

## **Passionately Recommending a Favorite Book**

A Bibliobattle, a competition in which students talk about the appeal of their favorite books, was held in Matsuyama on September 14, and 12 middle and high school students from the city competed enthusiastically. Matsuyama Central Library has been holding the event every year since 2014 to encourage students to become interested in reading. Each contestant spoke about one book for five minutes, quoting unforgettable passages, and answered questions from the audience and other contestants. The champion book was decided in each of three groups by voting for the book most wanted to read. One of the winners, who introduced "A Stone by the Roadside" by Yūzō Yamamoto, talked about how this book helped her grow, saying, "I learned to think positively by emulating the protagonist's positive way of thinking even in difficult situations." She added happily, "I'm glad many people have recognized the fascination of my favorite book."

(September 16, Ehime Shimbun)

Note:

Bibliobattle is a reading meeting in a competition style. It started at Kyoto University in 2007.

"A stone by the Roadside"(Robo-no-Ishi) is a novel that originally was serialized in the Asahi Newspaper in 1937.

## **Welcome Back to Ehime, Paralympic Medalists**

On September 12, two Paris Paralympic medalists returned to Matsuyama Airport. Junko Hirose, aged 33 from Matsuyama City, won the first gold medal as a Japanese woman in judo at the Paralympics, and Naohide Yamaguchi, aged 23 from Imabari City, won the bronze medal in men's swimming. People welcomed them with banners and congratulated them on their feats in Paris.

Junko Hirose arrived in the morning and hugged her husband and coach, Yū aged 45. Yū had watched her bout in Paris and returned to Japan earlier than her. Having reached the goal of her long-cherished dream through three consecutive Paralympics, Junko greeted her supporters, saying, "My strong desire to win led to the gold medal. The support from my hometown gave me strength." Members of the judo club at Matsuyama Technical High School, which is her training base, celebrated her achievement with a banner.

Yamaguchi arrived early in the afternoon and was greeted by people from Shikoku Gas, the company he works for. He expressed his gratitude, saying, "I wanted to win gold, but this bronze is proof that I gave it my all," regarding the 100-meter breaststroke race, where he aimed for his second consecutive victory. He also revealed that he broke a toe about a month before the race and at that time was unable to walk, almost giving up all hope of participating in the Paralympics. Now he said, "I will focus on my treatment. I want to refresh myself by eating delicious food from Ehime."

(September 13, Ehime Shimbun)

## **First Saizeriya Restaurant in Ehime**

Saizeriya Co., Ltd. located in Saitama prefecture which manages and operates an Italian restaurant chain announced that they would launch their restaurant at the “SOYORA Imabari-Umagoe”, with the full renovation of the AEON Imabari shopping mall, which will open in mid-November. It is going to be their first restaurant in Ehime. The opening hours will be from 10:00 am to 11:00 pm.

Saizeriya Co., Ltd. was founded in 1973. According to the company, they directly import the ingredients from Italy, and offer authentic Italian cuisine at reasonable prices.

There are 1,038 Saizeriya restaurants in Japan as of the end of May. There are only eight prefectures, including Ehime, Tokushima and Kochi, where they have not yet had any restaurants.

(September 11, Ehime Shimbun Online)

## **Demonstration Test for Power Generation**

Using Microorganisms in Mikan Orange Orchards

Shikoku Electric Power (Yonden) and a research team from Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology have begun a demonstration test of “microbial power generation” in mikan (mandarin) orange orchards in Yawatahama City and Ikata Town, Ehime Prefecture. The method uses “microbial fuel cells”, which generate weak electricity by storing electrons released by microorganisms that decompose organic matter in the soil and generate hydrogen ions. This year, the team will investigate whether power generation is affected by climate and seasonal changes. From next year, they aim to apply the generated electricity for “smart agriculture” to remotely monitor data such as the temperature of the orchards.

The university began researching microbial power generation in 2019. According to Associate Professor Keisuke Matsumura (28), “Although it has been known for about 100 years that microorganisms release electrons, research for practical use has not progressed because of the small amount of electricity produced. In recent years, technologies such as microbial fuel cells have been developed, and other universities have been conducting similar trials in rice paddies.”

The university has also developed a power storage device that can temporarily generate a relatively large amount of electricity. The generated electricity has been successfully used to turn light-emitting diodes (LED) on and off and for wireless data transmission.

Microorganisms that release electrons exist naturally in the environment. When being used to generate electricity, they do not need to be cultivated to increase their numbers, and the soil can be used as is. Once the device is buried in the soil, it can generate power using only the nutrients in the soil. To apply this

environmentally friendly technology to agriculture, the university decided to collaborate with Yonden and others for this test.

