

10th Anniversary of the Friendship between Taipei and Matsuyama

Matsuyama City and Taipei City in Taiwan have been promoting exchanges in fields such as tourism, culture, and sports since the two cities concluded a friendship exchange agreement in October, 2014. In October of this year, they will celebrate the 10th anniversary of the agreement. The officials of Matsuyama participated in the Taipei Lantern Festival and displayed a special exhibition of the artwork titled “Afterglow: Light and Shadow Life” using the former bathhouse as the venue from February 2 to March 3. The works were created by Miwa Abukawa, a photographer and film director who also worked on “Dogo Onsen Annex Asuka-no-Yu Courtyard Installation”.

The regular route connecting the two cities, which had been canceled due to the COVID pandemic, resumed operations on March 6 for the first time in about four years. There are two round trips a week on Sundays and Wednesdays. From March 20 to April 30, in anticipation of cherry blossom viewing, the flights will be increased to four round trips a week, including Thursdays and Saturdays. (March 15, Koho Matsuyama, March 6, Ehime Shimbun online)

Avatar Robot Guides Visitors

WIN Co., Ltd., a system development company located in Matsuyama, and avatarin Inc. a robot development company located in Tokyo, carried out an experiment to provide guide service to visitors at Bansui-so, an important cultural property, through an avatar robot operated at Matsuyama Airport.

The robot can be controlled remotely to move. Its neck has a tablet device that is movable, and also it is possible to talk with him.

The robots were placed at the airport and Bansui-so. An English guide stationed at the airport remotely controlled the robot in Bansui-so, and provided the information about the building for foreign visitors in English.

Ms. Yukako Chikazawa, the manager of Bansui-so, who was in charge of the English guide experiment said that it was easy to control the robot and could be used to provide the guide service from a distance.

The experiment was a part of an Ehime prefecture startup collaboration promotion project to promote a business by matching an enterprise in the prefecture and startups in the Tokyo area.

Mr. Sadayuki Tanaka, the head of the Matsuyama office of the Development Bank of Japan Inc. supporting the project, said that the region was facing issues such as the shortage of labor caused by population decrease, and expected that

this scheme could contribute to the nursing care and medical industries as well as tourism.

(March 12, Asahi Shimbun Digital)

The Most Number of Foreign Workers Recorded

The Ehime Labor Bureau announced the employment status of foreign nationals in the prefecture (as of October 2023). The number of foreign workers was 12,476 (+22.3% compared with the previous year), and the number of enterprises employing foreign workers was 2,131 (+7.3%). Both were the most after 2007 when it became mandatory to submit a report on the employment status of foreign nationals. The Labor Bureau reported that it seemed that the areas of construction, manufacturing, medical, healthcare, and welfare were proactively accepting foreign workers.

As for the status of residence, Technical Intern Trainings was held by the most workers at 6,629 (53.1% of the total). The number in the professional and special fields was 3,632 (29.1%). 2,298 out of 3,632 were Specified Skilled Workers working in the industries where it is difficult to seek and secure the workforce domestically (+117% compared with the previous year). The bureau stated that the number had increased because of not only the shortage of labor, but also the change of the status of residence and the relaxation of restrictions on entering the country after the COVID pandemic.

The most were Vietnamese 3,768 (30.2%), followed by Philipinos 3,135 (25.1%), and Chinese 1,695 (13.6%). The industry which accepted the most foreign workers was manufacturing; 816 companies (38.3%) where 7,060 were working (56.6% of the total). The rates of increase compared with last year by industry were +29.3% in agriculture and forestry, +26.5% in manufacturing, and +25.9% in medical, healthcare and welfare, which are the industries facing a serious shortage of labor.

As for the size of enterprises, 1,360 with less than 30 employees (63.8%), 459 with 30 – 99 employees (21.5%), 246 with 100 – 499 employees (11.5%), and 65 with 500 employees or more (3.1%). By the area, 3,780 in Imabari (30.3%), and 3,567 in Matsuyama (28.6%).

