

## **Yellow Token to Protect New Students**

There are about 4,200 new students entering elementary schools in Matsuyama this April. In order to protect the new students from traffic accidents, the city presents each new student with a school backpack cover, and the elementary schools with about 700 school flags used by groups of students on their way to school.

On March 11, a presentation ceremony was held at the city hall to two representatives of the new students. The mayor of Matsuyama handed school backpacks with yellow covers and flags to a boy and a girl from Hoshioka Kindergarten, both of whom are 6, saying, "Please be careful on your way to school." The two children expressed their gratitude in a loud voice, saying, "We will wear the school backpack covers and follow the traffic rules on our way to school."

The school backpack covers were donated by Japan CO-OP Insurance Consumers' Co-operative Federation, based in Tokyo. (March 13, Ehime Shimbun)

(All over Japan 1st year elementary children have yellow covers on their school bags so that they will stand out to avoid traffic accidents and so that drivers will know to be especially careful when they see them.)

## **Summer Schedule at Matsuyama Airport**

The prefecture unveiled the summer schedule for international flights (March 30 – October 25) at the Matsuyama airport.

Eva Air of Taiwan, currently operating three flights a week to Taipei on Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday, will introduce a daily flight from March 30 to April 17.

Air Busan, an LCC of Korea, will reduce their flights from six to three a week on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday. According to the prefecture, Air Busan gave the reason that the reduction was because of the aircraft assignment. Although the frequency of the flights will decrease, the aircraft assigned between Busan and Matsuyama will be larger. The number of seats will be increased from 180 to 220. They have had more than 80% capacity since November 2023 when they started operation to Matsuyama, so the prefecture continues talks to convince them to resume six flights a week as soon as possible.

JUJU Air, another LCC of Korea, keeps 14 flights to Seoul in a week. Also, the prefecture keeps making efforts to invite China Eastern Air to restart flights to Shanghai which had been suspended since February 2020 due to the pandemic. (March 12, Ehime Shimbun)

## **Children Introduce Ukichi the Legendary Stonemason**

On March 6, 22 students from an elementary school in Toon, south of Matsuyama, presented their three-year research on a stonemason from Toon to tourists and local residents on the trail to Matsuyama Castle. Kanno Ukichi

(1879-1960) was a legendary stonemason who demonstrated his skills in repairing stone walls across the country such as those at Osaka and Matsuyama Castles.

Now that more than 60 years have passed since his death, few people in the prefecture know about him. Since March 2022, all students at the school have been studying Ukichi as part of a class where they learn about their hometown. They have deepened their learning by listening to the stories from local people and studying resource materials.

On the day, the children held small flags and banners with the words "Legendary Stonemason Ukichi-san", and attracted people of all ages in front of the stone walls, east of the Kakuremon Tsuzuki Yagura Turret, where there are stones piled with the names of Ukichi and other workers engraved on them. When no one answered yes to the question, "Do you know Kanno Ukichi?" the children mentioned that Ukichi was called upon for the difficult project of restoring the stone walls of Osaka Castle after they were destroyed during World War II.

At a glance, he knew how to stack stones, and he was expert at the stone-stacking style called nozura-zumi, stacking stones of various sizes and shapes, which allowed him to reproduce the beautiful curves of the stone walls. He handled huge stones weighing even more than 750 kg.

The children also introduced his character as being "strict at work, but with leadership and tolerance." People who listened to them explain enthusiastically using handmade panels and quizzes gave them a big round of applause. (March 11, Ehime Shimbun)

## **YYSystem is Installed at Matsuyama Airport**

Matsuyama Airport Terminal Building Co., Ltd. introduced the "YYSystem", a live voice recognition system, which displays the contents of your conversation translated by AI to enhance convenience for foreign visitors.

According to the company, the system can translate 31 languages such as English and Korean. The displays are installed at the Information Center, police station and duty-free shop. When the system is not in use, a video showing sightseeing spots in Ehime to promote the tourism will be played.

The person in charge says that this is a part of DX process at the airport, and that it has made communication with foreign travelers smoother and more effective.

(March 5, Ehime Shimbun Online)

## **Brand-New Train for Iyotetsu**

The Iyotetsu introduced a brand-new train to the interurban railway lines (Kogai-sen), for the first time in 67 years. The new train improves energy saving, reduces electricity consumption, and can be operated by renewable energy. A digital screen is installed over the door. Removing hanging advertisements

creates more room in the train. It was manufactured by the Kinki Sharyo Co., Ltd. in Osaka. Six new trains are currently operated. The Iyotetsu group plans to invest four billion yen to renew 18 trains in total in three years.

Iyotetsu has opened an online shop using the ICOCA system managed by West Japan Railway Company to sell commuter passes for both train and bus for business people. They terminated the IC e-card, a commuter pass for business people. However, the ones for students and the elderly are still sold at the window since a certificate is required to purchase.

(March 4, Ehime Shimbun Online & February 22, Asahi Shimbun Digital)

## **Intercultural Exchange for Expo 2025**

Expo 2025 Osaka, is scheduled to open this April. Taking this opportunity, an International Exchange Program is being administered by the Japanese Cabinet Secretariat to foster friendship between participating countries and local governments. 154 projects by 19 prefectures and 19 municipal corporations have been registered nationwide. In Ehime Prefecture prefecture chose Mozambique, and Ainan Town, in southern Ehime, chose Canada, as their partners.

On January 26, an event was held in Matsuyama, where the participants gave presentations about activities that Ehime and Mozambique have carried out, such as exchange with paralympic athletes and sales of fair trade products. In addition, they enjoyed performances of a Mozambican folk instrument, timbira, which is a UNESCO intangible cultural heritage. They sang "If You're Happy and You Know It" together in both Japanese and Portuguese, clapping their hands and stamping their feet. The event was organized by the prefecture with the aim of improving international understanding, and promoting the creation of a multicultural community.

Ainan Town Minami-Uwa High School students went on study trips to Canada the past few years. The town is also preparing for the Expo. The core of the exchange program is product development. The students came up with a soup that combines the specialties of both Ainan and Canada, such as farmed red sea bream, Ainan Gold citrus, salmon, and maple syrup. They have been improving their product since the end of last year under the guidance of a cooking expert. They plan to package the soup in pouches by the end of March. The product is to be at the Expo at the end of May. The Ainan Town booth will be set up and the students will be there to promote the product. The town continues considering various exchange programs with Canada.

(January 26, Online Ehime, and March 2, Ehime Shimbun)