



Special Edition

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Miyadaiku carpenter lives Ise Shrine legacy

With a 2,000-year history of ethnic and religious tolerance, and embracing diversity, Ise Jingu, or the Ise Grand Shrine, is the heart and soul of the Japanese people. Helping to preserve this precious legacy is the *miyadaiku*, a carpenter who specializes in building and preserving Japanese architecture, particularly shrines and temples.

Ise Jingu holds a grand festival every 20 years called *Shikinen Sengu*, where the two key shrines, Naiku, the Inner Shrine, and Geku, the Outer Shrine, are completely rebuilt by the *miyadaiku*. At age 84, Kumao Miyama has had the honor of working on the *Sengu* three times. "I want visitors to the G-7 Ise-Shima Summit to see Ise Jingu. Although there are many old things in the world, Ise Jingu is very special," he said.

Miyama became a *miyadaiku* when he was 18 and experienced his first *Shikinen Sengu* at the age of 21. After his second *Sengu* at the age of 41, in 1993, he

became the *so-toryo*, or the leader of the *miyadaiku* for his third experience of the 61st *Shikinen Sengu*. His pride in his work is clearly evident in his words: "As a *miyadaiku*, doing a good job is to be expected." Building shrines is very difficult because of the unique architectural style called *yuiitsu shinmei-zukuri*. Miyama said they were building houses not for humans but for the gods, so they make sure every part is beautiful, even if it is out of sight. When he accomplished his job as *so-toryo*, he said he felt a sense of achievement. He is now dedicated to training the next generation of *miyadaiku*.

But passing on the legacy to the next generation is not easy because of the changing times. For example, it is getting more difficult to get enough quality wood. While the number of thick and hard trees is decreasing, the size of shrines can't be changed, so instead of using one wooden board, they now use two



PHOTO BY AINO SUZUKI

Kumao Miyama, an 84-year-old *miyadaiku* carpenter

similar boards. Miyama said that the wooden materials used for old shrine buildings are not thrown away but are brought to other shrines all over Japan to be reused.

Miyama said that he did not have faith in the gods when he was young. "However, I came to become more thankful to the gods as I got older. I am truly thankful for them because I was able to work as a *miyadaiku* for 49 years and I never had any serious injuries or accidents," he



The torii gate at the entrance of the Inner shrine

said. Miyama believes it is always better to have sincerity and gratitude rather than dissatisfaction or complaints. "We can't see the gods, but it all depends on how we think about them," he said. "*Shikinen Sengu* is an occasion to inherit not only traditions but also sincerity, gratitude, wisdom and the pride of conserving Japanese traditions. The times are changing, but these lessons will not change."

By Saya Ishimaru, Aino Suzuki, Minami Nakamura and Mirai Nakamura

Mie is 'hometown' of Japanese spirituality: Gov. Suzuki

Mie Prefecture, the venue of the upcoming Group of Seven summit at Ise-Shima, is the "spiritual hometown" of the Japanese, imbued with a spirituality that transcends differences in religions, races and generations, according to Mie Gov. Eikei Suzuki.

"Mie is home to Ise Shrine, famed for a spirituality that embraces diversity and allows people to live together in harmony," Suzuki said as his message from Mie Prefecture to the foreign leaders and visitors on the occasion of the G-7 summit.

In an interview with The Yamasho Times at his office, the former trade and industry ministry bureaucrat said that Mie abounds in culture and tradition,



Mie Gov. Eikei Suzuki (center)

in addition to its natural beauty.

"In the ancient cities of Kyoto and Nara, you can see many historical and traditional landmarks, like temples or pagodas. These places are the center of Japan's visible culture. On the other hand, Mie is full of invisible but valuable things," Suzuki said, in an apparent reference to the Japanese spirituality inherent in Ise Shrine's tradition, physical structures and teach-

ings.

The former bureaucrat also said that local people in Mie are known for their centuries-old hospitality. "So many people have been visiting Ise Shrine to pray especially since the Edo Period. Not a few pilgrims or visitors had difficulties on their way because they did not have much money or food, so local people living along the main road to the shrine gave them lodgings and alms. We have inherited the cordial hospitality that we provide to visitors from our ancestors and cherish it."

While emphasizing that his prefecture is fully prepared to ensure the safety of foreign VIPs and other guests during the summit, the governor hoped that

visitors will enjoy Mie's natural beauty and its attractions, especially Matsusaka beef, which is widely regarded as the best beef in Japan, *Ise-ebi* (spiny lobsters) and *Ise udon* noodles. "Please don't forget that Mie is a treasure house of delicious food," he said.

