



Mayor's Office of
International Affairs

FUKUOKA, JAPAN

ATLANTA'S SISTER CITY

FUKUOKA: THE POWER OF CITIZENS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

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ATLANTA - Exchanges between Atlanta and Fukuoka City were set in motion by the visit of former Japanese prime minister Kaifu Toshiki to Atlanta. Collaboration between the two cities was subsequently suggested through the Japanese Chamber of Commerce located in Atlanta. The two cities concluded the Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Cultural and Economic Cooperation in 1993 and formally became sister cities in 2005. In September 2015, delegates from Fukuoka City visited Atlanta to participate in JapanFest in commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the two city's sister city relationship. As the largest Japanese festival in the Southeast, JapanFest draws more than 20,000 participants each year.





Eight days after the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Japan in January 2020, a task force to combat the virus was established in Fukuoka. Approximately two months later, the national government issued a request for the public to stay at home and for non-essential businesses to close. “Since the Japanese government cannot legally enforce lockdowns due to constitutional restrictions, the state of emergency was based on official requests to the citizens for self-imposed isolation,” Ms. Nakagawa, International Affairs Coordinator for the City of Fukuoka, explained.

The majority of residents and businesses responded positively to the request, which was an initiative crucial to containing the spread of the infection. Additionally, Fukuoka City led a movement called “Friday Ovation” to applaud and encourage those working on the frontlines against COVID-19. The initiative, which spread nationwide, takes place each Friday at noon.



Furthermore, many startup companies are turning the COVID-19 crisis into an opportunity to adopt business reforms. The pandemic stimulated the creation of a group of 213 organizations from the Fukuoka Directive Council that are now working together to generate ideas and solutions for overcoming the social and economic challenges caused by the pandemic. The “Cheer for Fukuoka” project aims to support those who create new values to enrich the post-COVID-19 world and move forward towards a brighter future.

When it comes to engagement with Fukuoka’s foreign community, the City’s International Affairs Department engaged with social media channels and kept consulates and relevant organizations informed about the municipality’s efforts to combat the virus. Beyond that, the office sent members of its staff to support other departments dealing with COVID-19 countermeasures and canceled or postponed all non-essential events. “We were able to maintain our essential tasks of the team going with the minimum number of staff members by quickly revising our plans and priorities,” Ms. Nakagawa says. “Our team’s top priority will always be to keep outputting relevant information to foreign residents of our city,” she concludes. ◆