

Reconstruction Uma-ku-ike News

Nine horses or uma-ku also means things go well. We named this newspaper with hopes the reconstruction will go well.

running horses; double-walled cups; and blue-green cracks

Obori Soma-Yaki (Obori Soma Ceramic Ware)'s traditional craftsmanship:

The Obori Soma-Yaki Matsunaga Kiln was moved from Namie town to Nishigo Village temporarily due to the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station disaster. They continue to make traditional crafts there today. Overcoming difficulties, such as the inability to use raw materials from Namie Town due to the effects of radioactive contamination, and the evacuation of the town's potters, they are striving to attract new customers and produce officially licensed products for the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. We interviewed Mr. Kazuo Matsunaga (70) and his wife Kyoko (67), the owners of Matsunaga Kiln, to tell the story behind their comeback and future prospects. (Interview team)



Traditional Obori Soma-Yaki ware (right) and cross-section view of double-layered structure



A dish with cute, feminine strawberries

Matsunaga kiln:

For younger generations and women

Obori Soma-Yaki has three features: running horses, a double-layered construction, and blue-green cracks.

Running horses are something indispensable to Obori Soma-Yaki ware. Those horses face or run to the left, symbolizing "second to none."

The double-layered structure requires more time and effort than making ordinary pottery, but it also

has benefits. First, hot water stays hot inside it, but you can hold the container without getting burned. It also prevents water drops from gathering on the outside when something cold is in it.

Ao-hibi (blue-green cracks) is one of the traditional methods of Obori Soma-Yaki, which forms decorative cracks in the custom-made glaze. This glazing style also has the effect of making the entire

piece appear light blue or green. At the Matsunaga Kiln, they keep the pottery's distinct, traditional features, while focusing on developing items and designs that are attractive to young people and women. Cute designs such as strawberries and colorful cups are intentionally made of clay that, unlike the rest of the pottery, does not have the distinct cracks. They have a unique pottery ware series

featuring eight horses and the Chinese character for horse on the bottom; which means both "nine horses" and "things go well." They also have small ceramic Hina dolls and carp flag streamers for celebrating Children's Day. They produce about 50 kinds of ceramic ware at Matsunaga kiln. They produce about 3,000 pieces altogether each month. The Matsunaga kiln has one

electric kiln and two gas kilns, which are selected according to the desired color of the piece.

(Kanon Sato, Higen Namatame)

Will Obori Soma-Yaki disappear because of the nuclear disaster?



Kyoko (left) and Kazuo, putting glaze on their works

Handing down craftsmanship

Mr. Kazuo & Mrs. Kyoko Matsunaga from Matsunaga Kiln

Obori Soma-Yaki might disappear in the near future. Matsunaga sadly expresses his concern.

Currently, the Obori Soma-Yaki pottery has been displaced from Namie Town to various locations due to the nuclear disaster. He says that it's getting more difficult to secure successors and to hand down the tradition of craftsmanship to others. Mr. Matsunaga is actively

accepting local community members and internship students because of this crisis. He also visits schools in Kyoto to tell them about the appeal of Obori Soma-Yaki.

"I want young people to be interested in Obori Soma-Yaki first." Mr. Matsunaga expressed his hope that students and volunteers will inherit the traditional techniques he is promoting. (Nozomi Henmi)

Sending the message of reconstruction to the world

Official Olympic product: Guinomi (Japanese sake cup)

The Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics are set to be held next year and the Obori Soma-Yaki's Guinomi sake cup has been certified as an official licensed product. Mr. Matsunaga is enthusiastic about it and says "I want to advertise the unique features of Obori Soma-Yaki to the world."

"I want people to try Fukushima's gold prize winning sake in an Obori Soma-yaki cup." There are three types of guinomi cups, each shaped differently. You can choose from these types of cups depending on the liquor you want to drink.

They plan to send messages to the world about Fukushima's reconstruction with two officially licensed products: Obori Soma-yaki guinomi cups and the Shirakawa Daruma. After the earthquake the oldest son, Takeshi Matsunaga (31), started selling products online. Also, Obori Soma-Yaki ware is sold at several places such as Midette, Fukushima's antenna shop in Nihonbashi, Tokyo, highway rest areas and at roadside stations in Fukushima prefecture. (Shota Sekiyama)



Official licensed item of Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games; Obori Soma-Yaki "guinomi"

Obtaining alternative materials

The radioactivity in Namie's material makes it unusable

The damage of the nuclear disaster extended to the materials used in Matsunaga Kiln. Namie Town's Toyamaishi stone, a main ingredient for the glaze, was no longer usable due to irradiation.

After the earthquake and evacuation Mr. Matsunaga bounced from place to place, and he is currently living in Nasu Town, Tochigi Prefecture. In April of 2014, a temporary workshop was reopened in Nishigo Village, the closest to Nasu Town in Fukushima Prefecture. However, he had to find a replacement for the Toyamaishi stone found in Namie. In order to find something similar, he had the stone components that he used in Namie analyzed at the prefectural high-tech plaza.

In order to make a component as close as possible to the original, they blended 8 types of ceramic materials, including ones from overseas. There have been many challenges

like this due to the nuclear disaster, which includes increasing the cost of materials and the price of the pottery.

Before the earthquake, about 30% of the clay for ceramics was sourced locally, however, they now have to use clay from outside of Fukushima prefecture. He put a great deal of effort into finding they clay that would suit Obori Soma-Yaki ware from all over Japan. (Shiori Nagayama)

Reported by:

(From left in the back row)

Shota Sekiyama
(Shirakawa Daini Junior High 2nd grade)

Higen Namatame
(Omotego Elementary 6th grade)

(From left in the front row)

Nozomi Henmi
(Aizu Xaverio High 2nd grade)

Kanon Sato
(Mutsuai Elementary 6th grade)

Shiori Nagayama
(Kashiwagi Elementary 6th grade)

