

# Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City — JANUARY 2022

Thank you for picking up this quarter's "Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City".

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

With a population of around 290,000 people, Fukushima is surrounded by the beauty of nature. Due to its location, the city has a characteristic basin climate, and is a famous fruit production area: producing many varieties through the seasons, including cherries, peaches, Asian pears, grapes and apples.

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



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## ① Living free and easy in Fukushima City

② Fukushima City is in a basin, where the unique temperature difference makes the fruits and vegetables grown here delicious. There are numerous nearby spots to view the brilliance of the four seasons up close, such as Hanamiyama in spring, Jododaira in summer, and the changing colors of the leaves and snowy landscape of the Bandai-Azuma Skyline in autumn and winter. Another advantage is the city's proximity to hot spring resorts with three different resorts, each boasting abundant spring water, all located within a 30-minute drive from the city center. The prefectural capital is also located in Fukushima City giving it the perfect balance of urban environment and nature. The perfect blend for those who want to live away from cities, but also require convenience. In recent years, an increasing number of people are taking advantage of the various relocation incentive programs Fukushima City offers to create a lifestyle that suits their needs. In this issue, we visit and speak to Katsufumi Namiki, who moved to Fukushima City from the Tokyo metropolitan area and is enjoying his life here, as well as Natsuki Fujimoto, who has also transplanted herself in Fukushima City and actively supports others who want to do the same. We asked them about what brought them to Fukushima City and their lives here. Why not start your new year with a new story that begins from new encounters in Fukushima? Please feel free to consult with us about it anytime.

## ③ Interviews with I-turners

### ④ We planned our move to coincide with my eldest daughter entering first grade

"I want to go back to Fukushima," said my wife who is originally from Fukushima City. She was worried about her mother who had been living in Fukushima all alone for the past 10 years. That was the trigger for our move. I am originally from Kitakyushu City in Fukuoka Prefecture. After graduating university, I moved to Tokyo to work as a consultant in the area of human resources, regional revitalization, and support for venture companies, and internal communications, which involves newsletters and other internal PR activities within an organization. Our eldest daughter was going to start elementary school in April 2021, and at the same time, the coronavirus pandemic enabled me to work remotely, so we took advantage of the timing and moved in March of 2021. After we decided to move to Fukushima City, the first place we went to for help was the "Iju One-Stop Soudan Madoguchi (One-stop consultation center for transplanting)." We sent an inquiry by e-mail and received consultation online regarding our desire to move. That was when we learned about the various help available to us, such as a subsidy that would help us when we need to come to Fukushima to look for a house or when we actually move called the "Moving Preparation Subsidy," the subsidy available to those moving from the Tokyo metropolitan area to telework from Fukushima City called, "U, I, or J-Turn Moving Subsidy," and the "Yu-meguri (bath touring) Passport," which would allow us to use the four publicly run bathhouses in Fukushima City for up to three years at no charge. We met the conditions for receiving all of these, and they were very helpful.



### Starting a new company and inn

We live in a house that we purchased near my wife's parent's home. Unlike an apartment building, we don't have to worry about neighbors hearing our footsteps and the children can play freely. Our neighbors are also all very nice people. The neighborhood watch group that looks out for children and other aspects really make me feel like this is a place I can live with peace of mind. In addition to the work I do remotely, on August 16, 2021, I launched a new company called Innovation Shift with the aim of providing human resources hiring, training, and management consulting services, providing support for content marketing, which is my specialty, and to support regional development. In September, we started an inn called "Showa no Ie" using the single-story detached house on the property we purchased. We don't serve any meals, but I hope it will be a place that will allow us to relay the attraction of Fukushima through our communication revolving around our inn, as well as a base for visitors to carry out activities that would help Fukushima. The number of things I want to try has increased since moving here. I want to get involved in projects to increase the number of people who come to settle here while using the skills I have cultivated in my work thus far.

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## ① Interview with a moving support provider

② They moved to Fukushima Prefecture in 2007 for her husband's job. He was transferred to different locations within the prefecture four times, and they came to Fukushima City in 2013. Natsuki Fujimoto says she was able to find her place and role through interactions with the local people, which is what helped her overcome the loneliness and frustrations she experienced when they first moved to the prefecture 15 years ago. In 2018, she created a volunteer organization and started her activities from the desire to provide a place for women experiencing the same concerns to interact. In 2020, she launched "tenten," an incorporated association, to continue her activities. The following year, she was appointed an official Fukushima City Iju Ouen Supporter (provider of support to those who wish to transplant to Fukushima City). We visited the hard-working Ms. Fujimoto to hear her story.

