

## Recall & Record in our memory 10 years after Great East Japan Earthquake Denmark “Bond of Hope”

The “Japan-Denmark Society” published a book on March 11th 2021 to commemorate the 10-year anniversary of the “Great East Japan Earthquake” summarizing the support of Denmark’s Royal Family and the activities of the society’s members as a foundation of friendship between Japan and Denmark.



## “10 YEARS OF RECOVERY” AS FOUNDATION OF FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN JAPAN AND DENMARK

Ten years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011. Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark was the very first among members of royal families in Europe to visit the area; His Royal Highness handed donations made in Denmark and his encouraging message to local people there.

The total donation from Denmark was about 200 million yen, which was sent right after the Earthquake and Tsunami occurred, along with additional support, such as direct donations and supporting materials to municipalities like Higashi-Matsushima City. The total donation from Denmark amounted to more than 300 million yen. As time passes, regrettably, Denmark’s warm support may be forgotten by Japanese. In 2021, during the 10-year recovery ceremony of the Earthquake and its sustained recovery, condolences for those who passed away will be expressed and help Japanese recall and record in their memory Denmark’s sincere support at Japan’s time of need and rekindle the foundation of friendship between Japan and Denmark.

### Japan-Denmark Society Activities

Many members of the Japan-Denmark Society have been engaged in recovery activities from the Earthquake, some of which are still sustained. The Japan-Denmark Society merges aspiration in their activities and endeavors for swift international support to create a unified force to promote recovery from the unprecedented natural disaster of ten years ago, not only for East Japan but also for development of the entire country.

## PRODUCTION

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### Japan-Denmark Society's Editing Committee

The Editing Committee has organized to create the book that will record the activities of Denmark and the Japan-Denmark Society member's along with encouraging and standing by East Japan to create a foundation for further recovery.

### Committee:

Committee chair/ Mr. Toshio Sano, Chairman of The Society

Committee members/

Ms. Masako Yoshida: Former President of Andersen Institute of Bread & Life Co., Ltd.

Mr. Koji Tanaka, Chairman of KDDI

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Japan-Denmark Society Directors/ Mr. Katsutoshi Hanahara, Ms. Eri Takada

Chef Editor/ Ms. Kimiko Matsui: MightyBook Co.Ltd.

## OVERVIEW

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## <Chapter 1>

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### Denmark Brings “Hope” For Higashi-Matsushima City Devastated by the 2011 Japan Earthquake & Tsunami

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Higashi-Matsushima City, Miyagi Prefecture is a municipality with a population of about 40,000 (as of 2020), created through the merger of Yamoto Town and Naruse Town on April 1st, 2005. This city is known for being a special scenic spot located alongside Matsushima Bay called “Matsushima”, one of the three most scenic venues in Japan (Nihon Sankei), and Matsushima Base for Air Self-Defense Force, for which “Blue Impulse” is renowned for acrobatic flying.

The land, where people had led a blessed and affluent life, surrounded by an abundance of nature, suffered devastating damage in the Great Earthquake in East Japan on March 11th 2011. More than 1,100 lives were lost; a Tsunami (tidal wave) flooded approximately 65% of the area, considered one of the most severely damaged cities / towns in the region (Tohoku).

Amid this catastrophe, a bond with Denmark for reconstruction was formed in Higashi Matsushima, having become “Hope” for all its residents.



**Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark welcomed by children in Higashi-Matsushima City on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011 (photo/ Higashi-Matsushima City)**

## Crown Prince Frederik Of Denmark Visited Japan With the Sole Purpose of Encouraging Those Suffering

Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark Visited Japan with the Sole Purpose of Encouraging Those Suffering

Crown Prince, "Frederik Andre Henrik Christian" is the future king of Denmark. On June 14th 2011, Crown Prince Frederik visited Higashi-Matsushima City, Miyagi Prefecture which had been devastated by the Great Earthquake in East Japan to encourage its people; he revisited the city to celebrate the 150th anniversary for the establishment of formal diplomacy between Japan and Denmark in 2017. Residents of the municipality are still striving to reconstruct their city aimed at a new land like Denmark with the highest level of well-being, as if proactively responding to his such encouragement. We have interviewed Mr. Shuya Takahashi, a member of Congress in Miyagi Prefecture and then-official of Higashi-Matsushima City, who joined reconstruction efforts in the field as a group leader.



**Crown Prince Frederik firmly hoping for supporting children /October 10th, 2017 (photo/ Higashi-Matsushima City)**

**Experiencing Shodo (Japanese calligraphy) by socializing with a civic organization / October 10th, 2017 (photo/ Higashi-Matsushima City)**



## Vast Area Flooded by Tsunami with Many Evacuees



**Omagarihama / photographed on March 14th, 2011  
(photo/ Higashi-Matsushima City)**



**Nobiru Elementary School / photographed on March  
15th, 2011 (photo/ Higashi-Matsushima City)**

The Great Earthquake in Higashi-Matsushima City caused the loss of many lives; literally everything washed away. This land facing Matsushima Bay in the Pacific Ocean area is adorned by many rivers and canals as a regional trait; the Earthquake turned into an unthinkable disaster flooding approximately 65% of the area.

The number of people missing / deceased was 1,133, about 3% of the whole population at the time, next to that of Ishinomaki City and Kesenuma City in Miyagi Prefecture; the number of houses destroyed (totally / partial) was 11,073, 73% of the entire households; the number of evacuees amounted to estimated 15,285 (at most).

Mr. Shuya Takahashi, a member of Congress in Miyagi Prefecture and then-official of Higashi-Matsushima City (General Affairs Division, Policy Planning Section, Group Leader) says, "March 11th was a snowy, freezing day. Amid such a weather condition, many people were afflicted with hypothermia (low-temperature symptom) by being flooded or washed away by the Tsunami. It was an emergency no one had expected; we had to wait for the arrival of rescue teams for more than five hours... Meanwhile, in the City Office, its officials manually pumped petrol into vehicles that barely stayed away from the Tsunami and made roundtrips to carry victims many, many times" vividly looking back on what happened then.

With most lifelines (utilities), such as electricity and water severed, more than 300 evacuation shelters desperately called on the City Office to provide blankets, water, food, etc. Some city officials lost their family members or even had their own houses flooded away but teamed up and did their very best to help those in need there.

Even one week after the occurrence of the Earthquake, officials were still very busy handling various issues, such as confirming the safety of the residents there, searching for the missing and managing morgues for the deceased. Coffins and tribute flowers were no longer available; cremation was not possible. A method of (shared) underground burial was temporarily adopted for cremation later, all of which tells of the degree of emergency then.

