

# REPORT FROM TOHOKU

By Douglas Erber, President, Japan America Society of Southern California

October 2011

Dear members and friends of the Japan America Society of Southern California, and generous donors to the 2011 Japan Relief Fund,

On behalf of our board of directors and board of governors, I want to thank you for your heartfelt and generous response to Japan's greatest natural disaster, the Great Japan East Earthquake and resulting tsunami waves and radiation crisis. I have recently returned from a two-week trip to Japan where I spent five days in some of the devastated cities and villages of Iwate prefecture, as well as a visit to Fukushima prefecture. **Seeing the devastated areas and speaking with survivors was a life-changing experience and will remain in my deepest thoughts for the rest of my life.**



Left to right: Tsuneo Ibuka, director of administration, Seikeijyuku (Tohoku Earthquake Relief Fund); Douglas Erber, and; Yoshihiro Murai, governor, Miyagi prefecture. This meeting was made possible by JASSC Co-Vice Chairman, Kappei Morishita.



Yoshiharu Otsuka, vice president, Japan Red Cross Society.



Hironobu Shibuya, chairman, Save the Children Japan.

There were three important purposes for the trip. The first was to meet with the Japanese non-profit disaster relief and recovery organizations that received funds from our 2011 Japan Relief Fund. The Society's board of directors has strictly followed the principles and guidelines of international charity outlined by the IRS and the U.S. Treasury. As an additional monitoring effort, we wanted to observe the performance of the organizations' charitable activities in Japan to ensure compliance with expenditure responsibility rules under the tax law.

I am pleased to report the three organizations that each received a \$250,000 tranche from the 2011 Japan Relief Fund provided first-hand reports and updates on how our funds have been used for both immediate relief and long-term recovery in the devastated areas.

These organizations are the **Japanese Red Cross Society**, **Save the Children - Japan** and **Seikeijuku Tohoku Earthquake Relief Fund**. I also met with leaders of the Japanese non-profit organization, **Living Dreams Japan**, which will administer the Japan America Society's "adoption" of Fukushima Aiikuen, a children's home (orphanage) in Fukushima prefecture (Please see the related article on Fukushima Aiikuen).



Masako Unoura Tanaka and Douglas Erber receive a rebuilding plan from Kimiaki Toda, mayor, city of Ofunato. One-third of Ofunato, including most of the downtown business district, fishing ports and manufacturing, were lost to the tsunami. *Photo: Kanai*



Douglas Erber and Masako Unoura Tanaka meet with Satoshi Kitahama, Asia director, All Hands Volunteers. *Photo: Kanai*



Meeting with Ofunato Chamber of Commerce, left to right: Naokazu Ueno, executive director; Kosei Mizuno, vice chairman; Toshiaki Saito, chairman, Douglas Erber, and Masako Unoura Tanaka. *Photo: Kanai.*

The second purpose of the trip was a fact-finding visit to the devastated areas of Tohoku to gather information about rebuilding projects that would best serve an entire community. This information, provided first-hand by government officials, business leaders and individuals affected by the disasters, will benefit our board of directors' decision-making process when considering the best possible use(s) for the remainder of the 2011 Japan Relief Fund.

The third purpose of the trip was to meet with leaders of additional Japanese non-profit organizations for consideration to partner with when an appropriate rebuilding project is identified. Related to all three purposes of the trip, I was also able to meet with important contacts of the Japan America Society, including: U.S. Ambassador John V. Roos; Ambassador Shotaro Yachi and Director-General Junichi Ihara, both past Consul Generals of Japan in Los Angeles; Samuel Kidder, executive director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan; Ambassador Yoshio Okawara and Takashi Watanabe, chairman and executive director, respectively, of The America-Japan Society, and; several JAS Honorary Officers.

On all accounts, the trip was very successful. I would like to express my deep appreciation to **Delta Air Lines** for providing a gratis airline ticket, and to the **Imperial Hotel Tokyo** for providing a complimentary room during my stay for meetings in Tokyo.

Furthermore, I am deeply grateful to **Masako Unoura Tanaka**, a dear friend and Los Angeles resident who was visiting her elderly father in the city of Ofunato, Iwate prefecture, when the earthquake struck. Masako just barely survived the tsunami and has since been diligently working to help with the recovery and rebuilding of Iwate prefecture. Masako's father also survived and I had the honor of staying at his home during my fact-finding visit to Ofunato and surrounding cities and fishing villages. I am indebted to Masako, who, as an official "ambassador of Iwate prefecture," arranged important meetings with Iwate's Governor Takuya Tasso and Deputy Governor Yoshiharu Ueno, the current and immediate past mayors of Ofunato, the leaders of the Ofunato Chamber of Commerce, and Satoshi Kitahama, Asia director for the U.S. non-profit, All Hands Volunteers, that continues to work to help clean up and assist the citizens of Ofunato and surrounding areas.





