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The Candle Night Newsletter--#8

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Candle Night Committee

The Candle Night is an event under the slogan of "Turn off lights and take it slow" on the night of summer solstice. This is a voluntary participatory event, initiated by Japan's environmental non government organizations.

The Candle Night Committee hopes to extend this event from Japan to the world. We will provide readers with information and activities of the Candle Night.

If you find the Candle Night Newsletter interesting, please forward it to friends and suggest that they start their own free subscriptions at <http://www.candle-night.org/>

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In this issue, we picked up the following two articles:

Fire disappeared from Japanese homes

Milk carton lanterns lighting up Kumamoto.

The first article is a translated excerpt of a Japanese book, "Nihonjin no wasuremono," (English translation: Things left behind among Japanese people), Susumu Nakanishi, Wedge Corp. (published only in Japanese).

Since ancient times, "fires" have been treated as sacred by shedding light to the darkness and protecting people's lives. They were indispensable for family get-togethers and cooking, and were always placed at the center of a house. Many Japanese people feel nostalgic when they watch a wisp of smoke rising at dusk from a chimney of "minka," an old style Japanese house. However, with the advent of electricity, the roles of fires have been taken over one after another. In this essay, the author writes about the relationship between fires and Japanese people from a cultural point of view.

The second article is a December 2006 event report from Kumamoto in western Japan. Overcoming difficulties, various organizations were able to jointly hold the event.

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Fire disappeared from Japanese homes  
Susumu Nakanishi

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Milk carton lanterns lighting up Kumamoto

In December 2005, after overcoming many difficulties, a Candle Night event titled "Candle de Night" was held for the first time in Kumamoto City. Even though everyone who was involved agreed they must do something good for the environment, putting the plan in motion was another matter. The committee spent tireless hours discussing how to move forward with the event.

Wondering how to move on

Kumamoto Prefecture is located in the middle of Kyushu, the southern island of Japan. Its land area is about 7,404 square kilometers, nearly seven times the area of Hong Kong and about a half that of Northern Ireland. Seventy percent of the land is covered with forest. Kumamoto City, the capital of the prefecture, faces the Sea of Ariake, with a population of about 670,000.

In March 2005, responding to a call from Kumamoto Prefecture, a conference for environmental action networking was held. Environmental organizations in Kumamoto and the prefectural government discussed how to jointly take measures and actions towards environmental issues in the prefecture. Mr. Hiroyuki Yamada, an organizing member of the Candle de Night Committee recalled the meeting and said, "At the meeting all agreed to take action, but it was difficult to move on to the next steps, such as holding the event and taking some initiatives."

Then, in June 2005, another meeting was held in which the Kumamoto branch of OISCA Japan played a central role. Organizations from businesses, municipal government and NPOs/NGOs that had gathered at the previous meeting participated in this meeting as well. During the meeting, all agreed to take action. They formed an organizing committee to discuss how to take concrete steps towards creating initiatives. Then, in August 2005, they held the "sprinkling water" event to cool down the summer heat, and in December of the same year, they held the "Candle de Night" event.

Feeling warm in the heavy snow

On December 21, 2005, Kumamoto was hit by a cold wave for the first time in decades. The prefecture suffered heavy snow storms.

Karashima Park, where the event was held, is located at the center of the city. At the event, a gospel concert was held and handmade milk carton lanterns were decorated by the local citizens. Prior to the gospel concert, an instrumental concert was held where musicians played the marimba and the violin. Since it was very cold during the event, warmed wine was distributed to the participants.

About 50 volunteers, ranging from business people to students helped with the event. Nearly 500 people ranging in age from their 20's to their 40's gathered at the event.

At the event, an objective of the committee's initiative was put as follows: "Aiming at Japan's highest milk carton recycling rate."

The nation's average recycling rate of milk cartons is about 20 percent, but Kumamoto Prefecture's is 16.7 percent. By decorating milk carton lanterns, the group tried to beautifully display candles while at the same time, improve citizen's awareness for recycling. Recycling boxes for milk cartons were placed at the event site. On that night, about 5,000 milk cartons were brought to the event. The milk carton lanterns softened the candlelight and shed beautiful light on the park.

#### Spreading Candle Night in Kumamoto Prefecture

"Even among the organizing committee members, the actual players were limited. Getting consensus in the committee was also painstaking," told Mr. Yamada. However, due to their efforts, Candle Night is steadily spreading in the prefecture. On May 27, 2006, Tamana City, another city in Kumamoto, plans to hold a Candle Night event. They plan to hold concerts, such as "wadaiko" (Japanese drums), marimba and a brass band at five locations in the city. They will decorate milk carton lanterns using waste oil and encourage the citizens to join "Candle Night Summer Solstice 2006."

To realize an idea, you should take action and shape it through trial and error. Once the idea takes its own form, it will spread more and more. People's passion for the environment is spreading in Kumamoto, using "candles" as a symbol.

(Yuko Kisikami)

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We hope you enjoyed this issue of the Candle Night Newsletter.

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