

# Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City — JULY 2023

Thank you for picking up this quarters’ “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 280,000 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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## ①Special Feature

### Fukushima Festivals

②Fukushima City is home to an impressive variety of festivals and other traditional events that have long been loved by the city’s inhabitants and passed down the generations. What they have in common is that they are all occasions for offering prayers and making wishes for a long and healthy life, smiling broadly, and releasing boundless energy. Let’s share them together.

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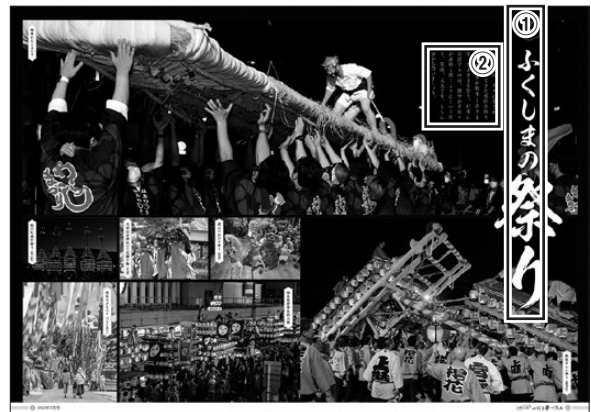
## ①Fukushima’s Exciting Waraji Matsuri Is Back in Full Swing After Four Years!

### ②Wasshoi! Wasshoi!

Let’s Have Fun Together!

③To be held on August 4th (Friday), 5th (Saturday), and 6th (Sunday), 2023

④In 2019, the Fukushima Waraji Matsuri, which is also known in English as the “Giant Straw Sandal Festival,” had a makeover to celebrate its 50th anniversary with live music and a live performance of the Waraji Ondo theme song. In addition, this summer, the festival will be held on the same full scale as it was before the COVID-19 pandemic and with several additions, including the Waraji Odori dance, the Grand Waraji Parade, the Creative Waraji Parade, and the Grand Waraji Dedication. For this issue, we asked Hirotomo Ogasaka (Chairman of the Fukushima Waraji Festival Executive Committee “Owaraji-zagumi”) about his thoughts on the festival and its highlights. Wasshoi! Wasshoi! Let’s have fun together at the Waraji Matsuri, where the summer will be bursting with excitement!



## ⑤Fukushima Waraji Matsuri Executive Committee “Owaraji-zagumi”

Chairman Hirotomo Kogasaka

## ⑥The Four Groups Organizing the Fukushima Waraji Matsuri

It’s finally returning! In August, the Fukushima Waraji Matsuri, one of Tohoku’s representative festivals, is making a full comeback. This year’s schedule includes the main festival on the 4th and 5th, and the dedication ceremony for the giant straw sandal at Haguro Shrine on the 6th. In anticipation of the main event, the four groups that are involved in organizing the Waraji Matsuri, namely the Owaraji-zagumi, the Mai-zagumi, the Fukuhibiki-zagumi, and the Koho-zagumi, have already begun their preparations. For example, the Mai-zagumi, in charge of the dance, has been holding workshops on the dance, which underwent a renewal in 2019, at the request of elementary and junior high schools throughout the city, as well as companies and organizations that are planning to participate in the festival. The Fukuhibiki-zagumi, in charge of the taiko drumming, is continuing to meet regularly to practice. The organizers are also inviting neighborhood taiko groups and individuals to register for the Waraji Taiko Corps, and encouraging businesses and organizations to participate in the event. In addition, they have worked hard throughout the year in support of the Tohoku Kizuna Matsuri and other events, while taking precautions to prevent the spread of infections despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.



## A New Project Born Two Years Ago, the Creative Waraji Parade

The Owaraji-zagumi is literally the Giant Straw Sandals Group. This group is in charge of everything related to the giant straw sandals, from unloading the old dedicated sandal at the foot of the mountain and carrying them to the work area where the members of Oyama Keishinkai, the group that makes the giant straw sandal, are waiting, to coordinating the parade so that it can take place safely. Two years ago, we also started the Creative Waraji Parade & Work Exhibition. In this new project, companies and organizations that want to participate in the Waraji Matsuri are invited to produce “creative waraji” based on their own ideas, and these creations will help to enliven the festival during the main parade.

The inspiration behind the project can be traced back to around 1970, when the Waraji Matsuri was inaugurated in its modern form. About 4,000 people, including citizens, businesses, and organizations, participated in that event, in which about 80 straw sandals, handmade by the members of each neighborhood association, took part in the parade spaced around the perimeter of the giant straw sandal. The participants overflowed with the feeling that this was their festival. The purpose of the new Waraji Matsuri, which has recently been reborn with the aim of being a festival everyone can enjoy and take part in, is in line with this sentiment. The year before last, participation was limited to only an exhibition, but last year an actual parade took place, which was very popular with the public. A sample video showing how to make creative straw sandals is available on YouTube, produced by the Koho-zagumi, the group in charge of public relations. They have also posted videos on how to dance the Waraji Odori and how to practice taiko drumming. Please make use of these videos if your company or organization is considering participating in the festival next year.

## This Year’s Festival Will Be Held in its Entirety as the Fully Revived Waraji Matsuri!

Looking back, the 51st festival had to be cancelled and the 52nd festival was held online. Last year, the 53rd festival was held as a real event, with the waraji bearers wearing masks and the number of dancers limited to 100 per group in order to minimize the spread of COVID-19 infection. Since it had been three years since the previous festival, it took some time to restore a sense of normalcy, and some of the groups that had decided to participate eventually declined to do so. However, we were very happy to see the smiles on the faces of the drummers, dancers, and sandal bearers in the parade and of the spectators along the route, and we were delighted to have been able to hold the festival.