### ③ My lifestyle changed completely when I found my place and role where we transferred. Suddenly life was fun!

Natsuki Fujimoto serves as the representative director of "tenten," an incorporated association created by women who have moved due to job transfers. She transplanted to Fukushima Prefecture at age 26 when her husband was transferred there for work. They were first moved to the town of Minamiaizu. It was a place she had no knowledge of with no friends and no acquaintances. Her days were filled with loneliness and frustration. It was at that time that she met a local resident through a couple that she connected with online, and that interaction started everything. She hit it off with a group of people around the same age who really loved their hometown and started making and selling novelty items using local resources under the brand name "bel\*fonte." "Once I found my place and role in the town we had been transferred to, my days were suddenly a lot more fun. I still make and sell novelty items." They were transferred to Fukushima City in 2013. When she put her child in daycare and started working, she started to wonder if she couldn't do something to provide a place for women with the same concerns as herself to interact. Her boss at work gave her the push she needed, and in 2018 she created the volunteer organization "tenten" and started her activities.

\* The name "tenten" comes from combining the Japanese words "TENnyu," which means to move into, and "TENkin," which means a work transfer. It also incorporates the desire to turn (or "TENjiru" in Japanese) a bad situation into a good one.



### Supporting women who have moved to draw upon their own strengths, connect with society, and live life on their own terms

The association incorporated in 2020 as a place for women who have moved to connect with one another holding events, such as Welcome workshops and "tenten café." The association embarked on a new stage. There are four pillar activities that support women who have moved into the area draw upon their own strengths, connect with society, and live life on their own terms. The first is "creating opportunities to connect with fellow members and the community," which means allowing participants to exchange various information about living and make friends through tenten café and workshops. Next is job creation. The third is using the perspective of women who have moved into the area as a strength to communicate Fukushima living information online and through other platforms. The fourth is managing a shop that sells recommended products from Fukushima that also serves as a base for exchange. In the fall of 2021, they opened their store, "ent" at long last. It is worth mentioning that they are not only connecting these four projects, but they are also building win-win relationships with the community and businesses. "The only way to get information about the place you are moving to is through the internet, but almost all the information you can find is related to sightseeing. Moving is not sightseeing, so people want living information. The private tenten community on social media and the tenten fukushima website are important tools for connecting those who have moved here to one another." The map that displays area names within Fukushima City titled, "Map of Fukushima City Area Names At-a-Glance" is especially helpful when looking for a place to live and those who come to live here still find it a valuable resource today. In addition, the Child Emergency Support, Post-Birth Care Support and other information regarding raising children helped to increase women's options when they couldn't go back to their hometowns during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Supporting transplants from the perspective of someone who can empathize having had the same experience

From February 2021, Ms. Fujimoto was appointed as an official Fukushima City supporter for people who moved into the city. How does she provide that support? "The most common pattern is for people to connect on our tenten community on social media (which currently has 450 members) before moving, and then meeting in person once they have moved to the city. For people who come from areas where it doesn't snow, I tell them when they should change the tires on their car and the reason for raising the windshield wipers away from the windshield. I can relate to so many of their questions and inquiries because I experienced them myself." When we asked Ms. Fujimoto, who has now lived here for eight years, what she feels is attractive about Fukushima City, she prefaced her reply by saying, "It's more fun when you look for good things on your own," and then she answered, "The people who live here are all quiet and refined. My mother always says that the people of Fukushima are all kind." The second thing is the rice. She says she is never happier than when she is eating delicious Fukushima rice together with fish that has been delivered from her hometown in Ishikawa Prefecture. When asked about her goals, she resolutely replies, "To continue what I'm doing." Ms. Fujimoto says, "Continuing our activities is important. I want various people to empathize with what we are doing and to broaden our activities and spread into other regions. I want women who move here to be able to find their place and role through interacting with other people and live fun, enriched lives." If you are ever in Fukushima City, make sure to visit the gift shop, "ent," where you can find Fukushima handicrafts and other useful information.

