

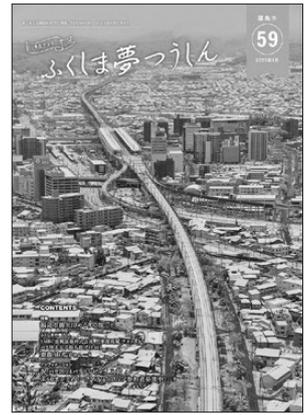
# Fukushima Dreams – a quarterly publication of Fukushima City — JANUARY 2025

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 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.



## P. 2, 3

### ① Fukushima City Goshuin Meguri

#### ② What Is Goshuin Meguri?

A goshuin (red ink stamp) is a stamp or seal impression issued by Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples in Japan to worshippers or visitors as a proof of their visit. They commonly bear the name of the shrine or temple, the name of the enshrined kami or Buddhist deities, and the date of the visit.

Some shrines and temples distribute goshuin decorated with elaborate illustrations or limited seasonal designs, and in recent years, goshuin meguri (a red ink stamp tour) has become a popular way for people to visit shrines and temples across Japan to collect these stamps in a book called a goshuincho. Why not get yourself a goshuincho and go on a tour of shrines and temples in Fukushima City?

#### ③ How to Get Your Goshuin

1. First, prepare a goshuincho. These books can be purchased at shrines and temples, as well as at stationery stores.
2. Before getting a goshuin, please pay your respects or offer a prayer following the shrine or temple etiquette.
3. Go to the shrine or temple office and make an offering to receive your goshuin.

### ④ Okabe Kasuga Shrine

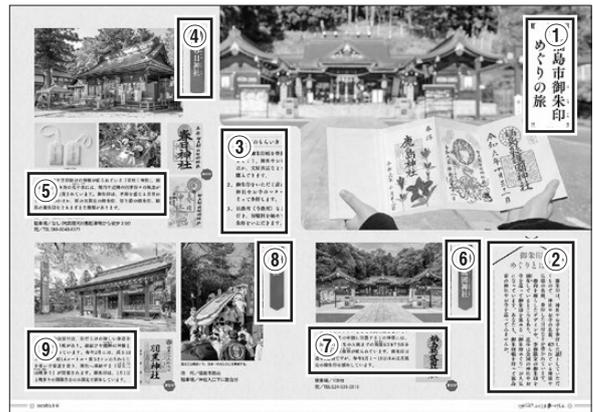
⑤ Known informally as Hanasaki Jinja (the flowering shrine), Okabe Kasuga Shrine is dedicated to the kami of protection against evil and bad directions. The colorful seasonal scenery of the shrine's precincts and the surrounding area is depicted in the design of the goshuin as well as on the shrine's two flower water basins. In addition to the seasonal goshuin, which change each month, there are also goshuin for rainy days, goshuin made from cut-out paper, and vertically-oriented goshuin.

### ⑥ Fukushima Gokoku Shrine

⑦ Mt. Shinobu is well loved by the citizens of Fukushima City and is a symbol of the city. Gokoku Shrine, located on the lower slopes of the mountain, enshrines the spirits of 68,500 soldiers who died in various conflicts from the Boshin War to the Second World War, as well as the sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami. The shrine only offers only a single type of goshuin throughout the year, but a special New Year's goshuin is available from January 1st to 15th every year.

### ⑧ Haguro Shrine

⑨ The main shrine is located at the end of a steep, rocky approach at the top of Mt. Haguro, the central peak of Mt. Shinobu, and is dedicated to the kami of marriage and healthy legs, implying the strength to walk a long distance. Every year in early February, the Mt. Shinobu Dawn Procession takes place, in which the participants carry a gigantic waraji (a straw sandal 12 meters long, 1.4 meters wide, and weighing 2 tons) up the approach to the shrine as an offering. Goshuin are only available twice a year—on January 1 and on the day of the Dawn Procession.