The giant straw sandal, measuring 12 meters long and 1.4 meters wide, is carried by around 50 people. At the climax of the parade, when the bearers carry the sandal around the streets shouting “Wasshoi!” and raising and lowering it, or rotating it in a large circle, everyone’s festive voltage goes through the roof. The excitement this spectacle

generates makes people want to see it again and again.

This year, we are at long last reviving the Waraji Matsuri on a full scale together with the Creative Waraji Parade & Work Exhibition. Regarding the venue, the festival will return to its regular "ring dance" format with National Highway 13 serving as the stage. The Waraji Ondo, complete with live flute and drum performances and live singing, the Waraji Odori, dancing while gripping a ring of rope called a wara-no-wa in both hands, the Grand Waraji Parade, the Creative Waraji Parade, and the Grand Waraji Dedication are among the many electrifying attractions of this festival.

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①Manato Tsuchida, aged 19, made his debut as a jockey in March 2022. When he was a child, his family took him to Fukushima Racecourse (Matsunami-cho, Fukushima City), the only Japan Racing Association (JRA) racetrack in the Tohoku region, and the experience kindled his dream of becoming a jockey. It was at this same Fukushima Racecourse, where he spent his formative years, that Tsuchida scored his long-awaited first victory in April this year. We asked Tsuchida, who is currently in his second year as a jockey, about how he felt when he won his first race in his hometown of Fukushima, as well as about the particular appeal of horseracing as a sport that involves interacting with animals, and the kind of jockey he aspires to be.

②Jockey (Affiliation: Kazuyuki Ogata Stable, Miho, Japan)  
Manato Tsuchida

③In the Second Year Since His Debut, the 19-Year-Old Wants to Gain Broad Public Trust by Riding All His Mounts with Meticulous Care.

④After Achieving His First Victory in His Hometown of Fukushima, Tsuchida Takes His Place in the Coveted Winner's Circle.

Manato Tsuchida's first victory came in Race 12 on April 16, 2023. He describes his feelings at that time as follows. "Prior to this race, I had yet to achieve any wins since my debut a little over a year ago. Also, this was a very special victory that I will never forget because it happened in my hometown of Fukushima riding a horse from my own stable." After a series of close races, he was filled with determination. "I didn't want to let my chance slip away this time. I had to win at any cost," On the day of the race, there was a good atmosphere both in the paddock and at the warming-up session for the horses entering the main track, and he felt he should go all out for a win. "During the race, my first priority was not to interfere with the horse's rhythm, so I trusted my horse and aimed hard for the finish line. It took a lot of hard work to win that race, so I'm very glad that I kept trying."

⑤All the Multifarious Dramas Surrounding Horses Are Fascinating.

Tsuchida, who set his sights on becoming a jockey when he was in his sixth year of elementary school, is truly a person who holds true to his original intentions. At the age of 15, his weight, vision, discernment, hearing, and health were checked, and after passing various school examinations including in mathematics and general education, he entered the demanding JRA Horse Racing School in Chiba Prefecture. For three years, while living in a dormitory, he underwent basic and practical training in horsemanship, and during his final year he passed his jockey's license examination. Currently, he is at the dream stage of receiving requests to ride at 10 JRA racetracks throughout Japan. Explaining about the appeal of this sport that involves living creatures, Tsuchida says, "It is the sheer intensity of horseracing that inspired me to pursue it as a career, as well as the fact that each horse has its own pedigree and that this kind of history can be useful in getting to know the animal. Before a horse is ready to run on a racetrack, a lot of drama goes on between the breeders, trainers, owners, jockeys, and the other people concerned. I have been riding Sanono Hero, the horse on which we won our first victory together, for a considerable period stretching back to the previous season at Fukushima Racecourse. I can only thank the horse's owner for the many opportunities they have given me. For me, all these things together provide a driving force."

He Will Ride at Sapporo Racecourse This Summer and Fukushima Racecourse in the Autumn.

This is Tsuchida's second year as a jockey. Naturally, his main focus is riding in races, but how does he spend his weekdays? "The training center's opening hours differ slightly between summer and winter. Roughly speaking, in the summer time, the jockeys wake up at around 1:00 am. Before the racecourse doors open at 4:00 am, we go to the stables to get ready for training, then we ride our horses in laps around the stables. Once the doors open, we enter the training course. The jockeys begin their own separate activities from about 2:00 pm, and I help with the work at my stable first. I begin my own training at about 5 pm. I try to be conscious of my riding technique. Right now, I am working especially hard on my lower body."

He says that his aim is to be like his favorite jockey Yutaka Take, who is well respected by everybody around him. The two have competed with each other in the same race. Tsuchida is an upstanding young man who is as fresh as spring grass. He is scheduled to ride at Sapporo Racecourse in Hokkaido this summer and at Fukushima Racecourse in the autumn. Let's give Tsuchida our full support so that he can win as many victories as possible.



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①Seasonal Jewel Box F-BOX  
—Filled with the Season's Best Selection from Fukushima

②We would like everyone in Japan to enjoy delicious fruit from Fukushima City, which has a well-deserved reputation as a jewel box of fruit!

And so, we have created an assortment box, called the Seasonal Jewel Box F-BOX, which allows people to enjoy a variety of Fukushima City's fruits, vegetables, and processed products in a single package.

We are also planning to sell the F-BOX containing an assortment of fruits and other products at mass retail outlets outside Fukushima Prefecture. So, if you see the F-BOX on sale, why not buy one for a relative or friend as a mid-year or summer gift? Of course, you can also bring one home as a present for yourself. Please make the most of this superb opportunity to enjoy Fukushima's fabulous fruit.



Edited and published by:  
Fukushima City Office, Public Relations Division  
3-1 Goro-uchimachi, Fukushima