Lack of petrol for cars, the only means to move in the disaster-stricken area, was grave indeed. A limited amount of petrol was provided by the Self-Defense Force in oil drums to the City Office to manually pump gas into its cars used for transporting groceries and food, etc. to evacuation shelters. Innumerable tasks multiplied as daunted city officials' burdens increased as time passed by, with all of them running about regardless of their divisions or responsibilities. "Every day was spent trying to return our citizens to their ordinary lives as soon as possible" Mr. Takahashi recalls.



**Mr. Abe, then-Mayor on March, receiving donation from Ambassador Mellbin / March 11th, 2011 (photo/ H. Nakai)**



**Tona Station / photographed on March 25th, 2011 (photo/Higashi-Matsushima City)**



**Ambassador Mellbin with Mr. Takahashi on March 30th, 2011 (photo/ S. Takahashi)**

## Danish Ambassador to Japan Visited Higashi-Matsushima City Right After the Earthquake

The explosion of buildings in Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant 1 that took place on March 14th made it much harder to support areas destroyed by the Tsunami.

Radioactive substance spread widely in East Japan at the epicenter; cooling devices stopped functioning. Even amid prediction of further explosions, the Self-Defense Force made desperate efforts to contain radiation, which was broadcast nationwide through the media; it made the entire country very nervous. With speculation that Tokyo, just 220 km away from the plant, might be also endangered, embassies and non-Japanese corporations alike gave orders to evacuate to Western Japan or outside of the country.

Right after all this commotion, Mr. Michiaki Omura, Assistant Professor of Tohoku University Graduate School, contacted the City Office of Higashi-Matsushima City saying, "The Danish Ambassador is hoping to go help children in need around disaster-stricken areas." Mr. Takahashi wondered, "Why Higashi-Matsushima City?", for a request to do so from Ambassador of Denmark that had not had any interaction with the city by the time.

However, the Danish Embassy's firm remark, "He'll come help, whatever it takes!", encouraged city officials who were burdened with daily rescue operations. Thus, such a visitation for encouragement to the city by the Danish Embassy in Japan was adopted, almost in no time.

A car arrived at Higashi-Matsushima City on March 30th. Getting out of it was Mr. Franz-Michael Skjold Mellbin, Danish Ambassador to Japan.

Mr. Takahashi, who welcomed him at the time, reflects, "In tattered working clothes and unshaven, I received Ambassador Mellbin right in front of the City Office anyway. He came out of his car even without holding his attache case; he looked like a figure in a movie, indeed."

Upon entering the reception room, he paid respect to officials around him for their efforts and slowly started to open his attache case; in it surprisingly was 16.5 million yen with bundles of 5,000-yen bills. He had converted wire-transferred donations from Embassy-related entities and Danish companies into cash. And hurriedly

brought it over hands-on to Higashi-Matsushima City, as financial systems were also down for the disaster.

In his car also were Lego-Block toys donated by Lego headquartered in Denmark as presents for Japanese children. He handed the cash to the City Office first, went through disaster-stricken areas while warmly talking to local people in evacuation shelters within the city and returned to his Tokyo Embassy on the same day.

Mr. Takahashi comments, "The world was trying to reach out and save us, which was a great encouragement for the people in Higashi-Matsushima City."

As a result of this tremendous act of kindness, the relationship between Denmark and the city began to deepen.

## Danish Crown Prince Alighted on The Land Amid Hectic Restoration Tasks

Like other disaster-stricken areas, many people in Higashi-Matsushima City had lost their residences due to flooding and were forced to live in temporary evacuation shelters, such as schools or community centers. Mr. Takahashi, who grappled with City Official's aims in order "to support rebuilding of daily lives", "to restore lifelines", "to remove debris", says, "I was all the time working like an engine which forgot to stop, driven by daily to-dos and had no idea in the least about taking days off, including Saturdays and Sundays, trying to do whatever task was right before me, as much as I could."



**Crown Prince Frederik with Mr. Abe, then-Mayor of Higashi-Matsushima on June 14th, 2011 (photo/Higashi-Matsushima City)**

May was passing by with confusion in full-gear when the Denmark Embassy contacted the city again: "Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark is hoping to visit Higashi-Matsushima City soon."

Crown Prince Frederik is the future king of Denmark. Higashi-Matsushima City felt it was not yet ready to welcome such an admirable member of the royal family due to its own still-unsatisfactory conditions. But with Ambassador Mellbin in mind and a desire to convey appreciation to the Danish companies that donated, the city decided to humbly accept Denmark's favor and welcome him outright.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was more than astounded at such an abrupt visitation by an international super-VIP (to be treated as a national guest without doubt), too. Mr. Takahashi started to prepare at his fastest pace for Crown Prince's arrival, in collaboration with the Denmark Embassy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Takahashi recollects that all through such preparation he felt as if he'd been in a dream, explaining, "For an ordinary city official of Higashi-Matsushima City like me, the anticipation that a prince of Denmark, located far away in Northern Europe, would visit our city was like an Andersen fairy tale for me, indeed."

## Crown Prince Frederik Brings "Hope" To Higashi-Matsushima City

On June 14th, 2011, Crown Prince Frederik came to Higashi-Matsushima City. Everyone who welcomed him looked very nervous; meanwhile, he himself was gentle and amicable, shaking hands with every official who met him. His cheerful attitude and behavior warmed everyone there.

It was Mr. Takashi who was responsible for introducing his city to Crown Prince Frederik on that day. Surrounded by Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials and policemen as guards, Crown Prince Frederik asked him as the very first question, "Mr. Takahashi, are your family members and house safe?"

Mr. Takahashi's house in Nobiru-area, Higashi-Matsushima City located about 3 km away from the coastline had been washed away; his 22-year-old daughter had already passed away. Later, he told Crown Prince the stark fact; Crown Prince hugged him and told him very gently, "I'll support you with all of my might." Crown Prince's kind behavior and words full of care have become an encouragement Mr. Takahashi could not forget for a lifetime.

They visited Akai-Minami Kindergarten for the Crown Prince to meet children in the city first, where they saw baby carriages (one for six children), tricycles and various

toys such as Lego delivered from Denmark. Children there, who had been unable to play with toys / playground equipment in the kindergarten buried in mud, thanked Crown Prince deeply.

Then, they visited Ono Primary School, which students of Hama-shi Primary School also attend for the natural disaster (because they couldn't go to their own school) and interacted with children there; Crown Prince played "futsal" with them in the gym. Next, they visited temporary housings to comfort and encourage victims there to end the busy day.



**Crown Prince Frederic playing "futsal" with students in Hama-shi Primary School / June 14th, 2011 (photo/Higashi-Matsushima City)**



**Crown Prince Frederic visiting Akai-Minami Kindergarten / June 14th, 2011 (photo/Higashi-Matsushima City)**

As they were driving: Crown Prince looked out from the car window, observed a man by the roadside and asked Mr. Takahashi, "What is he doing there?" The man was looking for something in rubbles.