## P. 4, 5

### ① Nishine Shrine, Takahata Tenmangu Shrine

② Nishine Shrine enshrines Furukawa Zenbei Shigeyoshi and Sato Shinemon Ietada, two Fukushima men who were instrumental in excavating Nishine Weir. Inside the precincts of the main shrine is the smaller Takahata Tenmangu Shrine, dedicated to the scholar Sugawara no Michizane, who is worshipped as a god of healing, warding off misfortune, and learning. It is said that if you receive a wooden carving of a bullfinch (called uso in Japanese) at the popular Usokae Festival, which is held twice a year, your bad luck for the past year will disappear as if it was a lie (also called uso in Japanese). The goshuin, which is the work of calligrapher Chotei Ajiro, features a woodblock print style rarely seen at other shrines.

### ③ Oda Kashima Shrine

④ This shrine is dedicated to the kami Takemikazuchi-no-Mikoto, who is worshipped as a god of good fortune, safe childbirth, victory, and protection from bad directions. The goshuin at this shrine are made with a handmade eraser stamp. In addition to those that are available year-round, there are also several designs that change with the month and season, bearing motifs such as seasonal flowers and foods, which are colorful and pleasing to the eye.

### ⑤ Nakano Fudosen

⑥ Nakano Fudosen has long been known as Nakano no O-fudo-sama (the Fudo of Nakano) and is one of the three most famous statues in Japan of the Buddhist deity Fudo Myo-o. It is said that the Fudo Myo-o statue enshrined here will grant your wishes if you pray sincerely with a pure heart. Two types of goshuin are available throughout the year, featuring Fudo Myo-o and Dainichi Nyorai, respectively.

### ⑦ Yorinji Temple

⑧ Yorinji is a Soto Zen temple founded by the Date family is also known as Fukushima's Hydrangea Temple on account of the white hydrangeas known as Annabelle that bloom all over the temple grounds during the rainy season. The chozusha (water basin for ritual purification) is decorated with flowers and other seasonal decorations for the enjoyment of visitors. In addition to the standard goshuin that are distributed to visitors throughout the year, a variety of other designs are available, including ones bearing colorful and cute illustrations of seasonal flowers and Jizo statues.



P. 6, 7

① Yukiko Saito, who finished 4th in the world in the Women's Shot Put - F46 competition at the Paris Paralympic Games in the summer of 2024, was born without the forearm of her left arm. Her first encounter with the shot put was when she was a student in the first grade of junior high school. Saito says she has loved sports since she was a child. She quickly rose to prominence in individual competitions. However, she faced many obstacles on her way to the Paralympic Games. In this issue, we would like to introduce you to Yukiko Saito, who has boldly overcome many difficulties with the support of her family, while making Fukushima City's Seidensha WINDY Stadium (Shinobugaoka Stadium) her home base.

② Yukiko Saito

③ After enduring the Great East Japan Earthquake, a change of events, pregnancy and childbirth, she has made her first appearance at the Paralympic Games in Paris. She is determined to continue facing new challenges with a smile!

④ After Being Affected by the Disaster in Kesenuma City as a Second-Year High School Student, She Set a World Record as a Fourth-Year University Student.

Saito recalls her childhood, saying, "I've always hated losing. I only have my right hand, so I did everything with that hand from a young age. At elementary school, I did everything with my right hand, whether it was playing on the horizontal bar or jumping rope, or even wringing out dust cloths for cleaning. By the time I was in junior high school, I was already over 160 cm tall and had good grip strength because I was training the arm naturally in the course of daily life. When I discovered the shot put, a sport in which even people with disabilities can compete, I felt as if I had learned how to make good use of my strength. She quickly rose to become a top athlete and went on to high school. In March 2011, while she was busy training for the National High School Comprehensive Athletic Meet (Inter-High), her house was swept away by the massive tsunami caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake, and she was forced to live in an evacuation center with her mother and two younger brothers. "I was so disappointed that I couldn't take part in the Inter-High. I wanted to continue competing a little longer, so I went on to university." At university, she set her sights on competing in the All-Japan Intercollegiate Athletic Meet, but one day, she was invited by a para-athlete to compete in the Japan Para Athletics Championships for the first time. There, even though she didn't perform at her best, she set new Japanese records in three different events: the shot put, javelin throw, and discus throw. Saito believes that if she aims to achieve a high ranking among able-bodied athletes at the Inter-Collegiate Athletic Meet, her records in para-sports will naturally improve. As a result, the record-breaking of 12m 47cm in the women's shot put (F46) in para-athletics, which she set in her fourth year at university, remained the world record for several years until it was finally surpassed in 2023.