Photo caption provided by AP/Kyodo News: "This combination image, the initial destruction and progress of cleanup after the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami is seen in Otsuchicho, Iwate prefecture, northern Japan. The top photo, taken March 14, 2011 shows buildings standing amid the debris. The middle photo, taken June 3, 2011 and the bottom photo, taken Sept. 7 show the cleanup and demolition are still in progress. AP/Kyodo News"

Two weeks prior to my trip, the Japanese media distributed a large number of combination photos showing three scenes (shown above): the first scene was during and/or just after the tsunami hit, the next photo was the same scene three months later and finally, a photo of how the scene looked at six months. The international media published these photos that show debris cleaned up and damaged roads repaired. However, after visiting the devastated areas, it is clear that such photos give a false impression that recovery and rebuilding is well underway.

Seeing the devastated areas in person, even six months after the disaster, gave me an entirely different perspective. Full recovery will take up to a decade. The nuclear radiation crisis in Fukushima will take many decades. While tremendous progress has been made in the cleanup effort, only 60% to 70% of the debris has been cleared and very little has been disposed of. Two-story high fields of debris, separated into massive piles of concrete, metal, wood and plastics, cover what little open space remains. Destroyed automobiles and large appliances also wait to be cleared. Japanese media reports there are more than 25 million tons of debris to be cleaned up; it is hoped to have all debris cleared by next March and completely disposed of by March 2014.



City of Ofunato. Photo: Erber





Temporary housing in an isolated area of Iwate prefecture. Photo: Erber

The scant reconstruction that has begun is the replacing of walls on the few structures that had a frame strong enough to withstand the tsunami. That said, the government has done a commendable job of building temporary housing, commonly two-room units that provide privacy and are well-equipped. However, the temporary housing is often located in isolated areas away from shops, medical facilities or food stores. Those who have been directed to leave the evacuation centers and move into the temporary housing must forgo free meals and are expected to pay for utilities and services, a tough obligation for victims who lost their place of employment due to the tsunami. Furthermore, most of the temporary housing will be available only for a two-year period, which will create a new challenge to assist victims' transition to more permanent resettlement.

While there are physical signs of progress, one of the large concerns is the psychological impact on the victims who have lost loved ones, friends, homes, important heirlooms and irreplaceable burial sites of their ancestors. Moreover, the disruption to children's lives has both immediate and long-term impacts on their wellbeing. For children relocated or those forced to stay indoors due to the radiation threat, being "locked" inside and not being able to play or go outside has added to their stress. Most open spaces, including parks, playgrounds and school yards, have been claimed by the cleared piles of debris or temporary housing, thus severely limiting the places to have fun and "just be a kid." Families living near the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant have an added level of anxiety due to worries about their health and the health of their children, both born and unborn. It is not widely reported, but the suicide rate in the affected areas of Tohoku has been rising each month since the earthquake. These psychological affects and how to address them are being examined by local and national governments, as well as the many non-profit organizations operating in the devastated areas.



Ofunato's Akazaki Elementary School's playground is now claimed by a massive pile of wood debris.

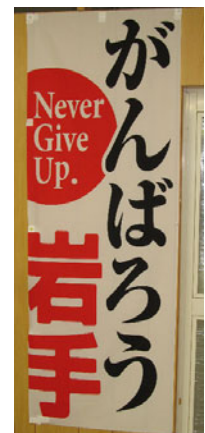
Still, with a multitude of challenges facing them and with so much that needs to be done, I was amazed by the fortitude and resilience of the Japanese I met in the affected areas. There is a very strong willingness not just to rebuild, but to rebuild to make the region even better. The national government has just announced its revised budget that includes an unprecedented second increase in recovery funds that will help Tohoku's prefectural and local governments complete long-term planning to begin rebuilding a new Tohoku, one that will attract both business and tourism to this exceptionally beautiful and tranquil region of Japan.

During my trip, I received repeated words of gratitude. Common expressions included, "Please thank Americans for their support and friendship," "Thank you for helping Tohoku," and, "Please come back!" The Japanese are grateful for "Operation Tomodachi," in which the U.S. Seventh Fleet assisted the Japanese Self Defense Forces to administer immediate disaster relief. They are grateful for the extraordinary role of non-

profit organizations and their volunteers operating in fields previously led by government agencies. They commend the Japan America Society of Southern California for our quick response, as well as the \$22 million in relief and recovery funds raised by the all the Japan America societies within the National Association of Japan-America Societies' network. Furthermore, they thank the world for its heartfelt and unprecedented outpouring of support for Japan.