They stopped their car and made an inquiry to the man; he replied, "I've lost my family and am looking for their pictures in my house's debris to be kept as a humble memento." Crown Prince held his hands and said warmly, "Such suffering must be hard to bear... But there is no night that comes without dawn."

On the polo shirt that the Crown Prince wore that day were the Japanese National Flag and two Kanji (Chinese characters also used in Japan) as Kibo (Hope), which he said he had secured by himself. City Office of Higashi-Matsushima City had polo shirts with a logo of "Hope" (in English) made not to forget the hope he had

delivered and designated it as their uniform for an integrated teamwork for reconstruction.

Furthermore, when an incorporated nonprofit association, "Higashi-Matsuyama Institute of Future City" in charge of reconstruction of the city was founded, its nickname was designated as Hope (short for Higashi-Matsuyama Organization for Progress and Economy, Education and Energy). "Hope" that Crown Prince Frederik brought to the city has indeed given its people its greatest principle.



**Socializing with children at Naruseouka Primary School/October 10th 2017(photo/Higashi-Matsushima City)**

Moreover, along with visitation to Japan by the Crown Prince, the Royal Family of Denmark donated 1 million dollars (about 103 million yen); with that as a capital, "Higashi-Matsushima City & Denmark Friendship Fund for Children" was set up. This fund was to support children by constructing and organizing kindergartens within the city, purchasing toys / playground equipment for them and constructing swimming pools for primary schools.

Damages due to the Great Earthquake in Eastern Japan reached such a wide range of areas that the public gave little attention to Higashi-Matsushima City despite its grave damage, where its residents somehow felt alienated. There seemingly was even a divide among local residents whose houses were washed away and those fortunately retaining theirs.

Regardless of all these (inevitable) indifferences, the visitation by Crown Prince Frederic triggered the city's miserable situation to be widely known and helped set up a clear vision for reconstruction; among all, it solidified the heart and mind of its citizens which has led to a swifter reconstruction and restoration.

## After Six Years, Crown Prince Frederic Revisited Higashi-Matsushima City

On October 10th, 2017, when six years had passed since occurrence of Great Earthquake in East Japan, Crown Prince Frederic revisited the soil of

Higashi-Matsushima City. 2017 was the year to celebrate the 150th anniversary for establishment of formal diplomacy between Japan and Denmark; Crown Prince Frederic came to Japan mainly for this event. Even though he had a heavy schedule, he kindly planned to revisit Higashi-Matsushima City.

Crown Prince played “futsal” again with the children at Naruseouka Primary School (made through a merger of Hama-shi Primary School and Ono Primary School that he had visited in 2011) and spent a relaxing time eating lunch with them. A reunion was held with the students he had played “futsal” with six years previously.

In addition, he enjoyed Japanese writing Shodo together with citizens there and met “Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls” who are specialized in traditional Danish stitching. Then, he paid a visit to Memorial Park for Reconstruction to make a flower tribute to 1,113 people who halts their lives here.

While visiting other areas, he made an inquiry, “How is the gentleman who was looking for pictures of his family six years ago doing now?”, which led to a warm reunion with that man.

Looking at venues of Higashi-Matsushima City on the mend, Crown Prince Frederic was surprised to see palpable changes for the better, compared to what they had looked like six years earlier. He left the city after conveying his message to its residents that he would keep caring for its reconstruction. His meticulous care and gentleness have left a mark on the hearts of many people in the city.

Mr. Takahashi comments, “Crown Prince Frederic’s repeated emphasis on ‘support for children’ was truly impressive. Then, I decided to aim at reconstruction that would make every child smile and be proud of growing up in Higashi-Matsushima City, and I kept striving up until now. Thus, Denmark has influenced its reconstruction in a very positive manner.” being deeply grateful for Denmark and the Crown Prince enlightening us all that “reconstruction” not only means getting the city and its residents’ life back to normal but also has a connotation for dreams and hopes in the future.



**Meeting again the man who had been looking for mementoes of his family / October 10th, 2017 (photo/ Higashi-Matsushima City)**



**Crown Prince Frederic making a flower tribute to Cenotaph for Great Earthquake in East Japan / October 10th, 2017.**

**(photo/ Higashi-Matsushima City)**



**Mr. Iwao Atsumi, Mayor of Higashi-Matsushima City, explaining its progress of reconstruction / October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017.**

**(photo/Higashi-Matsushima City)**



**Crown Prince Frederic grateful for reunion with Mr. Takahashi/ October 10th, 2017**

**(photo/Higashi-Matsushima City)**



### **Mr. Shuya Takahashi**

Member of Congress in Miyagi Prefecture (then-official of Higashi-Matsushima City)

Born in 1962. Upon graduation from his university, he joined the City Office in 1984 and worked for its various divisions, such as Planning, Industry and Education. After the Great Earthquake in East Japan, he consistently served as Group Leader, Section Manager and Division Head for Reconstruction over time, where he engaged in urban planning for restoration, forming of civil agreements and bridging his city and National Reconstruction Agency. In 2017, he asked for voluntary retirement to run for Prefectural Congress and was elected as its member in May. He is currently, working as Committee Chairman of Education and Public Safety Commission in Miyagi Prefecture.

## Steps Toward Reconstruction of Higashi-Matsushima City

### Envisioning “Creation of Sustainable City” Helped by The Bond with Denmark

Denmark is an environmentally-developed country that promotes domestic production of natural energy such as wind power, biomass and solar power. It is ranked among the top 3 or higher in UN's Worldwide Ranking for Level of Well-Being, named “the happiest country in the world” also for its deep-pocketed social welfares implemented.

Meanwhile, Higashi-Matsushima City, driven by help offered by Denmark, is now learning methods of administration and civil construction with Denmark as the role model, ever moving ahead with regional reconstruction.

Mr. Takashi Kawaguchi, Assistant Manager in Division (and Section, Group) of Reconstruction Policy in Higashi-Matsushima City Office has offered explanations on such undertakings.



**The main building of Higashi-Matsushima City Office.**



**Remnants of temporary housings in Hibiki Industrial Complex (turned into parking space now); Alongside progress in reconstruction of residences, temporary housings in the city had been all removed by the end of April 2019.**



**Ecotown for Smart Disaster-Prevention in Akai area (photo/ Higashi-Matsushima City)**

## Designated As “Environmental Future City”, Entering Agreement on Reconstruction from Earthquake with Lolland

Higashi-Matsushima City stipulated “Higashi-Matsushima City Reconstruction Plan” in December 2011 for the ensuing ten years, anticipating the participation of more than 2,000 residents, concerning what the city should look like in the future, along with advocating for the construction of a sustainable city resilient against natural disasters.

