

MAEBASHI FOCUS

Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) Newsletter

Howdy y'all!

The heat has really been picking up over the past couple of weeks, and I got more than my fair share of it this past weekend thanks to none other than the Maebashi Tanabata Festival.

The Cultural and International Affairs Division had the opportunity to collaborate with our sister city of Birmingham, Alabama, to create a special "Maebashi City × Birmingham City" Tanabata bamboo tree.

Residents of Birmingham, including the mayor himself, wrote their wishes on tanzaku, which they sent to us to be displayed on the bamboo tree we set up in the middle of the festival grounds.



Completed tree

This collaboration coincided with Birmingham's own Tanabata Festival, so we received dozens of tanzaku from the families who attended their event. We were incredibly grateful for everyone's participation, and it was a lot of fun reading the heartfelt and creative wishes they had written.

Setting up the tree was both rewarding and exhausting. It was a refreshing change of pace from my usual desk work, and I enjoyed figuring out how to arrange all the decorations. That said, with temperatures reaching the high 20s to low 30s (°C), spending nearly an hour outside in the summer heat was definitely a challenge.

Decorating the tree came with an unexpected obstacle. We had planned for a bamboo tree about 1.5 meters tall, but when it arrived, it was nearly twice that height! The fifteen tanzaku we had prepared suddenly looked nowhere near enough. Fortunately, we had just received the tanzaku from Birmingham, so we printed them out and added them to the tree the following day.



Me holding the bamboo tree

We also designed and printed additional decorations shaped like tanzaku to help fill out the branches. What we expected to be a one-hour task ended up becoming a three-day project. In the end, though, I think our tree turned out to be the best-looking one by far!

As for the festival itself, I haven't seen the shopping arcade (shotengai) that crowded since last year's Maebashi Festival. It felt as though people from all across Gunma had gathered there at once. I was especially proud to see our bamboo tree standing in the center of the event area alongside all the others.

Of course, no Japanese festival would be complete without great food. The festival stalls wrapped around the block, making it nearly impossible to resist stopping for a bite. I ended up treating myself to a cookie ice cream sandwich before picking up a fried chicken burger from my favorite local restaurant, Grassa, which had set up a booth outside for the festival.

Because of the heat, I didn't stay for very long, but I was happy to see the results of our hard work in person. Hopefully next year we can make an even bigger tree; one decorated not only with tanzaku from Birmingham, but also from our other friendship cities, Menasha and Orvieto!



Maebashi Tanabata Festival