The tiny (Population: 100) fishing village of Koishi Hama, Iwate prefecture, lost all but four of its 60 family-owned fishing boats. To survive economically, the village is using its remaining boats to "farm" scallops by using nets that will be anchored to these large, newly created blocks of cement. Photo: Erber



Encouraging messages of "Ganbere" (Never give up!) and "Ganbaroo!" (Let's not give up!) can be seen all across Japan.





**Tree of Hope** — the single surviving tree from a forest of over 7,000 pine trees swept away by the tsunami in the city of Rikuzen Takata. *Photo: Erber*

Back home now, I harbor a new understanding and perspective on how Japan's triple disasters have changed everything on so many different levels, and I am even more thankful now for the many things we often take for granted. I look forward to visiting Tohoku again and I encourage everyone to continue to support Japan as it works to overcome the many challenges of recovering and rebuilding after one of its worst disasters in history.

*Special Appreciation is Extended to Delta Air Lines and The Imperial Hotel Tokyo  
for Making this Report From Tohoku Possible.*



**Delta Air Lines**, recent winner of the prestigious Business Travel News Annual Airline Survey, serves more than 160 million customers each year. With its unsurpassed global network, Delta and the Delta Connection® carriers offer service to more than 350 destinations in nearly 70 countries on six continents, including daily, non-stop flights from Los Angeles to Tokyo's Haneda and Narita int'l airports, as well as service to Nagoya Centrair and Osaka Kansai international airports. Delta Air Lines has been a strong supporter of JAS for the past two decades.



**IMPERIAL HOTEL**

**The Imperial Hotel Tokyo** is a legendary landmark that has welcomed royalty, heads of state, celebrities and international business leaders for over 120 years. It offers discreet, highly personalized services, restrained elegance, award-winning cuisine and refined and impeccable Japanese hospitality. The Imperial Hotel Tokyo and the Imperial Hotel Osaka generously offer special rates to members JASs within the NAJAS network. Special rates are subject to availability; please contact the JAS office for more information and initial reservation requests.

## Japan America Society “Adopts” a Children’s Home in Fukushima, Japan

On September 20, 2011, the Japan America Society of Southern California’s board of directors approved a \$30,000 tranche from the 2011 Japan Relief Fund to “adopt” **Fukushima Aiikuen**, a children’s home (orphanage) in Fukushima, Japan. It is home to 91 children, ages two to eighteen, all of whom are affected daily by the nuclear radiation crisis. The funds will support educational programs for the children and will be delivered through **Smiles & Dreams: Tohoku Kids Support Project** that is managed by **Living Dreams Japan**, a recognized Japanese NPO that supports children’s homes in Japan.



In early October, JAS president Doug Erber delivered a “Ganbare Fukushima Aiikuen” banner signed by members of the JAS Board. Pictured here are the children’s home executive director, Hisao Saito (far left) and the home’s preschool-aged children and their teacher. Please note, in keeping with the need for confidentiality, the children’s faces have been disguised.

“One of my best experiences during my recent trip to Tohoku was an afternoon spent visiting Fukushima Aiikuen,” says Doug Erber, president of the Japan America Society. Erber adds, “The children and staff were extremely appreciative of our support and look forward to developing a longer term relationship with our members.” Because of the radiation released from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, as well as the ongoing threat of continued contamination, Fukushima Aiikuen’s children under 5 years are allowed outside for only ten minutes per day, and children ages 6 to 18 are only allowed out two hours per day.

**Fukushima Aiikuen** children’s home was founded in 1893 by Iwako Uryuu (aka Iwa Uryuu), who is known for her selfless work on behalf of the orphaned, the poor and the injured. In recognition of her work, in 1896, Uryuu became the first woman to receive the Medal with Blue Ribbon (藍綬褒章) from the Japanese government. There are several statues of Uryuu in Japan, including one in Senso-ji Temple in Asakusa, Tokyo. Fukushima Aiikuen consists of 11,000 square feet of buildings on nearly two acres of land. As a model children’s home, Fukushima Aiikuen was visited by the Emperor of Japan in 1952.

By “adopting” Fukushima Aiikuen, and working closely with Living Dreams Japan, JAS members will have opportunities to visit the home, as well as help support the children with correspondence and small gifts or donations. Information on how you can help will be announced and posted on the JAS website soon.