Specifically, such a “sustainable” project means the formation of a city through the local production of renewable energy, which is for multi-generations to live in, energy-saving and restorable and resilient against natural disasters; put another way, it is a plan for the creation of a sustainable city with Denmark as its role model.

At the same time, the National Cabinet Office accepted this project and designated Higashi-Matsushima City as “Environmental Future City”, one of eleven such municipalities in Japan.

In January 2012, three members of the Division of Reconstruction Policy in Higashi-Matsushima City visited Lolland in Denmark to see and learn from it.

The city of Lolland in Denmark had originally thrived on its shipbuilding industry; in the late 1970s, however, the industry declined; in the 1980s, the city suffered from fiscal deficits and high unemployment rate with most of its shipyards closed. Later, the city has prospered again on its environmental policies mostly around renewable energy, leading the world as an exemplifying environmental municipality.

Mr. Kawaguchi, working for the division, participated in such trips to Lolland several times, points out, “Lolland, which is located in the west end of the Baltic Sea, is as large as Okinawa’s main island with a population of a little more than 60,000, where its energy consumption is supported 100% by natural energy with the self-sufficiency rate of 600%, the rest (500%) exported both internationally and domestically; among all, wind power generation with windmills is being tapped most. As such, it has become the best role model for our city which has aimed at reconstruction with renewable energy as its pillar.”

In March 2012, after one year had passed since the Earthquake, they revisited Lolland to see how Mr. Leo Christensen, a member of the Congress in the City of Lolland, who was engaged in environmentally-friendly energy project, could

support Higashi-Matsushima City embracing reconstruction as “Environmental Future City”. In July, the Mayor of Lolland visited Higashi-Matsushima City to enter an “Agreement on Collaboration / Cooperation for Recovery from Great Earthquake” and determined to study renewable-energy policies together, which has enabled Higashi-Matsushima City to proceed with community plans, development of renewable energies and green technologies, etc. with the support of Lolland in Denmark and Danish companies, ever tightening their relationship.



**Designated as “Future City for SDGs” (Sustainable Development Goals) in 2018**



**Higashi-Matsushima City equipped with wind-power generators**

## Plan for Reconstruction Prepared Against Another Natural Disaster.

Higashi-Matsushima City, founded through the merger of former Yamoto-cho and former Naruse-cho on April 1st, 2005, had been already engaged in “civil construction by residents in corporation with the city”; then in 2009, each of the eight areas in the city voluntarily agreed to operating one “Civic Center” as a regional, self-governing body with commitment.



**Landscape of “Nobirugaoka”, a new residential area, and current Nobiru Station moved near it.**



**Railway extended from coastline urban area to residential area.**

After the Earthquake, plans to move coastline residences to the hills were rather smoothly implemented, based on the residents' own ideas on how to make their living spaces more comfortable. Mr. Kawaguchi comments, "Our city's undertakings that respected its residents' opinions have led to the designation of "Environmental Future City", one of eleven such cities in Japan, and further culminated in the agreement with Lolland in Denmark."

Mr. Kawaguchi comments, "Higashi-Matsushima City has constructed 'multiple-defense structures' that prevent the invasion by Tsunami with multiple dikes and buffer zones. Residential areas have been moved from their original places to locations far away from the ocean or on top of hills to protect local communities." He also adds that he needed to discuss such issues repeatedly with local residents to convince them before implementation.

The city also has constructed a huge central warehouse for disaster prevention which stores, renews and can deliver food and necessities that about 27,000 people can live on for three days, or about two thirds of the city's entire population (with management outsourced to private companies); twenty-four local warehouses for disaster prevention have been constructed and are managed by each area.

In addition, seven "Tsunami-monitoring cameras" have been set up that can independently send images through radio links (wirelessly) that are also equipped with devices to measure height of waves, solar / wind power generators and spare cells.

"Residential areas have pursued comfort in terms of exposure to the sun by building houses facing south, which has led to efficiency in solar power generation, too. We've aimed at the construction of a 'compact' city by placing JR (Japan Railway) stations and schools near the residential area, where residents can live a 'walking' life (they can just walk to locations), a comfortable form of living which is also environmentally friendly and hence sustainable", he says.

The population of Higashi-Matsushima City had been about 43,000 before the Earthquake; it lost about 1,000 by the Earthquake and Tsunami; 2,000 moved to other areas later, approximately a 9% reduction in the number of residents, which is significantly lower than other disaster-stricken cities. The city's reconstruction is being implemented based on the idea that "a city is there for its residents" (residents are most important), which surely has contributed to keeping them there.

## Foundation Of “HOPE” For Reconstruction with Government, Corporation, Academic in Collaboration

The Higashi-Matsuyama Institute of Future City (HOPE), an incorporated nonprofit association, is an organization in charge of reconstruction of the city founded in October 2012, that leads participants and various projects together making recovery efforts with the government (public sectors), corporations (private sectors) and academics (universities) in collaboration.

Here are some undertakings around the “Environmental Future City” (currently, SDGs Future City) the city and institute together are working on:

**“Oku-Matsushima ‘Kizuna’ (bond) Solar Park”:** Mitsui and Co., Ltd. set up mega-solar panels in a park for athletics which had suffered from the Tsunami to start solar power generation in August 2013.

**“Smart Disaster Prevention & Eco Town”:** One public apartment for former victims is connected with four hospitals / other public institutes with power transmission line (of autonomy) to provide power mostly through solar power generation, a “Resilience Model” where the supply of power wouldn’t be interrupted even when general utility companies were rendered inoperable from a natural disaster.

**“Harappa (grass filed market place)”:** This group was established in April 2016; it intends to further vitalize local industries by directly selling regional agricultural / marine products and processing and marketing them.

**“Smart Pole (locally distributed power generation and delivery)”:** Smart Pole is equipped with small-size wind power / solar power generation and spare cells which are deployed in main evacuation shelters to reinforce functionalities around disaster prevention, started in 2012.

**“Model Residence for Super-Aging Society”:** This is a model house to show the concept of “Higashi-Matsushima-type local residence” prepared for the aging society with fewer children and environmental / energy issues.

**“Sachi Mitsuru Sato (village with happiness), KDDI Evolva Nobiru”:** This institute is managed for the purpose of effectively utilizing disaster-stricken areas and the creation of various employment opportunities by offering jobs to the handicapped in local areas and employing active seniors to grow agricultural products, etc.