The technology is also seen as an effective way of helping aging farmers. If the device can be used to remotely monitor the temperature and other conditions in mandarin orchards, which are often on steep slopes, it could reduce the burden on farmers having to check their orchards.

In the university's experiment, a single device containing about 350 cubic centimeters of soil was confirmed to generate about 10 microwatts of electricity. The demonstration test should confirm whether stable power can be generated in an actual field.

On September 4th, Matsumura and his team buried the device about 30 centimeters underground in a mandarin orchard managed by a Yonden group company in Yawatahama, about 200 meters above sea level, and began measuring the voltage. Matsumura said, "The amount of electricity generated is small, but we want to use the small amount of energy hidden in the soil around us to benefit agriculture. We also want to confirm the differences in electricity generation depending on the type of soil, and show that microbial power generation can be used." Hiroyuki Mishima, general manager of Shikoku Electric Power's New Business Department, added, "We want to apply this technology to solve regional issues. With its simple structure, there is a possibility that it can be provided at low cost."

(September 9, Yomiuri Shimbun Online)

## **Uchiko-za Closed for Repairs**

Uchiko-za, an Important Cultural Property, built in 1916 has been closed since September 2, 2024 and is now in preparation for preservation and repair work. The construction is planned to start in this year with plans to reopen in March 2029. The person in charge in Uchiko town says that Uchiko-za which is not only a legacy but also a pride of the residents in the town must be passed on to the next generation.

It was originally planned to close in Autumn 2023 for the construction. However, it was delayed by a year since the budget for Uchiko-za was not allocated by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. It will be the first major construction since 1985. The total budget for this project is 800 million yen for seismic reinforcement work for ceilings and walls as well as renewal of air conditioners and fire prevention facilities.

Uchiko-za hosts about 100 performances a year including the ones for exclusive use, and also is open to the public for a fee to see the stage and equipment. Uchiko town will start an alternative tour of the dressing room where the autographs of famous performers could be found on the walls, and a video to show the history and pictures of current construction work. A construction site visit will be held in accordance with the progress.

A part of the construction cost will be covered by Furusato-Nozei (Hometown

Tax Donation Program) and crowdfunding which will be launched shortly on the Internet.

(September 6, Yomiuri Shimbun Online)

## **Recruitment and Training of Local Interpreter Guides in Imabari**

In October, Imabari will begin training “local interpreter guides” who can effectively convey the region’s attractions to tourists in foreign languages. This initiative is the first of its kind by a local government in the prefecture. It aims to promote Imabari’s tourism resources, which are not limited to cycling, and further reveal its hidden charms, focusing on the demand from foreign visitors for cycling on the Shimanami Kaido.

On September 1st, just after Typhoon No. 10 had passed, tourists arrived at the “Sunrise Itoyama” (Imabari) cycling terminal, overlooking the Kurushima Strait. The terminal is one of the key points on the Imabari side of the “Shimanami Kaido Cycling Road” (approximately 70 km) that connects Imabari and Onomichi in Hiroshima Prefecture. It offers 200–300 bicycles of various types, including electric-assist and sports models. Once the tourists have completed the rental procedure, they can start their bicycle trip.

Japanese tourists come on weekends and foreign tourists on weekdays to enjoy the unique experience of cycling across the bridges spanning the strait and the beauty of the many islands of the Seto Inland Sea. International tourists come from all over the world, including Taiwan, Europe, and South America. A staff member expressed the hope the interpreter guides can introduce visitors to the many attractions of Imabari beyond cycling, encouraging them to explore further and contribute to local tourism.

Local interpreter guides provide paid guiding services to foreign tourists in specific areas. Unlike nationally licensed interpreter guides who are not restricted to any region, local interpreter guides are certified by prefectures and municipalities. Imabari is the first city in the prefecture to introduce the system. Kagawa and Kochi prefectures in Shikoku introduced similar programs in 2018. The majority of foreign tourists who visit Imabari do so for cycling along the Shimanami Kaido or for pilgrimage routes like the Shikoku 88 Temple Pilgrimage. Introducing local interpreter guides not only provides high-quality tourism services tailored to specific needs but also has the potential to discover new tourism resources that will appeal to foreign visitors, generating a ripple effect throughout the area.

Those who pass the preliminary language proficiency test on September 29th will then undergo an 11-day training program, mostly on weekends, from October 12th to December 14th. During the training, participants will deepen their knowledge of Imabari's geography, history, culture, local products, and other tourism resources, as well as learn cycling etiquette and rules. They will also acquire first aid knowledge and techniques.

Oral exams will be held in December, with the aim of training around 10 local

interpreter guides proficient in English this year.  
(September 3, Yomiuri Shimbun Online)