As a Newly Graduated Athlete Employee, Her Goal Was the Paralympics. But...

After joining a company in 2016 as an athlete employee, Saito set her sights on competing in the Paralympics. However, due to the lack of competitors in this event, the women's shot put (F46) was not included in either the Rio de Janeiro or the Tokyo Paralympics. Thinking "If that's the way things are...", Saito changed her event to the javelin and tried her hand at it. However, "The results were not what I was hoping for. I was getting paid to compete, but I couldn't contribute to the company, and I felt all too keenly how lacking in ability I was."

As her days of frustration continued, she received some good news at the end of 2021. It was announced that the women's shot put (F46) would be reinstated at the Paris Games. At that time, I was thinking about having a child. So, when I found out I was pregnant, I really thought that my child had really chosen precisely the right time to come down to earth."

I'm Looking Forward to the Paris Games, and From Now on I'll Keep Giving My All in Both My Personal and Professional Life.

Saito gave birth safely in 2022, and resumed training two months later. After giving birth, she lost 15 kg and struggled with a decline in her muscle strength and running ability. "Even though my husband, who is also an athlete, was looking after our child, I sometimes felt guilty about leaving the child at home to go to the stadium to compete." She was finally able to get over this feeling at the 2023 World Para Athletics Championships in Paris, where she came third and was selected to represent Japan at the Paris 2024 Summer Paralympic Games. From that point, she focused on her athletic career until the summer of 2024.

At her first Paralympics, adopting smiles as her theme, Saito threw her way to a very respectable fourth place. When asked about her next goal, she said, "One of my goals is to win a gold medal at the Asian Para Games in Nagoya in 2026," but she also wants to enrich her personal life. "I lost my father when I was in elementary school. I also experienced the Great East Japan Earthquake. Our lives are limited. If possible, I'd like to have another child. What will I choose for my own happiness? I want to decide that for myself." Let's keep supporting Yukiko Saito, who is throwing herself wholeheartedly into both life and competition.

P. 8

① Congratulations on Winning at the Paris 2024 Summer Paralympic Games

② The Paris 2024 Summer Paralympic Games were held in Paris, France from August 28th to September 8th, 2024. Among the 4,400 athletes from 185 countries who participated in the games, three athletes with connections to Fukushima City managed to achieve excellent performances, giving the city's residents a great deal of inspiration.

Boccia, Women's Individual BC1 Bronze Medal & Mixed Team BC1/BC2 Team Bronze Medal—Hiromi Endo Athletics, Women's Shot Put (upper limb disability F46) 4th place—Yukiko Saito Athletics, Women's 400 m (visual impairment T13) 7th place—Mana Sasaki

③ On Your Marks — Run to the future, Fukushima! —

Applications for Participants in the Fukushima City Half Marathon 2025 Are Being Accepted Now!

④ Date: Sunday, May 18th \*The event will go ahead in the event of rain, but will be canceled in the event of severe weather.

Venue: Starting and finishing at Seidensha WINDY Stadium (Shinobugaoka Stadium)

Application period: Runners ▶ Until Friday, March 7th.

Volunteers and runner support team ▶ Until Friday, February 28th.

Last year's Half Marathon attracted 4,354 runners from all over the country. The event was ranked among the top half marathons in Japan by the running website Runnet.

In addition to runners, we are also looking for volunteers and supporters to cheer on the runners. Please join us!