Meanwhile, Higashi-Matsushima has extensively promoted the construction of facilities for wind / solar power generation; it launched “HOPE-no-Denki” (HOPE's electricity) to provide electricity to various public institutes, agricultural / marine cooperatives and private companies in April 2016, managed by HOPE itself with the aim to create a circulation of “economy, energy and people” through such new attempts for power generation and the revitalization of local areas; HOPE is also responsible for electricity management of Smart Disaster Prevention Eco Park with a framework in mind to give back its profits to local areas in the future.



**Electronic car (Smart E-car) donated to HOPE by Mercedes-Benz Japan,2014**



**Mr. Yusuke, Atsumi, Chair of HOPE**



**Mr. Kentaro Mizoe, Director of “Kichi Mitsuru Sato, KDDI Evolva Nobiru” (right) and Mr. Kazuya Shida (left)**



**“Sachi Mitsuru Sato, KDDI Evolva Nobiru” the handicapped worked in, cheerful and with “pop” atmosphere**

## Proactive Communication with Denmark For the Future of Higashi-Matsushima Children

In September 2011, three months after Crown Prince Frederic had first come to Higashi-Matsushima City, twelve junior-high-school students of the city visited Denmark, supported by Denmark-related companies.

Those children, who stayed in Fredensborg for eight days /six nights (as homestay) returned with a great pride and ambition to “become a grownup to take on the

world". Mr. Kawaguchi says, "We grownups, ex-victims, were in turn moved and encouraged by them embracing a bright future."

They started a project to invite children of the host families in Denmark to the city, in return. The International Association for Cooperation between Denmark and Higashi-Matsushima City also held a wide variety of socializing events between the Danish people who visited Japan and local residents. As of 2020, this roundtrip enterprise is temporarily being interrupted by the Coronavirus pandemic; however, such interaction and communication between the children in Japan and Denmark will continue in the future.

Ten years have passed since 2011; the then-junior-high students who first visited Denmark have grown up and are starting to work in society. As such, Denmark has greatly influenced the reconstruction of the city. Senior people are anticipating what path those young people, who learned a lot from Denmark's ideals, will do and what future they will bring to their hometown, Higashi-Matsushima City.



**Students who crossed the ocean to Denmark in September 2011, now grownups  
(photo/ Higashi-Matsushima City)**

## Primary School Established Under the Same Concept as Denmark's

The Island of Lolland in Denmark has an institute called "Forest Kindergarten", an ideal environment for education where its children spend almost their entire day in forests to hone their five senses and nurture their mental capabilities. Higashi-Matsushima City began construction of a new school in the Nobiru area (to which residences have moved) under a project named "Forest School" to create an environment where children can learn with nature, which had been triggered by the call of Mr. C. W Nichole, a writer and environmentalist, to reconstruct schools damaged by the Earthquake.

Amid heightened anticipation for the project with a concept overlapping that of “Forest Kindergarten” in Lolland, “Miyano-Mori Primary School” (“Mori” meaning forest) of Higashi-Matsushima City was completed in January 2017.

While general, public buildings with endurance and costs in mind are mostly made from reinforced concrete, those of the primary schools are mainly made of local wood with ideas to make one feel the warmth of trees in its spots here and there, a venue of learning that will for surely evoke imagination.

At the back of the school is “Reconstruction Forest” where children can play together outside close to nature.

The supply of electricity is of course made through utilization of natural energies, with solar panels set up on the building facing south to tap renewable energy such as solar power.



**Miyano-Mori Primary School under the concept of learning with natures**

## Becoming “Host Town To ‘Thank You’ For Reconstruction” That Welcomes Denmark Back



**Mr. Hisayoshi Sugawara in charge of Tokyo Olympic / Paralympic Games as a manager to promote sports in Lifetime Learning Section of Educational Board in Higashi-Matsushima City, with the city’s official mascot characters “Ee~t & Ee~na”. He is planning various socializing events with Denmark after the Olympic Games**

The Cabinet Office of Preparations for and Management of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo in 2020 has registered and supported municipalities that are active in internationally promoting the revitalization of local areas / sightseeing as "host town" since 2016 and has set up "Host Town to 'Thank' for reconstruction" in 2017 anew, chiefly for three prefectural municipalities that suffered (Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima) for the purpose of showing how they have been revitalized since the Earthquake to countries and regions in the world that supported them and promoting further communication after Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Supported by this program, people in Higashi-Matsushima City visited Denmark in January 2018, when they paid an honorary visit to Crown Prince Frederic and visited Denmark's Olympic Committee and companies that had supported the city after the Earthquake to express their gratitude and show the will for sustained communication and cooperation.

In August of the same year, they took part in a summer school held in Denmark with "Food" as its theme, where fishermen in the city accompanied them, and a workshop was held to convey ideas and artisanship around seaweed cultivation, a specialty marine product of the city. They exchanged ideas on various topics such as food, industry, culture, and environment to promote mutual understanding; Denmark is looking forward to such Japanese projects to convey its own know-how and experience further.

While some of the projects are pending along with Olympic and Paralympic Games postponed for the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Kawaguchi nonetheless hopes to continue such attempts to deepen the relationship of both sides.



**Takashi Kawaguchi**

Assistant manager in the Division (and Section, Group) of Reconstruction Policy in Higashi-Matsushima City

Born in 1975, he joined the Higashi-Matsushima City Office in 2010. Stationed in the Division of Reconstruction Policy in August 2011. Engaged in various planning and operations to reconstruct the city and for related issues, among all the project for Environmental Future City. Participated in HOPE in 2015. Back to the division in 2018 (current position).

## From Crisis to Cooperation – Hope for Higashi-Matsushima –

**Contributed by Franz-Michael Skjold Mellbin former Danish Ambassador of the Danish Embassy in Japan.**



It is difficult to imagine the destruction of your entire life. Everything you have, your home, your town – your family and loved ones. Crushed under water. Washed away. Gone.

The 2011 Earthquake and Tsunami in the Sea of Japan was a horrific event by any standard. A triple disaster had combined the destructive forces of an Earthquake, a Tsunami, and a nuclear disaster. Millions of lives were disrupted. Hundreds of thousands lost their homes to the waves or radiation. But by far the worst affected were coastal communities such as Higashi-Matsushima where hundreds perished.

In Tokyo we were luckier. We fled our homes. Electricity and gas were disrupted; communications broke down, trains stopped, and roads clogged. But we were safe. Still, just minutes after the first tremors died down the Embassy immediately came under tremendous pressure to account for each and every Dane in Japan. Many needed help. Relatives were desperate. Everyone wanted answers.