By Hinata Nishimura and Moe Hashimoto

NOTICE TO READERS

The Yamasho Times was created by a group of 29 selected students of Ujiyamada Commercial High School in Ise City, Mie Prefecture. The first, second and third graders of the commercial high school have endeavored to portray their prefecture and the school for non-Japanese visitors/tourists on the occasion of the G-7 Ise-Shima Summit due for May 26-27 in Mie Prefecture – Editor

MARINE RESOURCES

Wagu fishermen work to save *Ise-ebi* lobsters

Ise-ebi, or “Japanese spiny lobsters,” are a local specialty of the Ise-Shima area in Mie Prefecture. Wagu Fishing Port, located in the south of the Shima Peninsula, boasts one of the largest catches of the lobsters, thanks to the efforts of the fishermen who work there.

Mitsuyasu Nishizeko, a Wagu fisherman said, “We’ve worked hard for a long time to sustain catches of *Ise-ebi* lobsters, but now we are facing serious problems.” Nishizeko said hauls of *Ise-ebi* have been decreasing due to environmental changes



Ise-ebi lobsters

such as global warming. For instance, rising sea temperatures prevent seaweed and plankton, both important food for *Ise-ebi*, from growing.

Also, people find it difficult to make a living by fishing, and young people tend not to think positively about being fisher-

men. “The aging of fishermen and a lack of successors are problems that need to be solved as soon as possible,” Nishizeko said.

Even under such severe circumstances, the Wagu fishermen continue to live with the sea, willing to face the many dangers they encounter in nature. They said they hope to share with the next generation how attractive the sea is and pass on the traditional fishing methods that help protect the precious *Ise-ebi* and the environment.

Ama divers go deep to preserve 2,000-year-old tradition

The *ama* divers — literally “women of the sea” — catch shellfish without the help of modern diving equipment. But these women of the sea are struggling to preserve their 2,000-year-old tradition due to environmental problems and other issues facing modern Japan.

The *ama* are mostly female divers who collect shells and seaweed using the traditional “skin diving” technique that has been practiced for more than 2,000 years. They use a peculiar breathing technique called *isobue*, or “sea whistle,” which is a piercing exhalation of breath after a dive so that their lungs can take in air quickly and also to let other divers know they are safe.

Today there are only 12 wom-



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en working as *ama* divers at Wagu Fishing Port. Most of them have been diving since they were 15 or 16 years old, and are now over 70. Seventy-five-year-old Toyoko Anori said their long-held technique has been handed down from generation to generation. However, environ-

mental issues such as water pollution have made it difficult for them to catch enough shellfish to make a living.

In 1972, there were 4,124 *ama* in Mie, but a lack of successors has caused the number to decrease gradually over the years. According to a survey, there were only 761 *ama* left in 2014. In an attempt to preserve the tradition, there is a movement to register *ama* with the UNESCO Intangible Culture Heritage List.

Despite the difficulties they face, Anori, like her fellow *ama* divers, has no intention of quitting anytime soon. “I am very proud of being an *ama* and believe that the sea has a charm you cannot express in words.”

By Nana Nishizeko, Haruka Hamaguchi and Yuki Umemoto

Teenagers Junior Summit takes fresh look at global issues

Teenagers from the Group of Seven major industrialized democracies got together in Kuwana, Mie Prefecture, from April 22 to 28 and engaged in heated discussions on global issues at a Junior Summit.

The “2016 Junior Summit in Mie” was related to the G-7 Ise-Shima Summit due to be held May 26-27 in Shima. The main theme of the Junior Summit was “The planet for the next generation: environment and sustainable society,” with two sub-themes, “Coexistence of environmental protection and

economic development,” and “Toward a better society and a better world.”

At the end of the forum, the participants issued the “Kuwana Junior Communique,” outlining the outcomes of their debate about climate change, economic disparities, human resources development and gender. They presented the document to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on April 27 at his official residence in Tokyo, hoping that their proposals will have a positive impact on the Ise-Shima summit.

Of the four Japanese partici-

pants, two students were chosen from local high schools in Mie Prefecture. Haruki Inaba, one of the two, said, in an interview with The Yamasho Times, “On the first day, I found that other delegates spoke English very quickly and with a strong accent. So it was difficult to listen to it at first. But I got used to it gradually and I felt deep emotion when we finally could issue the Kuwana Junior Communique.”

By Otome Okumura and Hinako Minami

Yamasho graduate is enchanted by pearls

The beauty of pearls never fails to enchant people all over the world. But not many people know how these beautiful pearls are cultured. Yuiko Nakamura, a graduate of Ujiyamada Commercial High School, was so beguiled by them that she decided to work for one of the pearl oyster nurseries in Mie Prefecture.

The process of creating pearls takes a long time, Nakamura explained. First, the farmers must breed good shells from baby shells. In order to produce beautiful pearls, it is necessary to



raise good-quality shells. It normally takes two years for the baby shells to mature.

