

Promoting Our Hometown Through NPO Activities



Natsuki

Fuyuki

Fuyuki (Director of NPO “Furusato Komatsu Kentei”+)

Natsuki (Deputy Director of NPO “Furusato Komatsu Kentei”)

Third-year high school students, Ishikawa Prefectural Komatsu Commercial High School

Q: Why did you decide to join the Furusato Komatsu Kentei?

Fuyuki: When I was in my first and second year of high school, I went on a Furusato Komatsu Kentei Discovery Tour. This was a tour organized by Komatsu Commercial High School students to show local participants around historic sites in the city of Komatsu. I learned many things about the city that I didn’t know before and really enjoyed myself, so I decided to join the group when I became a third-year student.

Natsuki: When I learned about Komatsu Kentei from some upperclass students who talked about it at a school gathering, I thought it would be an interesting way to interact with the people in the community. I, too, had a great time talking to local people during the Furusato Komatsu Kentei Discovery Tour and the school festival. It made me want to join Komatsu Kentei and get to know the people in the community better.

Fuyuki: My teacher encouraged me to become director of the group. I had also been the treasurer of the student council before, but the NPO activities sounded very demanding so I wasn’t sure at first. However, I thought it would be a valuable experience, and I decided to give it a try.

Natsuki: I was also uncertain when my teacher encouraged me to join, but as deputy director, I thought that I would have more opportunities to interact with the local community. I accepted the position because I thought I could learn a lot from the experience.

Fuyuki: People are always asking us for favors!

Natsuki: Maybe we just look approachable. (laughter) Fuyuki and I are both third-year students in the same class. Fuyuki knows what she’s doing, and she’s reliable and a lot of fun, too. She helps me out in so many ways.

Fuyuki: Natsuki really spoils me. (laughter) Whenever she hears me say, “I can’t do that,” she always lends me a hand, saying, “Come on, I’ll help you out!”

Q: What does your organization do?

Fuyuki: We are divided into two teams: one that works on preparing flyers, posters, and the questions for the exam+ and one that maintains the website. Up until now, we’ve been involved with promoting the exam and re-writing the text and the workbook that have been prepared in the past. The exam team is currently compiling the questions for the exam in November. When that’s done, we’re going to discuss the draft and create the

final list of questions. We’re also planning to update the website. Natsuki and I are both on the website team, and we’re currently learning how to build websites.

Natsuki: We also go out to find question topics for the upcoming exam. The other day, we visited a *machiya* by Komatsu station, and had someone from the *machiya* preservation society tell us about it (see the photo below.) Other than that, since we’re the director and deputy director, we have to prepare the NPO annual report of activities and the accounts ledger to hand over to the prefectural government office. We also answer interviews from local newspapers. In class, we’re learning about the history, purpose, and management of non-profit organizations.



Machiya is traditional style of urban dwellings built by merchants and artisans from the Edo period (1603-1867) through prewar Showa era (1926-1945). <http://www.city.komatsu.lg.jp/pre/machiya/k-koma-index.html>

Q: And by the way, what level of Komatsu Kentei certification do you both have?

Both: Actually, we took the elementary level exam in our first and second years, but failed both times! (laughter) It’s actually so difficult that even our teachers have trouble passing the intermediate level. We took the exam without studying much for it because we had other certification exams around the same time. We were taking bookkeeping, information and word processing, and tourism certification exams that might help us in our job hunting.

Q: What difficulties do you encounter working for Komatsu Kentei?

Fuyuki: Remembering all the website codes is a lot of work.

There are so many similar codes that as soon as I learn a new one, I forget one that I learned before! Preparing the NPO paperwork is exacting, too, but Natsuki writes up most of it, so all I do is stamp it with my seal (*hanko*). (laughter) You would be surprised at how difficult it is to make sure the seal comes out nice and neat!

Natsuki: The NPO paperwork is definitely a lot of work! Our teacher helps me along the way, but I had never prepared documents like these before. They're official documents, so the wording has to be appropriate, and there's so much to write. It was very hard at first, but I've grown quite used to it now.