Because we would not be able to help the worst affected Japanese before we could account for all Danes, I asked everyone at the Embassy to put all other matters aside and proactively start contacting every single Dane we had information about, through telephone, email, Facebook, chatrooms – whatever. Just find them! Staff members, spouses – and even some of their children – started relentlessly tracking down every Dane. And in less than 72 hours we had a complete overview. It was by far the fastest accounting of all Danes abroad ever.

We were now free to focus on two tasks; Managing the developing situation at Fukushima with all its consequences and trying to help Japan at a time of deep crisis.

Fortunately, the Danish Business community was very quick to respond to the Tsunami with offers of donations through the Embassy. Many deserve to be noticed,

but I will highlight four key donors: the Norden Shipping Company, Maersk Line, the Danish Business Association of Singapore and Andersen Bakery, Hiroshima.

However, having funds was far from enough. What to do with the money at hand? Speed was obviously essential, but with the entire North-East struck hard none of the charities the Embassy contacted had the capacity to move quickly into action.

Instead, we started calling one coastal community after the other. But everyone we reached were swamped with the demands of the immediate disaster and did not have the time to discuss what, how and when the Embassy could help.

After several days of frustration, we re-focused all our efforts using three criteria: we wanted to reach a smaller community where Denmark could make an impact, we would look to the hardest hit areas, and focus on helping the children there as the most vulnerable. We also decided for a direct donation so local authorities easily could spend the money as needed.

This delivered the necessary break through. Within a couple of days, we had a call from Mr. Michiaki Omura of Tohoku University Graduate School, who has a network with Higashi-Matsushima City. He informed Higashi-Matsushima had an agreement with us that they would allow the town to pay for the school children's bus transportation to nearby cities were they temporarily could resume schooling.

However, the very next day Higashi-Matsushima suddenly asked us to deliver the donation to them in cash instead a bank transfer. All banks in the area were shut down and the city was very short on cash. We promised to do our best - knowing it would be a challenge. First it took two days for our bank to gather the cash and for our drivers to collect enough gas around the city to get the Higashi-Matsushima and back. Afterwards we had to find an open route as several bridges and many roads were unpassable. Finally, we needed to take precautions to monitor the radiation as we passed Fukushima – and yes, we could hear our Gieger-meter “clicking” faster and faster as our car got closer to the nuclear plant and fading again as we passed.

We left Tokyo for Higashi-Matsushima on March 30. As we reached Higashi-Matsushima we met scenes of unimaginable destruction. Even if I had seen the consequences of war nothing can prepare you for the scope of human tragedy as you face what was once a living community erased from the surface of the earth and piled into a meaningless unrecognizable jumble.

But we were met by more than just destruction. We also met resilience. Saw courage. Sensed hope.

There was the fireman who had lost his entire family – eleven people – and who still worked tirelessly to rescue others. There was the older couple who had gone looking for their house – were their daughter had been swept away – and miraculously found the second floor of their house nesting in a tree over a hundred meters away with a photo album of their daughter still unscathed. And there was the School building. Still standing strong. A small miracle in a sea of devastation. Here on the top over a hundred children were saved from the waves as the building was gutted by the waves.

At the office room of Mayor Mr. Hideo Abe, the air was filled of determination and purpose. And so, in the middle of the municipal crisis center – amidst helmets, radio and phone calls, head lights, gloves, huge maps, speed markers, bulletins and notes of missing people – the Mayor and I held a short ceremony handing over two large paper bags of cash, which the Mayor promptly ordered put into their safe.

The Mayor and I afterwards had a short talk about the impact of the Tsunami and challenges the city was facing. However, there was a journalist from a sports newspaper. Was I willing to give an interview to him? I answered that if any journalist had made it all the way to the Mayor's office, he certainly deserved an interview. I promised to in touch and consider what more we could do to help the citizens of Higashi-Matsushima and went for the interview.

Back in Tokyo the next day the story of Denmark's assistance and the Embassy's journey to Higashi-Matsushima suddenly became headline news for a day. At a time where the nation was beset with the aftermath of the disaster and with more bad news coming from Fukushima every day, the story of how the Embassy in spite of all the difficulties made it to Higashi-Matsushima with the donation offered at least a glimmer of sunshine and renewed hope.

In the following weeks, the Embassy and its partners organized several minor outreaches to the people of Higashi-Matsushima and to the refugees from Fukushima. Meanwhile the mood in Japan was dire. Many foreigners decided to leave, several airlines stopped flying and some Embassies even evacuated Tokyo.

To me this was incomprehensible. Japan was strong and rich. It would rise to the occasion. But facing so many set back many Japanese needed a moral boost to

restore their faith in the future. So that Embassy organized several “firsts” with its partners. The first was international business dinner, the first large business event etc. Small steps on the path towards economic and social restoration.

I was also planning another big “first”; Having HRH Crown Prince Frederik visit the affected areas in Japan following the disaster.

Anyone who knows and has met HRH Crown Prince Frederik can attest that he is eminently skilled at talking with people, understanding their situation, and meeting them eye to eye. So, when the Court replied that HRH was ready to go to Japan and visit the people of Higashi-Matsushima I was overjoyed.

And so, it happened that HRH Crown Prince Frederik became the first high level foreign visitor to visit the areas where the Tsunami had struck. It was a great visit that allowed HRH to underline both the sympathy and support of the Danish People towards Japan and especially the people of Higashi-Matsushima – but also to send a strong signal, that Japan was open and ready for business and tourism again.

HRH met many of people I had met during that first visit to the city. He played soccer and sang with the school children, talked with the refugees and Higashi-Matsushima City officials who gave their best like Mr. Shuya Takahashi showed us around. There were meetings with city officials and back in Tokyo with Japanese and Danish businesses. More than anything I believe that the Royal visit helped cement the strong ties between Denmark and the people of Higashi-Matsushima and HRH even today speaks very fondly of his visit to the city and its people.

Higashi-Matsushima has come a long way since the disaster. The children have grown, the buildings are restored and the defenses against the whims of nature strengthened. Even if Denmark and the Embassy only played a very small role in the city’s restoration, I like to think that we helped inspire the city to imagine a better future and bring a little hope to its citizens who I learned to admire and love.

As I look back at the chaotic and hectic days following the 2011 disaster, I cannot help feeling that it was a small miracle that Denmark was able to reach out with a small ray of hope for the people of Higashi-Matsushima so shortly after the Tsunami hit.

Turning Denmark's Traditional Culture into Local Industry

## Challenge of Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls, To Make Higashi-Matsushima A City of Stitching

**Ms. Tomoko Haga chair of “Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls”, that became a private enterprise in February 2019. The group empathizes with lives in Denmark that embrace natural environments and time spent with family members.**



Denmark is a country in which a North-European traditional stitching culture called “Cross Stitch” is rooted. “Stitch Girls” is a project to convey techniques around Cross Stitch to local women and establish a new industry that will lead to reconstruction, not just supporting disaster-stricken areas by sending materials with Cross Stitch or making donations, an enterprise launched by Ms. Miri Okada calling on local “girls” in November 2013.