After implanting the nucleus, the oysters are suspended on strings under the sea from rafts. It takes another two years for the nucleus to grow into a good-sized pearl. During the two years, farmers have to clean the oysters and make sure they are not damaged by severe weather, such as typhoons. Finally, the pearls are taken out of the oyster shells. This process, called *hamaage*, is always carried out in winter.

Nakamura said that during the process of culturing pearls, many oyster pearls die. What is worse, not all of the pearls taken out of the oysters are good enough to sell. Only 10 percent of all of the pearl oysters can produce cultured pearls of a high enough commercial quality. “That is why pearls are considered to be valuable and precious,” she said.

“Before I started working here, I just thought pearls were beautiful things. However, now I know how rare and precious they are. I would like to pass down this technique of culturing pearls to the next generation,” she said.

By Ayaka Nakano, Tomoko Isetani and Itsuko Kadoya

REGIONAL GOODIES

Farmers promote Matsusaka brand of *wagyu* beef

When it comes to *wagyu*, or Japanese beef, Kobe beef is known around the world. But not many people are familiar with another brand of *wagyu*, Matsusaka beef, produced in Matsusaka City, Mie Prefecture. Matsusaka beef farmers are working hard to promote their local specialty at home and overseas.

Kazunori Matsumoto, a producer of Matsusaka beef, explained that he tries to make his products more competitive by producing top quality beef. Only 3 percent of top quality Matsusaka beef is certified as *tokusan*. To be considered *tokusan*, the cattle need to be fattened for more than 900 days. The calves are raised in spacious sheds to avoid stress and fed twice a day, sometimes with beer to stimulate their appetites.

The fat of Matsusaka beef melts at a low temperature and the flavor of the meat fascinates many people. Perhaps the best way to eat Matsusaka beef is as



sukiyaki, a popular hot pot dish in Japan.

Wanting to promote the brand not only in Japan but overseas, a Japanese delegation from Mie visited Florida's Orlando City in January 2015 to introduce Matsusaka beef to the United States for the very first time. Matsumoto said the response was very good, especially the reaction to the beef's flavor. "I want to make better beef and increase the proportion of the special grade beef to keep the tradition of *tokusan* going," Matsumoto said.

By Miaki Otsuki

Mie's *mochi* and *anko* desserts will satisfy any sweet tooth

Mie Prefecture is known for its many different kinds of desserts, including the popular *akafuku*, or *mochi* rice cake covered with sweet *anko* bean paste. But only a few people may be aware that some of the other local specialties — *tsuitachi mochi* and *akafuku gori* — are only sold for a limited period every year.

Tsuitachi mochi is sold only on the first day of every month, except January. In Ise, there is a

custom to visit Ise Shrine early on the first day of the month to thank the gods and pray for a good new month. The *tsuitachi mochi* is made to welcome such visitors to the shrine.

People make a long line every month to purchase the different kinds of *tsuitachi mochi*. May's *tsuitachi-mochi* was *kashiwa mochi*, which is *mochi* and *anko* wrapped in an oak leaf, that look like our hands when we are

praying. Oak leaves symbolize praying for the prosperity of offspring because the leaves do not fall until new leaves sprout. The dessert is wrapped in beautifully designed paper called Ise *chiyogami*, also considered an important intangible cultural property. The May wrapping was an iris, also a prefectural flower of Mie.

The *akafuku-gori*, which is *mochi* and *anko* topped with shaved ice, and laced with *matcha* green tea syrup, is sold only during summer. It was created in 1961 to welcome guests who came to Futami-ura to enjoy sea bathing in summer. It is sold from mid-April till mid-October every year.

A chance to enjoy the *akafuku* and other sweets from all over Japan will be the 27th National Confectionary Exposition in Mie, in April 2017. Held every four years, the expo is coming to the prefecture for the first time.

By Nanako Isowa and Miko Okamoto

Ninja 'super powers' mystify foreigners: Japanese scholar

Ninja fascinate people all over the world, but a Japanese expert says that the ninja did not have mystical martial powers as many foreigners seem to think, but were skillful spies that blended in with the common people.

"The images foreign people have of ninja are wrong most of the time," said Yuji Yamada, a professor of the Faculty of Humanities, Law and Economics at Mie University.

"They tend to think that ninja are very mysterious people who have extraordinary powers, but that's wrong," he said, explaining that this is because people are influenced by animation and *manga* that feature wrong images of ninja.

In fact, the ninja were not warriors but rather skillful spies. Their main duty was to pass on important pieces of information to their masters. They sneaked into enemy territory and castles to obtain useful information such as troop numbers and deployments, and the structure and layout of fortifications.

Some people believe that ninja wore black uniforms and moved like shadows, but the ninja actually wore brown or navy blue clothes so that they could blend in with farmers or enemy soldiers. The number of ninja decreased after the Edo Period because Japan entered a period of peace.

