

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



P. 2, 3

① Nutrition and rich flavor are condensed with the gifts of the cold wind and sun

Tatsugoyama's freeze-dried Shimi Tofu is an essential item for the dining table in winter

The Tatsugoyama district is on the east side of Fukushima city. In winter, a cold dry wind blows from Mt. Azuma and Mt. Adataru. Taking advantage of the sub-zero weather, freeze-dried Shimi Tofu has been produced in this area since the Taisho era. In the freezing cold and dry air, the white rows of tofu lined up are the very picture of winter in the Tatsugoyama area. We visited Masatake Takane, president of Tatsugoyama Shimi Tofu, Inc. just as he entered the peak Shimi Tofu production season and asked him about its history, production methods, and his recommended recipes.

② A traditional food born from Tatsugoyama's natural surroundings.

The history of Shimi Tofu goes back to the Edo period. It began when the head priest at Entsu-ji Temple in Omori village in the Shinobu district brought the Koya Tofu he encountered at Mt. Koya (Wakayama prefecture) back with him, adjusted the production process to suit Fukushima's climate and showed people nearby how to do it. It became a specialty of the Tatsugoyama district in the Taisho era when a local farmer and avid researcher, Sojiro Kanno began studying its production method in search of hope for those engaged in farming in hilly and mountainous areas. Kanno discovered that Tatsugoyama's climate was perfectly suited to the production of Shimi Tofu, and by reproducing the production method of 300 years earlier and continuous study, he was finally able to establish a production method that generated a smooth, rich flavor. "Since then, it has become a valuable source of income during the off-farming season" says Masatake Takane, who has been making Shimi Tofu for 40 years.



Low-calorie, high-protein health food with a long shelf life.

The commercial farms in Tatsugoyama district begin making Shimi Tofu in October. It starts in the dimly lit hours of the early morning using twice the amount of soybeans as normal tofu to make a harder tofu. Once the tofu is made it is sliced to a thickness of 7 mm and placed in a freezer. Once it is aged at a low temperature, the sliced pieces are tied together with rice straw and after drying outside 4 - 10 days, they are ready for shipment. The timing for drying is the most difficult step in the process, says Takane. "You want to aim for a cold day when the air is dry. When all the conditions aren't satisfied, you just look at the sky and wait." By repeating the process of freezing and melting with the gifts of cold air and sunny days, Shimi Tofu, a low-calorie, high-protein health food, is filled with condensed nutrition and rich flavor. "It has a long shelf life so when the snow is deep and you can't get outside you can still make nutritious meals. It is wisdom passed down from our ancestors." In the northern part of the prefecture, it is an essential item in New Year's dishes, also used in o-zoni (soup with rice cakes) and nishime (a slowly stewed vegetable dish).

Supporting elementary school students' learning through experience communicating the warmth of their home town.

Shimi Tofu is also known as the treasure of Tatsugoyama. At the peak, roughly 70 farms produced Shimi Tofu, but currently the numbers have dwindled to 8 or 9 farms. In order to make sure the tradition and culture of Tatsugoyama's Shimi Tofu stay alive, 5th and 6th graders at Tatsugoyama Municipal Elementary School are taught how to weave Shimi Tofu as part of their comprehensive learning curriculum. "It's difficult work, but the children all take it very seriously. It makes me so happy." Shimi Tofu, which is almost entirely handmade with the help of nature, is full of the warmth of this area passed down for approximately 100 years since the Taisho era. We have posted some recommended recipes and hope you enjoy the flavor of Tatsugoyama's tradition this winter.

P. 4, 5,

① I want to give the people of Fukushima hope and courage with my skiing.

Hitomi Sato took her place on the global stage in 2014 at the Sochi Olympics (Russia) when Slopestyle freestyle skiing officially became an Olympic sport. She began to dream of becoming an Olympic athlete while watching the Nagano Olympics as a 3rd-grader at Kanayakawa Municipal Elementary School. We spoke to Ms. Sato, who aims to make her dreams come true in the PyeongChang Olympics (Korea) to be held in February 2018, about the allure of skiing and her future goals.

② After teaching herself to master the jump, she has competed overseas every year since 2012.

Ms. Sato first began skiing at age 2 and started competing seriously at 19. When asked about the allure of skiing without any hesitation she quickly replied "the speed." Teaching herself how to jump masterfully, she began competing in the freestyle ski Slopestyle event at the World Cup every year since 2012. She is especially skilled at the exciting "Cork 7" trick which consists of spinning while twisting your body horizontally and flipping twice. "I've injured myself during practice before, and there are times when things go well and when they don't. It has taken me about 8 years to perfect this trick so to me it is really special."