Girls who had been forced to live in temporary housings with mental scars of the Earthquake have been energized again with such a specific goal and gradually grown up as “pros” to make profits and revitalize local communities. We have interviewed those “girls” in Higashi-Matsushima and Ms. Tomoko Haga who has inherited the business.

### Denmark's Gentle and Warm Traditional Manual Artifacts

On November 6th 2013, girls gathered in “Kurassic Park” (implying classic), a facility for civil socializing in Higashi-Matsushima City, to celebrate the startup of Higashi-Matsushima Stich Girls and receive the first lecture on stitching delivered by Ms. Miri Okada. This project was named “Stitch Girls” for the girls to tackle Cross Stitch, with their ages ranging from in their 20s to 60s, every member being an energetic “girl”, without exception (regardless of age).

Such stitching to draw patterns and pictures on cloth with a stitching needle and threads can be recreated with a sewing machine; but more complex ones cannot be created without manual artisanship of sewers, a daunting task a sewing machine could not ever handle.



**The most popular original goods of Stitch Girls: ones stitched with “Blue Impulse” renowned for acrobatic flying from Matsushima Base /Air Self-Defense Force. Even the products sales for reservation only though orders in line for months.**



**Towel of friendship between Denmark and Japan designed by Ms. Okada and having been sold since her foundation of Stitch Girls, where she made several roundtrips between Tokyo and Higashi-Matsushima to give strict lectures to the “girls” based on an idea that goods made for hobbies and ones professionally made for sales are totally different.**

Ms. Tomoko Haga, who manages “Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls”, sales of its products and other marketing activities mostly for tailored orders, explains, “The Uniqueness of Cross Stitch lies in its stitching method to combine X shapes with matrixes, for example, having to get a thread through one hole four times, which does require manual dexterity and among all patience. Most important is the tenseness of the threads and how to organize them on the back side, which will affective beauty of the finished stitching.”

In Denmark, Cross Stitch has been traditionally handed down as a handy hobby to enjoy in daily lives, warmth of which probably matches the lifestyle of families in Northern Europe.

**The first lecture on Cross Stitch held in “Kurassic Park” on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013, when Ms. Okada taught her girls very “seriously” as their product would require a professional (sellable) level (photo/Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls)**



Ms. Haga tells us, "Then, 'HOPE' adopted Ms. Miri Okada's such plan as its managing body to kickstart the project. I, who belonged to HOPE at the time, joined it as one of its staff members; my main roles were to solicit participants for its activities, prepare and provide necessary threads and cloths, and set up of an environment as a whole where 'girls' would be able to concentrate on making their products." She once changed her job to enter HOPE and has inherited management of Stitch Girls while embracing its original goals set at the onset of the project.

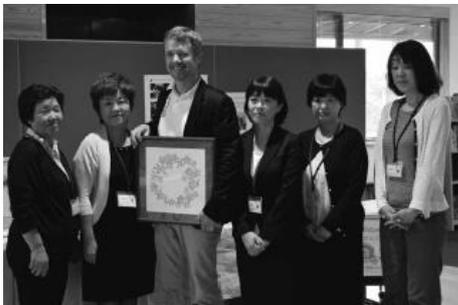


**Opening event of "Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls Cafe", the headquarter of Stitch Girls opened in a temporary housing in November 2015, joined by Mr. Freddy Svane, former Ambassador to Japan, and his wife (photo/Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls)**

## Starting to Work for HOPE Upon Experiencing Great Earthquake in East Japan

Before joining HOPE, Ms. Haga worked for a major electronic company located in Tagajo City 40 km away from Higashi-Matsushima City where she lived.

On the day of the Earthquake, damages of the Tsunami extensively spread to Tagajo City, too, with her trapped there. Worried about her two sons, she had to spend days unable to contact her family with lifelines severed.



**Crown Prince Frederic watching activities of Stitch Girls on his second visit to the city in 2017 (photo/Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls)**

She reflects on the anxiety she had at the time, "On the third day I managed to ride a car, packed with seven passengers headed to Ishinomaki to see their respective families. On the way there, I heard a rumor that in the Omagari area of Higashi-Matsushima City (where my house was located) the sea level reached the rooftop of a primary school, which I thought would ruin everything if it were true."

Upon reaching her own residence, she observed that her two-story house was not washed away, but the first floor was in shambles: fortunately, as she had bolstered its base in construction, the second floor was kept untouched by the Tsunami.

She glanced at a nearby coastline, where houses that "should have been there" were completely gone, around which countless cars were left scattered, a totally changed landscape for her, and that for the worse or literally the worst.

She recollects, "Our house sheltered some people who were evacuated from the Tsunami; my husband's father told me that he helped them, running away and about to be drowned, into our house with a rope from the second floor in tandem with those who fled first. Meanwhile, on the first floor was an old woman holding a baby and crying for help; my older son received the baby and told me later that 'his leg shook in fear of not dropping baby.' After the tidal waves receded, we scavenged the first floor for something edible such as canned foods not to starve. I successfully contacted my second son via email; five days after the Earthquake I re-united with all of my family members including my husband."

Observing her own hometown whose landscape was totally changed by the unprecedented Earthquake, she began to think that she should assume a job that would help reconstruct Higashi-Matsushima City in one way or another, where they had lived for long. In 2014, she resigned from the company she had worked for to join HOPE; she would be involved in Stitch Girls, which had been already launched then.



**The period for its products to be bought for reconstruction ended, to be sold at a price for what can't be mass-produced like industrial commodities, which consumers would truly crave**

## Business Staged By “Professional” Stitching Group

There were about seventy girls who participated in Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls when it was founded; Ms. Miri Okada regularly went to a hall in Higashi-Matsushima to deliver her lecture on Cross Stitching to them, where merely “practicing” it would not boost their motivation much.

After one month, Ms. Okada told them, “Let us show and sell what we’ve created in hobby exhibitions!” Her word “sells” somewhat surprised them as a high hurdle, but it did unify them, those who had just enjoyed stitching in different venues and participated in the gathering with different motives; since then, they had voluntarily come to a community center there every week to continue their production and hone their skills.

After one year had passed; Ms. Okada launched her original plan to make it a “business” as one of the city’s local industries in January 2014. “Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls” finally started its production / sales as a business under the support of HOPE, as a “professional” stitching group.

Ms. Haga says, “Upon professionally marketing our products, we implemented tight inspections in delivery on finished stitching such as the tenseness of threads. Some left as they didn’t really agree with our professional policy; some in their 60s quite due to the eye strain, not confident enough to continue professionally.”