Q: What is it that you find so enjoyable about Komatsu Kentei?

Fuyuki: Our visit to the *machiya* that Natsuki mentioned earlier was great. I was so impressed by the way a little decorative cap is used to hide nailheads on the pillars or walls. I also enjoyed being able to talk to different kinds of people. Students usually don't have a chance to talk to teachers with whom they don't have classes. But through our NPO activities, we've had the opportunity to meet different teachers and learn about their viewpoints and personalities, and feel much closer to them.

Natsuki: For me, the Furusato Komatsu Kentei Discovery Tour was the most enjoyable experience. Since we all took the same bus, I became friends with people in my community I had never met before. Prior to the tour, we handed out flyers around school and at the station, calling for participants. It was also fun planning the tour and thinking about what part of the city would interest people. For our tour last year, in addition to local people, there were ten students from a high school in Osaka we have an exchange relationship with. In turn, we joined them on their Osaka tour, and they took us to different places, like to a livestock-raising farm and Korea town. It's thanks to Komatsu Kentei that I've had the opportunity to experience so many things that I would have missed as an ordinary student.

Q: What kind of activities are you planning from now on?

Fuyuki: I'm looking forward to promoting Komatsu Kentei at local festivals, where I'm planning to organize Komatsu Kentei trivia games that everyone can enjoy. Also, as we near our exam date in November, all of our members will be spending more time working together. As director, I'd like to create an environment in which everyone will feel free to contribute. I hope all the members, including those in different classes who don't know each other well, will get along. I try to make sure I listen carefully to others' opinions so that everyone can get along with one another.

Natsuki: I'm also looking forward to meeting the people in our community at festivals and other events. As deputy director, I'll try to support Fuyuki as much as I can!

Fuyuki: I told you she spoils me!

Natsuki: Member's opinions tend to diverge widely. I'd like to work together with Fuyuki to see how well we can coordinate them and come up with good plans.

Q: What do you want to do after graduation?

Fuyuki: I enjoy bookkeeping, so I'd like to work in accounting or finance. When I'm working on accounting worksheets, I have to do many calculations to make the figures tally. The calculations take a lot of time and effort, but it feels great when I get everything right at the end. I'm a bit uneasy about leaving the prefecture, so I'd like to work close to home. Osaka feels somewhat familiar, but Tokyo is a bit intimidating. I'd like to stay in my hometown where I've grown up.

Natsuki: There was a time when I wanted to leave Ishikawa prefecture and make friends in different places, but now I'm thinking of finding a job here, in my hometown. Like Fuyuki, I find living in a big city a bit daunting because I think people who live there are rather cold and distant. I'm planning on applying to financial institutions this year. Working for a bank will give me more opportunities to speak to the people in my community, and it will help me learn more about my hometown.

(Interview held August 2009.)

+ What is Furusato Komatsu Kentei?

Run by third-year students at Komatsu Commercial High School, Furusato Komatsu Kentei (literally, "the Komatsu Hometown Exam") is an NPO devoted to the promotion and appreciation of local culture founded in 2005. The group, which became an officially approved non-profit organization in 2008, administers an examination (*kentei*) testing knowledge of local culture once a year, at elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels. A total of 7,042 people have taken the exam the four times between 2005 and 2008, and 2,756 people have passed it. Test takers can prepare using a text and workbook compiled by the group. Other than planning, administering, and promoting the exam, the members of Furusato Komatsu Kentei also organize computer classes for the local community. Currently, there are sixteen members. The official website is <http://www.tvk.ne.jp/~kshs/>



My favorites



好きなことば (favorite phrase)

Fuyuki: 温故知新 (おんこちしん) Learn new things by studying the past.

Natsuki: 十人十色 (じゅうにんといろ) To each his (or her) own.

好きな食べもの (favorite food)

Fuyuki: カレー (カレー) Curry.

Natsuki: 桃 (もも) Peaches.

好きなこと (favorite pastime)

Fuyuki: 読書 (どくしょ) Reading.
I like romance novels.

Natsuki: 音楽をきくこと (おんがく) Listening to music.
I like Japanese rock music and ballads.