

25 Years of Iwaki Vision

Interview with Chris Burkimsher (UK)

Editor of Iwaki Vision volumes 1-14 (Winter 1990-Spring 1994)

Iwaki Vision is celebrating 25 years since it was first conceived by Chris Burkimsher and published in the winter of December 1990. Of course Iwaki Vision has changed a lot since its early days; so in tribute to 25 years, Iwaki Vision has sought a few words from the first Coordinator of International Relations, Chris Burkimsher.



Chris interviewing Atsuo Nakamura (centre), well-known actor and TV presenter colleague from the same division, Utsumi (right).

Although there were a few unknowns for all parties in the early days, the leadership in Iwaki had thought carefully what they wanted to achieve through the creation of the CIR position, so I had a clear sense of where we needed to go in that first year. There was the excitement of starting new things without precedent and having a hand in shaping the development of the role. The first major new project assigned to me was the creation and launch of a regular English language newsletter, which of course became 'Iwaki Vision'.

How did you feel when you made your first Time Out and Iwaki Vision?

Iwaki City wanted to create an English language newsletter as a means to showcase life and culture to non-Japanese people inside and outside Iwaki. That was the broad concept, but I was able to start with pretty much a blank sheet of paper when it came to ideas for content. That was a great opportunity for me on the one hand, but on the other hand I had no experience whatsoever of creating publications, and when I found out that I had to be journalist, editor, photographer, illustrator, translator and layout designer, it became a slightly more daunting proposition. Fortunately, I got great support and advice from City Hall colleagues especially in the Public Relations Department who produced regular

What was your first few months working as a Coordinator of International Relations for Iwaki City Hall like?

I was the first CIR to work for Iwaki City so everything was new, both for me and for my Japanese colleagues in City Hall. But prior to taking the CIR role, I had been employed as an ALT for the Iwaki City Board of Education for three years and had been based in City Hall, so I was lucky to know a lot of people already and to understand to some extent how things worked in Iwaki's local government.



Chris in his office working on Iwaki Vision using a primitive version of word processor.



Chris out reporting on another local festival.

much space I had for the text. But it was still just an estimate, so the printers had quite a job interpreting my hand-made intentions and there was always a considerable amount of manipulation and trimming at the proofing stage. Nevertheless, it was thrilling and incredibly satisfying to see the culmination of these efforts in the first edition of Iwaki Vision. The early editions were coloured in two-tone purple (purple being Iwaki's municipal colour) so the photos looked a bit other-worldly, but after a couple of years the magazine went full colour which further stimulated my enjoyment of discovering and capturing the appeal of life in Iwaki through the lens of my camera.



Queensland Museum, also part of Townsville visit. Press pack accompanying Chris and Mayor Iwaki for the signing ceremony.

publications for Iwaki citizens. All this was of course in the days before widespread digital publishing. I did have my own word processor which was still a pretty rare thing back in the day. It enabled me at least to input stories electronically on to a floppy disk, but if other people contributed an article it was hand-written on paper and I had to type it up. The layout was seriously challenging and I spent long hours by the photo copier enlarging or reducing the size of photos, then sticking them on blank pages and measuring with a ruler how



Visiting a processing plant in Townsville as part of visit for signing of sister city relationship. Accompanied by Mayor Mitsuhide Iwaki (left).

Time Out was born from my idea to keep non-Japanese people in touch with some of the great things Iwaki citizens were enjoying but generally non-Japanese people weren't aware of because the information was published in Japanese. Coming from the UK, I was inspired by Time Out London magazine, but my version was just one sheet of A4 knocked out on my basic word processor, then photo-copied in mass. There were no such things as websites in those days, so to find out what was happening I had to walk around Taira, checking out places ranging from the culture centre, art museum and library to the station, cinemas and department stores, where I could find posters and information boards about upcoming events and entertainment, with the mission of taking pencil notes to type up back in City Hall. I hope it's a bit easier 25 years on!