

Shirakawa Roman News

Rakuichi for town development

The town development company Rakuichi Shirakawa (President Masafumi Suzuki) in Shirakawa City, Fukushima Prefecture, is working to revitalize the city center around JR Shirakawa Station. Overcoming disasters, such as the Great East Japan Earthquake and TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station disaster, they opened the Eki-Cafe Shirakawa using the old station building built in the Taisho era, and prompted other businesses to fill modern buildings with "Taisho culture". The company is now developing its own business ventures, such as the establishment of the facility Rakura. In the future, they plan to develop housing complexes and parking lots. Preserving iconic local sites such as Komine Castle and the Shirakawa Daruma, they are seeking ways to develop the town in a way that attracts visitors.

(Honoka Midorikawa, Nonoha Kaneko, Kaisei Aki)



The Taisho era's atmosphere still remains at JR Shirakawa station

A station café with Taisho era atmosphere

The company was established in July 2000, by Mr. Suzuki and 4 other members. JR Shin-Shirakawa Station (where the Tohoku Bullet Train stops), and the Japan Central Horse Racing Association (JRA), an off-site Katsuma voting ticket sales office (Winds Shin-Shirakawa) have been improved. However, there had been worry about the current situation with the city center being hollowed out, and this is why they started in-town development. In April 2012, the company became a designated

manager of the citizen exchange facility: My Town Shirakawa. So far, the company provides services within the community, such as operating bus circulation in the city and a lunch delivery service for senior citizens. The effort was highly praised and received a Commendation Award from the Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism in June 2014, and also one from the Local Autonomy Law 70th Anniversary from the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications in November 2017.



Eki Cafe restaurant with a modern atmosphere

Eki Cafe report

Crispy on the outside, fluffy on the inside. Sweet Pancakes



The most popular item on the menu—the Fuwafuwa Pancake



Beautiful Japanese style building, Rakura

Eki Cafe has a Taisho era atmosphere in its furniture and architecture. There are also seats that resemble those on the Narita Express train, so you can enjoy tea as if you were traveling. Check out their selection of sweets that are popular with young people, such as pancakes that are crispy on the outside, fluffy on the inside, and served with whipped cream and vanilla ice cream. The Fuwafuwa

Pancakes are 680 yen (tax included) and are the most popular item on the menu. You can choose your favorite from 6 flavors of bubble tea: milk tea; chai tea; calpis; matcha milk; orange; or pomegranate for 450 yen each (tax included). The chai tea is the most commonly recommended. It is a relaxing place where children and adults can enjoy food and drinks. (Aika Takano, Junnosuke Togura)

Opened with enthusiasm in spite of the Great East Japan Earthquake **RAKURA**

Rakura was scheduled to open in April, 2011, but was postponed due to the Great East Japan Earthquake. Although it was difficult to procure materials to repair broken walls, it was opened in June of the same year with the enthusiasm of all the people concerned. Currently, the building is occupied by 8 tenants, including an Okinawan restaurant, and a shared office. The building has been designated as a Cultural Property of the City. Its exterior is done in the traditional Japanese style, while the interior is done in the style found in the Taisho era.

(Riri Kanno)

Join us! Interview with Rakuichi Shirakawa's director, Mr. Naofumi Furukawa

Mr. Naofumi Furukawa (55), one of the directors of Rakuichi Shirakawa, told us about the company's challenges and dreams for the future during the interview.



—How did you come up with the name of the company?

Just like Rakuichi Rakuza (free markets and open guilds) that was introduced by Nobunaga Oda during the Sengoku period, we wanted to energize Shirakawa's economy. That is where our company's name originates from. It makes me happy to hear local people say that it is now more comfortable living in Shirakawa than it was before. We would like to be a bridge between the gap of private sectors and public administration. It's a great feeling seeing my hometown revitalized.

—What are the challenges in the future?

Currently we have 17 employees. We would like to expand our business, but we need more manpower to do it and we want more people to join us. We would like to strengthen all aspects of the area by building residential complexes and parking areas. This is the 20th anniversary of the project establishment and I want to do a commemorative project next year to celebrate.

—What is your dream?

I want to make the Shirakawa Community a place for everyone to gather, while also preserving local traditions, culture, and history such as the Shirakawa Daruma, Nannko Park, and Shirakawa Ramen. I would especially like to utilize Komine Castle, our city's icon, to attract more visitors.

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