

Learn More about Organ Transplants

Since October is "Organ Transplant Promotion Month," Ehime Prefecture held an awareness-raising activity in Imabari, north of Matsuyama, on October 13. They called for understanding and cooperation for transplant medicine.

About 20 members of the Prefectural Kidney Disease Patients Liaison Council and prefectural officials distributed 1,200 sets of organ donation intention cards and awareness leaflets. They explained that in Japan of the about 16,000 people on the transplant waiting list, only three percent are able to receive a transplant each year. The chairman of the council said, "About 40% of the population are willing to donate organs, but only about 10% of them have made intention cards. We want to create an opportunity for people to think about organ transplants with their family."

(October 17, Ehime Shimbun)

First Ride-sharing service in Shikoku in Matsuyama

Shikoku District Transport Bureau issued "Ride-sharing service" permits to 8 taxi firms in and around Matsuyama-city, in which people use their personal vehicles to offer paid rides under the management of taxi operators. This is the first implementation in the Shikoku region.

Each company is allowed to operate 1 to 5 vehicles for the service. It is initially offered in Matsuyama (excluding islands), Toon, Tobe and Masaki from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. of following day only on Friday and Saturday when there is a shortage of taxis. The total number of vehicles operating for the service at a time is limited to 16.

The Bureau has already received applications for the "Ride-sharing service" permit from 3 other prefectures in Shikoku.

(October 5, Asahi Shimbun Digital)

Manga Island in the Seto Inland Sea

Takaikamishima (Kamijima, Imabari), a remote island in the Seto Inland Sea with a population of 11, has become a tourist spot known as the "Manga Island." About 30 murals of popular manga, such as *Dr. Kotō Shinryōjo* (Dr. Kotō Clinic), *GTO* (Great Teacher Onizuka), and *Candy Candy*, have been painted on vacant houses and public facilities with the cooperation of the manga artists, attracting fans of the original works. A manga school is also scheduled to open next spring as part of the island's revitalization efforts.

Get off at Innoshima on the Setouchi Shimanami Kaido, which connects Onomichi (Hiroshima) and Imabari (Ehime), and then take a ferry for about 50 minutes to this small island with a circumference of about 5.3 kilometers. The island is lined with colorful character murals.

Osamu Hasebe (76), who runs a medical company in Yamanashi Prefecture, started revitalizing the island with manga. In 2007, he was invited by Sadao Kimura (74), his work associate and the chairman of the Takaikamishima's residents' association. Hasebe was captivated by the beauty of the many islands in the calm waters of the Seto Inland Sea. He couldn't believe there was such scenery in Japan. Since then, he has been visiting the island every month.

However, the island's population has been steadily declining from about 190 people in 1970 at its peak to around 50 in 2007. There are many vacant houses, and some vacant houses destroyed by typhoons were abandoned. The following year, there were no more children on the island, and the population continued to decline. Kimura consulted with Hasebe, saying, "At this rate, the island will become deserted," and so Hasebe took action.

He came up with the idea of using manga, which is popular among people of all ages, to create murals at his own expense. In 2016, he proposed the idea to Takatoshi Yamada, the author of *Dr. Kotō Shinryōjo*. Yamada readily agreed, saying, "It fits in perfectly with the island's image of remote medical care." Hasebe had Yamada draw an original artwork for the mural, which was then created by a sign-making company. The resulting mural, about 20 meters high and 10 meters wide, was completed at the community center.

After that, through Yamada's introduction, Nobuyuki Fukumoto, author of *Tobaku Mokushiroku Kaiji* (Gambling Apocalypse Kaiji), and Hiromi Morishita, creator of *Shōnen Ashibe* (Boy Ashibe), also provided their original artwork for free, and the number of murals increased by three to five per year. Many of the works are originals made especially for the island.

"The concept of "Manga Island" has gradually become known through social media over about five years, and more tourists, including those who stay at the island's guesthouses, began visiting the island.

Four new works are planned to be added this year, and in September, work began on a mural of *Abare Hanagumi*, a manga serialized in *Monthly Magazine Shonen Jump*. The manga artist Yuichi Oshiyama (60) visited the island to see the mural's creation. He was delighted, saying, "Having my work displayed here on a wall helps young people discover it. It's the greatest reward for a manga

artist.”

In April this year, Masanori Baba (49) learned about the island online and came to visit. He was so enchanted he moved there from Aichi Prefecture with his wife and two daughters who are in elementary and middle school. The island's population suddenly increased from seven people. In October, they plan to open Manga-tei, the island's only restaurant. He said, “This is the beginning of the island’s new chapter, powered by manga. The mural should attract more people to move here. There are many inconveniences, but it's exciting to start from nothing.”

Before Baba and his family moved to the island, all the residents were over 70 years old. Kimura said with a smile, “The island is getting more and more colorful and the population is increasing. It's like a manga success story.”

Next April, Hasebe and his team will rent the closed-down elementary and middle school from Kamijima to open a manga school. They plan to invite manga artists who helped with the murals to be instructors at the school.

Hasebe said, “My dream is one day to have a manga artist who graduates from the manga school paint a mural on the island. I want to show that even a small, remote island like this could be revived. Using Japan's cultural treasure of manga, I want to attract tourists from overseas to this island.”

(October 1, Yomiuri Shimbun Online)

New Matsuyama Station Opened

The new JR Matsuyama Station has been in operation since September 29. This is the first upgrade in 71 years for the station building. A length of 2.4 km was elevated, including the station. It is greatly expected to function as a new gateway to Matsuyama.

The new station is the third station since Matsuyama station opened in 1927. There are 2 entrances both on the east and west sides. Electric ticket gates and a walk-in ticket gate surrounded by glass were installed. Accessibility was improved by adopting universal design such as the new bathroom. There is also a nursing room. The platforms are separately designated for the express and the local trains to provide an easy transfer.

A new commercial area, Dan-Dan street, located under the overpass which consists of 14 stores and restaurants also officially opened at the same time.

The project for the new station building was a part of the plan to elevate the train line. The construction started in 2010 to decrease the traffic jams caused by

train crossings and develop the neighboring area of the station. 8 train crossings were removed when the 2.4 km of the project was elevated, and the traffic in that area has become smoother as a result.

According to the prefecture, the dismantling and removal of the old station building and train line is scheduled to start this year. The site is planned to be redeveloped by the Shikoku Railway Company.

(September 29, Ehime Shimbun Online)

Costco invited to Toon

On September 27, the governor of Ehime prefecture revealed an initiative to invite the American membership supermarket "Costco" to Toon, south of Matsuyama. If it comes, it will be the first Costco to open in Shikoku. They are trying to reach an agreement as early as this year, with the aim of opening in 2026. The prefecture revealed that it had been secretly discussing attracting Costco for about four years, approaching some cities and towns within the prefecture, with the aim of the ripple effect for job creation and an increase in tax revenue. Among several candidates, Toon was seen as the best one, in terms of the closeness to Matsuyama and convenient access with the Toon Smart Interchange (IC) on the Matsuyama Expressway, which opened this March.

Costco is a major global retailer. According to the company's website, it operates a total of about 890 warehouse-style stores, in the United States, where it's based, Canada, Mexico, and other countries. It is characterized by a membership system, and the number of members worldwide is approximately 130 million. It opened its first Japanese store in Fukuoka Prefecture in 1999, and as of late August this year, it has 35 stores in Japan. The website says the conditions for its new store location include a population of more than 500 thousand within a ten-kilometer radius, a region with many businesses, and a site of more than five hectares.

(September 28, Ehime Shimbun Online)