their teaching activity; so they decided to take it on the road, bringing the ingredients for local specialty dishes and sweets to places like schools and learning centers, and teaching people how to make them. They continued to collaborate with hot spring inns, offer farming experiences for children in the greater Tokyo area, and work on other tireless activities, which eventually resulted in the Society being called upon for events in Fukushima Prefecture and Fukushima City.

④ Having companions got Mrs. Watanabe back on her feet and became the driving force behind reconstruction

Just when she had found a new pride in farming and food and build up her skills, the Great East Japan Earthquake happened. "When Fukushima produce stopped selling due to rumors of radiation, I was left with nothing but despair. But having companions who were in the same situation and whom I could speak with frankly was invaluable. Our bonds were strengthened even further with the earthquake," said Mrs. Watanabe. Since then, Mrs. Watanabe and her associates hold a biannual training session and collaborate in a variety of events geared toward bringing vitality to Fukushima as part of their group's projects.

One of these projects is the "Women's Agricultural Ability Improvement Committee" co-sponsored by the Society and Fukushima Prefecture. "After a farming experience, like harvesting rice, people eat our steamed buns or crepes made from rice flour, and they all say 'I've never tasted anything so delicious.' I think when people actually experience how tough farming is and understand the feeling of those who make the food, it deepens the flavor," explained Mrs. Watanabe.

⑤ **Men farmers strive for expertise. Women farmers strive to create more delectable processed foods.**

As farmers whose work is directly linked to eating, Mrs. Watanabe speaks of wanting to "value the perspective of female farmers which is distinct in a way that it can help bring people and communities together through agriculture and food. If men are the ones with expert craftsmanship, then women are the ones who broaden its potential. My husband makes outstanding apples and we women possess the ability to expand that from a consumer's perspective into purees and apple pies. I want to inform as many people as possible of the appeal of Fukushima's produce and processed goods, which are the results of this perfect union."



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① **Handing the baton of Fukushima's tradition to the children who hold its future**

The inspiration to pass on the culture of Japanese dance to the next generation came when Sariju Hanayanagi opened a Japanese dance studio in 2005 as part of the "Traditional Culture Classes for Children" project commissioned by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. We spoke with Ms. Hanayanagi of "The Future of Traditional Culture Association" about how the "Fukushima Children's Society" comprised of her students has played a role in Fukushima PR activities since the Great East Japan Earthquake, and its amazing growth, including the start of a "Folk Performing Arts Bank."



② **"Fukushima Children's Society" carried on by the children's strong desire to learn Japanese dance.**

Sariju Hanayanagi began Japanese dance in high school and now teaches it to children. Ms. Hanayanagi reflects, "when I first began the "Fukushima Children's Society" activities I only taught the etiquette and rules of the dance, but the children said 'we really want to learn how to dance!' This inspired me to begin teaching them real Japanese dance. New students join every year, and I have now been doing this for 10 years."

"I got progressively stricter with the lessons, but the children don't quit. They grow through Japanese dance. In particular, every time they stand on stage in front of an audience, they develop even more."

More dynamic activities and stronger children after the earthquake.

Before the earthquake, the Japanese dance summer camp was held in Fukushima. But after the earthquake, it was held in Okayama through the kindness of a student volunteer group, "Okayama Baton" of Okayama University. At the Okayama camp, the Fukushima children returned the goodwill of the volunteers by dancing for them with all their hearts. The children continued to practice even after the earthquake, and two years after the disaster, entered the "New Dance and Folk Music National Competition" winning the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology Prize. It was the second time they came in first place since 2011.

Approximately three years after the earthquake, Ms. Hanayanagi decided the "Fukushima Children's Society" should also play a role in contributing to society and under the supervision of Save the Children, she established a general incorporated association, "The Future of Traditional Culture Association." Once established, her students who were now in high schools and universities became even more proactive and independent in their appeals to the public of a bright and vibrant Fukushima. In an effort to continue the activities of "Okayama Baton" which helped her students over the last five years, Ms. Hanayanagi founded "Fukushima Baton," initiating the shift from receiving support to providing it.

"Fukushima Baton" saving the future of Fukushima's folk performing arts

In 2016, "Fukushima Baton" began the "Folk Performing Arts Bank" which mainly involves high school students in working toward preserving folk performing arts that have been passed down for generations, mainly in areas where people were forced to evacuate as a result of the tsunami and nuclear accident. "If we don't pass the baton of folk performing arts and Japanese dance on to children now, they will not survive in the future. Aspects that can be changed, should be changed. It is the job of the adults to believe in these young people and entrust them with this mission, creating an environment that allows the passion for learning and carrying on tradition to swell from within these young people," explains Hanayanagi. These youth are trying to inherit and pass on traditional culture through the tenets "what the body learns it doesn't forget" and "culture also belongs to me." One can see in their eyes the strong will to pass the baton on to children far into the future.

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① From April 6 through May 8, as part of the Great East Japan Earthquake Reconstruction Project, the Fukushima Prefectural Museum of Art will hold an exhibition entitled, "Vermeer and Rembrandt: The Masters of the 17th Century Dutch Golden Age." Numerous Dutch masterpieces will be displayed, including for the first time ever in Japan, Vermeer's "Young Woman with a Water Pitcher" and Rembrandt's "Bellona." Please take advantage of this opportunity to enjoy some of the masterpieces of the world.