According to Yamada, there are three abilities that a ninja was required to have: "wisdom" to adjust or react to any sudden incident; "memory" to retain important information; and "communication skills" to get a lot of information from others. "Actually these abilities are what we also need in this modern world," Yamada said, adding that is why people from all around the world never cease to be fascinated by ninja.

By Airi Kataoka and Mahiro Hamazaki



PHOTOS COURTESY OF AKAFUKU CO.



ALMA MATER

Olympic gold medalist Noguchi proud of Mie, her alma mater

Mizuki Noguchi, the winner of the women's marathon gold medal at the 2004 Athens Olympics, said she is proud of her native Mie Prefecture for hosting this year's G-7 summit.

"I hope the G-7 leaders will recognize Mie's splendid natural beauty and delicious food, and that the summit produces good results," said Noguchi, an Ise native and a graduate of Ujiamada Commercial High School.

The 37-year-old Noguchi set the Japanese national record of 2 hours, 19 minutes, 12 seconds at the Berlin Marathon in 2005, a record that still has not been broken. She was the first Japanese woman to win the hat trick of the three major Japanese mar-

athons: Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya. In April this year, she announced her retirement from competitive running.

Her answers to a brief questionnaire by e-mail follow:

Question: What are the attractions of Mie?

Answer: Definitely, Ise Shrine. Besides that, we are proud of Matsusaka beef, and such sea products as Ise-ebi (spiny lobsters) and turban shells. I feel Mie is the place that abounds in nature, food and history in a well-balanced way. My favorite places in Mie, which I recommend to foreign visitors, are Ise Shrine, the Nagashima Spa Land and Parque Espana, dubbed Spanish Village, among



PHOTO COURTESY OF MIZUKI NOGUCHI

Mizuki Noguchi, a graduate of Ujiamada Commercial High School others.

Q: How did you feel about your career as a runner looking back on the Olympics?

A: I am very happy that I was able to get the gold medal in Athens where marathon races and the Olympics originated. Greece is a country full of myths and Mie is a divine land, charac-

terized by the presence of Ise Shrine. Of course, I put in the hard work myself, but in hindsight, I feel as if I was driven by something divine to win the gold.

Q: Will you tell us about your days at Yamasho?

A: While I was a student at Yamasho, I started as a sprinter, but I noticed I was able to run faster than my seniors at school. Therefore, I decided to be a long-distance runner. I could devote myself to studies and club activities. I learned a lot from teachers, especially Akira Yamamoto who was in charge of the school's track club. I made many good friends. I owe much to the three splendid years at Yamasho, including my success as a marathon runner. Thank you all very much!

By Miyuki Sakanashi and Itsuko Kadoya

School cooks up original products

Ujiamada Commercial High School opened a "Net-shop (online shop)" four years ago to market original products developed by its students with the help of local food makers. As a part of the school's regular courses, its third-year students take part in this project to show the results of what they have studied for three years.

So far, the students have developed four original products, including Salt Vanilla Bouchée, a kind of cake, which was developed and marketed at the school's online shop in 2013. One of the ingredients is natural salt containing minerals pro-



duced in Futami, Ise City.

The salt was dedicated as an offering at a ritual during Shikinen-Sengu, a grand festival of Ise Shrine, where the two key shrines are completely rebuilt every 20 years.



After the success of that cake, the students spent two years developing a Salt Vanilla Ice Roll Cake. The ice cake was a big hit and all the cakes sold out.

Two more products have been developed: Ise Arare, small rice crackers, which contain aosa (sea lettuce), a local specialty of Ise, and Okara Balls of Ise Hijiki, meatballs with soybean curd lee and seaweed. The students designed the packages for these products themselves.



The number of local companies that help and cooperate with Yamasho has been increasing. The school plans to continue this project.

By Izumi Furuo, Ayaka Tsutsumi and Nodoka Kobayashi

Students are Yamasho's true vocation

Ujiamada Commercial High School, known as "Yamasho" in short by local people, was founded in 1908. As a commercial high school, Yamasho offers a wide range of career guidance to respond to student needs.

At Yamasho, students can get many qualifications that will help them get a job or progress to the next level of education — bookkeeping certifications, IT passports, commercial economics, secretarial qualifications and English proficiency tests. The fact that Yamasho offers so many opportunities and possibilities to acquire such a variety of qualifications makes it a great vocational school.

The school's motto is *bunbu ryodo*, which means that we have to work hard in our studies and club activities. At Yamasho, all of the students are required to join club activities. Some students join more than one because there are a lot of different clubs (12 sports clubs and 17 cultural clubs).

Among them, the school's track and field club is famous not only in Mie but all over Japan. One of its coaches, Hirofumi Koike, is a former sprinter who participated in the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

By Kotetsu Tamagawa, Sakura Kohori, Moeka Yoshikawa, Hanaho Yoshimura, Maho Matsunaga and Hina Nakano, and Moe Maeda

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