Aiming to be No. 1 Taking on bold challenges

She has undergone training with the Swiss national team's coach and with an Italian coach, but Ms. Sato explains that as a general rule

practices are a lone effort. In order to support Ms. Sato's efforts, a booster club was established in her hometown of Matsukawa-town in 2015. It was this support that allowed her to enlist the former mogul skier, Natsuki Endo of Inawashiro-town as her coach this season. "I am so grateful for the kindness of the people of Fukushima who really helped me out when I was in a pinch." In addition, by being selected as a "Fukushima J Athlete" reinforcement support project designated athlete, she is now receiving support unlike ever before. One aspect of this support is mental training from Fukushima University's Professor Yutaka Shiraishi. "I am now able to undergo fulfilling training both physically and mentally." Her current goal is to compete at the PyeongChang Olympics in the Slopestyle event and be the first Japanese person to stand in the center on the rostrum at the medals ceremony. Ms. Sato is passionate as she speaks about focusing on earning as many points as possible in each and every competition in order to be considered for the Olympic team. Ms. Sato has a constant hope that her skiing efforts will bring hope and courage to the people of Fukushima, therefore it is up to us to lend her all the support we can.

③What is Slopestyle?

It is a very entertaining sport that uses jump and jibbing items set up along the course to present tricks. As skis are used that allow the skier to ski backwards, slip, and jump, a wide variety of tricks can be performed. As the course is different for each competition, athletes prepare their trick combinations for the first time on-site. Scoring is not based on time, but rather rank is determined on points given for difficulty, landing, and creativity.

P. 6, 7,

①Prayers for the year's happiness are entrusted in giant waraji (straw sandals).

A seasonal tradition in early spring "Shinobu Sanzan Akatsuki Mairi"

②We are nearing the "Shinobu Sanzan Akatsuki Mairi" held on February 10th and 11th. This traditional event held in early spring since the Edo period is dedicated to prayers for a good grain harvest and health, and is widely known for offering the largest straw sandal in Japan to Haguro shrine on Mt. Shinobu. It is also said to be beneficial for marriage as men and women help each other along the steep, snowy road on their way to offer prayers. In this issue, we asked Shinichi Nishizaka, the chairman of the "Oyama Keijinkai," the group that has carried on the traditional techniques used to make the giant waraji straw sandal offering, about its history, points of interest, and the secret to making the straw sandals.

③The giant waraji was originally an offering to Nio-sama, the demon gatekeeper.

The "Shinobu Sanzan Akatsuki Mairi" is a festival at Haguro Shrine nestled in Mt. Shinobu, which consists of the three peaks, Mt. Haguro in the center, Mt. Hayama to the west, and Mt. Kumano to the east. It is said the giant waraji straw sandal was originally an offering to the Nio-sama demon gatekeeper once enshrined in the Nio-gate within the shrine grounds. The task of making the 12m long, 1.4m wide and 2 ton giant sandal is undertaken by the members of the Oyama Keijinkai. When we asked the association's chairman, Shinichi Nishizaka, about the group's activities he explained, "In addition to the Akatsuki Mairi, we make giant straw sandals to represent Fukushima at events both within Japan and overseas. We are also often invited to comprehensive learning classes at local elementary schools and teach the students how to make straw sandals and decorations for New Year's."



Approximately 2,000 bundles of rice straw are used. Production starts with the 'No-no-Hajime'(first farming ceremony).

It is easy to say giant waraji straw sandal, but exactly how much rice straw is used? "We require 2,000 bundles. It is such a vast amount that there have been times when we had a hard time gathering it all. Now we have a contract with a farm that delivers the rice straw, which is quite a relief." To make a beautiful sandal preparations must be completed beforehand. Mr. Nishizaka and the other members finish the straw pounding and cleaning at the end of the year before ringing in the New Year. "We start production with our own feelings refreshed on January 11th when the farmers perform their 'No-no-Hajime' first farming ceremony and make the offering on February 10th."

The "Children's Waraji" entertains the bystanders with their energetic rallying cries.

"I'm looking forward to it again this year," says Mr. Nishizaka referring to the "Children's Waraji Parade" held for the first time last year. "Last year, 500 elementary school students from the city took turns carrying two 2.5m long, 70kg waraji straw sandals. I want as many people as possible to see the giant waraji the adults carry and the 'Children's Waraji' carried by the energy-filled elementary school children." With the god for opening roads, Tengu leading, the Shinobu Sanzan Akatsuki Mairi purifies the road to the shrine while the giant waraji and the clamoring rallying cries of the people carrying it entertain people. Wouldn't you like to witness this traditional Fukushima event yourself?

P8

①Fukushima Sweets Contest 2016

Winner Introduction

The "Fukushima Sweets Contest 2016" called for entries using Fukushima-bred pears. There were 314 entries from around the country, and 7 awards, including a Grand Prix award, were granted in 2 categories, "Pro" and "General/Student." The Fukushima Sweets Contest has previously been held with the theme of apples, peaches, and pears, all well-known Fukushima City fruits. The winning entries will each be commercialized and sold in peak season.

②On the cover

Winter scenery Tatsugoyama Shimi Tofu

Cover explanation: Shimi Tofu is a local specialty of the Tatsugoyama district passed down since the Taisho era for approximately 100 years. Shimi Tofu drying in the sun is a typical winter scene in Tatsugoyama, and an important step in the process to condense nutrition and rich flavor into the tofu in the cold air. We hope you will try the traditional Shimi Tofu made by commercial farmers almost entirely by hand.