However, some of those who had left Stitch Girls kept doing Cross Stitching as a hobby, and some new groups which would make and sell Cross Stitch products at their own pace (not so strictly professionally) have been born; thus, Denmark’s Cross Stitch culture has been steadily rooted in Higashi-Matsushima City.

## Inheriting “Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls” Business From HOPE

Sales of stitching products reminds us of “retail style” where consumer stop by at a shop to pick up goods; on the other hand, Stitch Girls’ goal is to expand its business around deals with companies (B-to-B) rather than those with consumers (B-to-C). For instance, it works on the outsourced production of finished models for a “Stitching Kit” (a set of cloths, threads and drawings / a manual for stitching at home as a hobby) of DMC, a stitching-thread maker in France, where such models exhibited at a handcraft shop will boost buyer’s motivation as the specific image upon completion

that consumers should have in mind. Whenever such a kit is devised by DMC, there will be an order placed to Stitch Girls; a French company is now a loyal client.

While Ms. Haga was highly motivated by Stitch Girls expanding its business, she started to feel that it might be hard for her to keep working for HOPE; she subtly sensed her own aging. Then, she made the decision by and for herself.

Ms. Haga recalls, "I negotiated with HOPE over whether I could inherit the business of Stitch Girls as a private business owner from it; it was getting harder for me to 'commute' to and work at a designated timeframe for HOPE, but it was possible for me to manage the business at home. Meanwhile, I thought that if I was out, I who had been a bridge between Stich Girls and its corporate clients for about five years, it might fold. Clearly, it had been on the rise as a business, greatly contributing to the local society as one of sightseeing resources and among all got Crown Prince Frederic's continued warm attention. I thought I was just responsible for continuation of the business."

In February 2019, "Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls" went independent in the true sense of the word. Ms. Haga built a log house on her real estate, at her own expense, which would be at once her workplace and shop to sell its own products and other handcraft tools, as the very bastion for Stitch Girls.

Nineteen women (stitchers) who belonged to Stitch Girls delivered their finished products there regularly. While the process of production itself remained unchanged, her leadership and skills as a female manager / owner of Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls, instead of as one staff member, would be tested. Ms. Haga reveals, "The relationship with stitchers is most critical for me. If I "forced" them to work, our relationship would have damaged. Instead, I should aim at a company that can provide products which they can be professionally proud of in a sustainable manner. Without them, there is no business for me; it should be an operation with stitchers as the first and foremost that will turn profit.", sticking to a style that respects her workers while trying to establish a business with bright possibilities.

Ms. Miri Okada came to the new Office & Shop to celebrate its new voyage, too. The Coronavirus pandemic hit the world right after that, which has fortunately affected Stitch Girls' operations just a little, with Ms. Haga ever busy for demand

stemming from at-home remote work and shutting-ins (needs for a domestic hobby).

She says that her experiencing the Great Earthquake in East Japan has made her choose to live near her own family, rooted in her hometown, where "Hygge" has been observed in her profile, a relaxed lifestyle unique to Denmark with the highest level of well-being.



**At-once Office & Shop, a log-house built on her own real estate, with furniture inside donated by Ms. Miri Okada (one used for the first, temporary shop opened in 2015)**



**Meeting online over new products with Ms. Katada, who provides technical guidance for smocking stitch in Tokyo, with trial workshops connecting Higashi-Matsushima City with the entire Japan online along with experimental technical lectures in mind.**



### **Tomoko Haga**

CEO and President, Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls  
Had worked in Sendai Technology Center of Sony Corporation for 25 years before the Earthquake, where she was engaged in quality management of magnetic tapes, designing of various products (especially that of printing media), etc. Joined HOPE in October 2014 after the Earthquake, where she helped reconstruct Higashi-Matsushima City, setting up its Discovery Center and among all working as Secretary-General for Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls.

## How Circle of Their Activities Broadened

### Miri Okada, Founder Of “Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls”

Ms. Miri Okada is known as the founder of Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls. As her grandmother is Danish, she has been deeply connected to Denmark, having worked as Goodwill Ambassador for the 150th anniversary for establishment of formal diplomacy between Japan and Denmark in 2017, etc. Her activities range from exposure to media, model, essayist and lecturer and manager of classes for Cross Stitch, a traditional Danish handicraft, widely supported by women nationwide.

Observing the grave damages of the Earthquake through various media, she wanted to do something for the region; while she was looking for activities that would help reconstruct Higashi-Matsushima City (visited by Crown Prince Frederic of Denmark, in which she is rooted), she garnered information on HOPE, an organization promoting various projects for recovery.

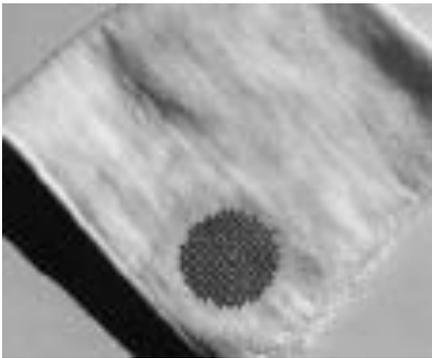
She comments, “While ‘food / clothing / shelter have been imperative in helping the victims, supports for economic independence are also important. For example, stitching can be done by women even in a temporary housing and may have an effect to mentally sedate them. Among all, I believe that having skills that can be professionally used would give them confidence and a hope to live with.”; thus, she decided to back women in Higashi-Matsushima City with traditional Danish stitching.

Backed by DMC, a stitching-thread maker which agreed to her such plan, “Higashi-Matsushima Stitch Girls” was qualified by HOPE as a reconstruction effort (enterprise), established and to become a business over time.

In 2019, Ms. Haga, who oversaw Stitch Girls as one of HOPE's projects, took it completely independent of public assistances, which Ms. Okada of course is still supporting.

**Cross-Stitch drawing of the logo for 150th anniversary for establishment of formal diplomacy between Japan and Denmark (designed by Atelier Daisy)**





Techniques of drawing needed to create such original Cross-Stitch works (right) / Emperor of Japan (then-Crown Prince), assuming the position of Honorary Chair for the anniversary, having expressed the logo for the anniversary depicted on a handkerchief, for request by Embassy of Denmark, upon formal visitation to Denmark (15th - 21st June)



**Miri Okada**

Model, Essayist

Born in Tokyo in 1961 / CEO of a general import agent in Japan for “Trollbeads” in Denmark in 2008 / Director of “House of Amber” in 2016, an 83-year-old jewelry brand in Denmark / Honorary Tea Instructor certified by Japan Tea Association since 2012 / DMC Stitching Mentor, etc., known as an extensive business person.