

Did you feel any extra pressure or sense of responsibility being the first CIR for Iwaki City Hall?

I had been working as an ALT for Iwaki City and had been involved in a few events with an international theme, so it seemed like a natural progression to become CIR for Iwaki. I already had a strong affinity for people and places in Iwaki and it felt like 'my town', so it was exciting to be able to share this experience with other non-Japanese people. The time was also right because Iwaki City was very committed to reaching out to non-Japanese people living in the city and I felt rather lucky to be able to play my part in that community initiative. I soon started to feel the uniqueness and importance of the role when I found myself being interviewed on TV and by newspapers about 'international relations' in Iwaki. That sense of responsibility was also reinforced on occasions when I acted as interpreter for English-speaking guests on courtesy visits to the Mayor of Iwaki City. The Mayor while I was CIR was Mr. Mitsuhide Iwaki, who was highly supportive of cultivating international relations – his greeting features on the front page of Iwaki Vision Number 1 – and I think that endorsement gave the new position extra purpose and recognition.

What was the most challenging and awarding parts of your life in Iwaki?

When living in another country, it usually takes a while to get accustomed to local life, but Iwaki people were warm and welcoming from the start, which helped to accelerate the process of settling in. This also allowed me to develop my language skills and a deeper understanding of Japanese life, factors that in turn contributed to a richer experience through knowing local people and what's important from their standpoint.

I must say it took a while to acclimatise to the hot and humid summers in Iwaki. This was in the days before air conditioning was widespread in homes and I know there are hotter parts of Japan, but when I first arrived in August it felt like I was permanently stuck in a sauna. But now back in the cooler UK, I often wish we could have a little bit of that heat over here!

In the context of Iwaki Vision, I really enjoyed the freedom to pursue ideas for articles and content. It was exciting to get out and meet people for stories and interviews. I always found an open door and people were extremely



The signing ceremony in Townsville. Mayor of Townsville Tony Mooney (centre).

supportive in answering my questions and indeed in educating me more about their personal areas of interest. I'm also proud of playing a part in the establishment of the sister city relationship with Townsville, Australia. During my time in Iwaki, I got to know plenty of people from Townsville and took pleasure in being able to record the progress of the relationship starting from the formal signing of the sister city declaration in ceremonies held in both countries to the regular exchange activities between citizen groups and schools at grass roots level.



Iwaki's City Flag (bottom) among others presented to the Mayor of Townsville.

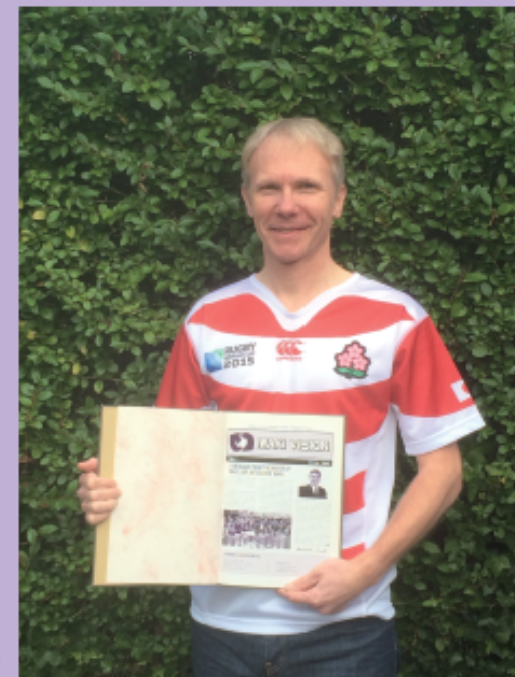
Do you believe your experiences living and working in Iwaki were helpful after your time here finished?

My time in Iwaki was very formative, and gave me experience and confidence that I have carried forward into my life in the UK. I still have friends in Iwaki and keep up my interest in what's going on – it's certainly easy to keep up through the Internet; when I first left Iwaki the most instantaneous form of news update was a fax. I've returned a few times since I left including with my family, and one of my daughters has done a homestay thanks to help from the Iwaki International Association. All in all, my years in Iwaki were a totally unique period in my life and the memories still give me great pleasure and pride.

Any comments regarding the 25th anniversary of Iwaki Vision?

It is absolutely wonderful for me personally that Iwaki Vision has reached the milestone of 25 years. When I worked on the first edition I had no concept that we might one day celebrate its silver anniversary. I congratulate Iwaki City for its original foresight and its long-term commitment to the project, and I thank all the other CIR editors of Iwaki Vision who have continued the 'story'. I hope it has been as rewarding for them as it was for me to discover Iwaki and to be able to bring its life and colour to a wider audience.

I'm lucky enough to have been receiving Iwaki Vision since I left Japan in 1994, and it has been fascinating to see how the city and citizens have continued to blossom and in particular how that original statement of inclusiveness towards the growing non-Japanese community has been sustained. I must praise the efforts



Chris today, holding the first edition of Iwaki Vision he published 25 years ago.

of the Iwaki International Association as a constant catalyst for developing cross-cultural understanding and friendship. And I continue to admire and to be deeply moved by the tremendous resolution and energy of all people in Iwaki to rebound from the devastating effects of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami.

Finally, in case anyone is curious, I should say that I'm the one responsible for the name 'Iwaki Vision'. I went through a quite a few different names as candidates for the title, but in the end I liked the basic idea of trying to broadcast the vividness and actuality of life as lived in Iwaki via the words and images on the pages of the newsletter. Well it's lasted 25 years so I guess people are used to the name by now!

Thank you Chris for giving us insight into what it was like making those first few editions of Iwaki Vision and of your time in Iwaki. We hope Iwaki Vision enjoys many more years to come from here on out.