The Bureau predicts that the number of enterprises accepting foreign labor will increase since the issue of the shortage of workers will not easily be solved. Also, they expect that the workers from Myanmar, Indonesia, and Cambodia will increase.

(March 8, Ehime Shimbun ONLINE)

Rear Seatbelt Use Rate

Ehime Prefectural Police and the Ehime Branch of JAF (Japan Automobile Federation) announced that the rate of rear seatbelt use cars driven in the prefecture was 32.8%, the third worst in Japan. It was 36.9% last year, the worst in the past 5 years.

The investigation was conducted in November 2023 at 13 spots on ordinary roads and two spots on highways. The seatbelt use on ordinary roads was 98.7% for the driver's seat (nation average is 99.2%), 93.4% for the passenger seat (nationwide average is 97.4%) and 32.8% for the rear seat (nationwide average was 43.7%). All the rates were less than the national average.

According to the renewed Road Traffic Act implemented in June 2008, fastening seatbelts is mandatory for all seats. However, there is no penalty for a violation on an ordinary road, although a ticket is issued on the highway.

According to the traffic division of the prefectural police, nine people were killed in a traffic accident in 2023 in the prefecture, and one of the nine victims did not fasten the seatbelt. Fastening your seatbelt, even on ordinary roads, is strongly recommended.

(March 5, Yomiuri Shimbun Online)

Eighty-Year-Old Graduate Enjoys her Youth

On March 1, an 80-year-old graduated from Matsuyama School for the Blind, the oldest in the school's history. Yoshie Nakagawa, a third year high school student, had been learning massage techniques in the health and physical therapy department at the school. According to the school, there are many other schools for the blind that do not limit the age for admission, but 80-year-old graduates are rare in Japan.

She was born in 1943 in northeastern China (formerly Manchuria). When she was about 4 years old, her family moved to Uwajima City, and when she got married, she moved to Saijo. She became a single mother and raised two daughters by running a coffee shop. In her late 30s, she underwent surgery for cataracts. She had been suffering from poor sight in her right eye, and when she fell when cleaning her bathroom, she lost the sight in her left eye and broke a bone. She didn't go out on her own as often as before. Since the surgery, she gave herself moxa treatments for over 40 years. She kept notes about the moxa

in around 90 notebooks, and desired to learn more about anatomy. When she received her disability certificate, she remembered her relative went to the Matsuyama School for the Blind, and called there directly, saying, "I'm 77 years old, can I apply?" After entering the school, she did everything she could. She said, "I was excited. I studied so much that I almost fell over trying to get a good score on the test." On weekdays, she lived in a dormitory with children from elementary school to high school. She also tried swimming for the first time in 60 years in class. Other students affectionately called her "Kae-chan".

She formed a band with her teachers and younger friends at the school festival, and she sang the vocals to the melody of Southern All Stars. "I love you, Matsuyama School for the Blind, with all my heart. I found my life with you." At the graduation ceremony, she wore a green hakama with cherry blossom embroidery and received her diploma. The principal thanked her in a speech, saying, "She was like the sun, and she brought energy to both adults and children." Her second daughter congratulated her, saying, "When I heard she was going to enroll, I was worried about whether she would be able to continue attending, but she has had a fulfilling school life and has become even more energetic."

(March 2, Ehime Shimbun)

Iyotetsu to Expand Usage of Nationwide Transportation IC Cards

The Iyotetsu Group introduced 10 types of nationwide transportation IC cards, such as ICOCA by JR West and Suica by JR East to all Iyotetsu tram lines and the Matsuyama Airport limousine bus this March. They announced on February 26 that it would expand the use of such cards in March, 2025, for all train and bus lines, excluding the Iyotetsu Nanyo bus. Commuter passes will be sold only as IcoCa from March, 2025. For office commuter passes, users can choose from the card type and the smartphone app, Mobile ICOCA. Iyotetsu says, "We recommend that customers take advantage of the convenient app that doesn't require them to visit the store." School commuter passes are currently card-based and the app is under development. Users are required to visit the store to present their certificate of enrollment. The group's own IC Card service will be discontinued in September, 2025.

(February 27, Ehime Shimbun)