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- ① After graduating high school, she started working for Toho Bank as the Japanese record holder in the women's 400-meter race in para-athletics. She joined the bank's track and field team, and with the support of Coach Kazuhisa Kawamoto and the able-bodied runners that came before her, Mana Sasaki worked hard and practiced to overcome the barriers to the world stage. She made those obstacles her own source of energy and broke her own record year after year. At the long-awaited Tokyo Paralympic Games, she took 7th place in the women's 400-meter para-athletics competition (visual impairment T13). Ms. Sasaki says, "If I had never found track and field, I wouldn't be who I am today." We asked her about the allure of sports and her future goals.
- ② Toho Bank Track and Field Club Para-athletics 200-meter/400-meter (visual impairment T13)  
Mana Sasaki
- ③ Thanks to sports, we can share our thoughts with those around us and aim for the world stage from Fukushima
- ④ Aiming for the world stage from Fukushima, Ms. Sasaki changed events from long to short distance



Mana Sasaki competes in the visually impaired class in para-athletics. She has had aniridia, a visual impairment that prevents her from controlling the amount of light entering her eyes, since birth. She first discovered the joy of running in the 5th grade when her homeroom teacher invited her to compete in a Fukushima City track & field meet. "I came in second place. It was then that I learned the joy of being able to do something well even with a disability and the joy of running. I want to feel more of that joy, so I continue to run." In her first year of high school, Tokyo won the bid for the 2020 Paralympic Games, and that became a turning point for her. In her second year of high school, she changed events from running long distances to running short distances aiming to compete in the world championship. However, training was not easy. In short distance running you have to stay in your own lane. Plus, the rules are different. For example, you are disqualified if you step on the inner white line. "You have to move your arms in a certain way to gain more speed, and when I first learned how, I struggled with setting a record." She considered the 2015 Japan Para-Athletic Track & Field Championships her last chance. When she came in first in both the 200-meter and 400-meter events and set a new Japanese record with her personal best time, the tears overflowed from her. "But the obstacles to the world stage were still high. At the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, my time was faster than standard records, but I was disappointed that I still wasn't ranked among the world's best."

### Sports expanded the world for shy and quiet me

Since then, Ms. Sasaki set her sights on the Tokyo Paralympics and decided to push herself to focus on training her core muscles and being conscious of her start as a way to overcome her previous issues. "I continued practicing accelerating from the start line to about the 50-meter mark. Starting out well means more speed in the latter half. I push down hard on the ground for the first three steps and use the rebound to propel myself forward. I trained my body to remember how that feels." Finally, the summer of 2021 brought the long-awaited Tokyo Paralympic Games. Unable to adjust the amount of light coming into her eyes, Ms. Sasaki always competes wearing sunglasses. The preliminary round of the women's 400-meter race was held at night. In the rain. Under such harsh conditions should she wear sunglasses, or not? It was a monumental decision. She trusted herself and chose not to wear sunglasses and qualified for the finals. The final was held under cloudy skies. She wore sunglasses and came in 7th place. She called her family immediately. Ms. Sasaki has been running since she was in her second year of junior high school. When we asked her again what she finds attractive about the sport, she answered, "It makes me smile. I also like the feeling of cutting through the wind." But she says that most of all it has expanded her world. "In elementary school, it was difficult for me to communicate to able-bodied people how I saw or felt things, and I was shy and quiet. When I started track and field, I learned how to share my thoughts with those around me. I've been blessed with great coaches and senior teammates, and I was able to reunite with athletes from the United States at the Tokyo Paralympics. Parasports, in particular, are enjoyable for everyone. I want people to know that enjoying something can become a tool for broadening your world." Let's continue sending our passionate support to Ms. Sasaki who has started working on improving her speed and endurance for the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris.

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- ① Kesenuma, Kuji, Fukushima Information Station  
Okaeri-kan ("welcome back center") Now Open!
- ② Kesenuma City in Miyagi Prefecture, Kuji City in Iwate Prefecture, and Fukushima City in Fukushima Prefecture, which have all been the setting for the TV serial dramas ("Okaeri Monet," "Ama-chan," and "Yell" respectively) since the Great East Japan Earthquake, have collaborated to open the "Okaeri-kan" located in the Tokyo Kotsu Kaikan in Yurakucho, as a base for communicating information in the Tokyo metropolitan area. The center offers various local specialties from each city that are hard to come by outside those cities, as well as information regarding sightseeing and relocating. Fukushima City fans living in the Tokyo metropolitan area should definitely come by!!

