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produced by The Japan Times Cube

sustainable japan

Not-for-profit organizes beach cleanups, citizen science/art, sailing

SEGO Initiative creates connections in Kanagawa

Name: Alana Bonzi
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URL: www.segoinitiative.org
Birthplace: Trinidad
Years in Japan: 26

Leaders & Readers

LOUISE GEORGE KITAKA
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Serendipity flows like a current through Alana Bonzi's life, gently leading the environmentalist and educator to places and people where she feels at home. Her love for nature and a desire to create connections within her community are reflected in the SEGO Initiative, the not-for-profit she founded with her husband, Michel, in the coastal Kanagawa city of Fujisawa.

Like many who came to Japan in the 1990s, Bonzi initially arrived on the JET Programme. She was accompanied by Michel, her fiancé at the time, who taught French privately while Bonzi was working as an English teacher. Hoping to be assigned to a warmer area of Japan and in close proximity to nature, the couple were delighted to find themselves in the city of Izumi in Kagoshima, which is known for hosting more than 10,000 cranes each winter.

"We got married while we were in Izumi but had to travel to Osaka for the required interviews with our respective embassies — it was a little bit more complicated with two foreigners," Bonzi recalled with a smile. "One thing led to another, and we found our path here in Japan."

Loving where you live

The next step on their Japanese journey led to Fujisawa when Bonzi started a new position lecturing on corporate social responsibility (CSR) at Keio University in 2001. They subsequently opened their own language school and purchased a house. "We put down roots and wanted to give something back. There was a foreign community there, and we wanted to connect them with the local Japanese community," she explained.

In the spirit of "love where you live," the couple came up with the Fujisawa Beach Cleaning Project. Since the principle of cleaning a beach needs little explanation, Bonzi says it was an ideal way to bring people of various backgrounds and ages together for cleanups twice a year, in the spring and the autumn.

With her academic background in CSR, as well as practical experience gleaned from her work in government and a short-term assignment as the interim director of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Bonzi pondered how to take her business acumen and apply it to these volunteer activities.

The encouragement of corporate sponsors of the Fujisawa Beach Clean was a very important factor behind the decision to take the next step. "In Fujisawa, you can go surfing in the morning and then take the train to work. So, how do you bring that engagement from the corporate office back to this local area?" she said.

A culture of connections

The SEGO Initiative was launched as a not-for-profit in 2014. Bonzi and her husband wanted a name that worked in both

English and French, with the English version standing for sustainable/social, environment/education, global/grassroots and outdoors/outcome.

Eight years on, the couple are still at the heart of the organization, managing the activities while continuing their day jobs and relying on the efforts of volunteers for support. Bonzi likens this to concentric circles, with an inner circle of a handful of people with whom they bounce around ideas, then widening to include larger groups as their initiatives develop and take shape.

"There are teams of staff from corporate supporters and their families, students, members of the local community and sometimes dedicated groups — foster children, for example. For our pre-COVID beach cleanups, there were usually more than 500 volunteers who joined annually," she said. For the past two years, SEGO has encouraged "Together Apart" cleanups as a socially distanced alternative, with volunteers working in their local areas at their own pace.

The three pillars of SEGO

Over the years SEGO's activities have evolved to encompass three key pillars: volunteering through the cleanup activities, public education via citizen science and art, and reconnecting to the marine environment via sailing.

The citizen science aspect includes contributing information about the prevalence of plastic waste to a database run by the Ocean Conservancy, a nonprofit environmental advocacy group headquartered in the United States. SEGO is one of its official partners in Tokyo. Plastic waste from the ocean has also been utilized as a medium



SEGO INITIATIVE

for art installations by four artists. These were initially displayed on the beach during SEGO's 2019 fall cleanup and were later exhibited at an indoor space in Fujisawa.

Sailing, the third and final pillar, ties in with Michel's role as the Japan representative of Tiwal, a French manufacturer of small dinghies. "We wanted to see how we could incorporate this into what we were doing and make the ocean accessible. You can

actually go out onto the water and understand your place in this beautiful and fragile marine environment," Bonzi explained. "We are all about making connections — hearts, minds and nature."

Looking toward new horizons

SEGO's newest project is the #CreateWaves campaign, which is slated to kick off this spring on Earth Day, April 22. The overall

Lecturer, teacher, project founder

Alana Bonzi was born in the Caribbean island nation of Trinidad and later moved to Canada, becoming a naturalized Canadian citizen. She holds multiple degrees, including a B.A. with honors in modern languages (1987) and a B.Ed./M.A. in teaching (1995), all from the University of Toronto, along with an MBA from Canada's McGill University campus in Japan (2003). She first arrived in Japan in 1995 to teach English in Kagoshima Prefecture, before moving with her husband, Michel, to Fujisawa, Kanagawa Prefecture, six years later. Bonzi continued to pursue an academic career and has been lecturing at Keio University since 2002. She combines this with her role as representative co-director of the not-for-profit SEGO Initiative, which she founded with Michel in 2014 following the success of their Fujisawa Beach Clean project, along with running their French-language school. Having both been raised in coastal areas, in their spare time the couple enjoy relaxing near the beach or taking drives around their area.

goal is to help people cooperate and facilitate creative community-based solutions through a variety of activities, including further Together Apart cleanups, educational webinars, art and film, and hands-on volunteer opportunities.

Looking ahead, Bonzi would love to see SEGO branch out from beach activities to encompass organic farming while continuing to serve as a platform for new ideas. She is also very open to connecting with interested individuals and groups to explore diverse ways to connect and grow.

Asked what she enjoys most about living in Japan, Bonzi paused to think for a moment before answering. "It is really hard to pick out one thing, since I have been here a long time, but I guess it is a sense of place, a sense of balance that you find. And there is always something new for us to discover — we still don't know everything about Japan, even after being here so long," she said.

NTT collaboration learns how to plant a sustainable well-being city

Satoyama~Authentic Japan

MAIKO MURAOKA
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NTT Urban Solutions recently acquired a new certification of international guidance on the operation of smart cities over its development project in the central Nagoya district of Higashisakura, conducted in collaboration with NTT Urban Development and other NTT companies.

The certification, called ISO 37106, is the first granted in Japan since the International Organization for Standardization established ISO 37106 in 2018. The standard focuses on "how to develop an open, collaborative, human-centric and digitally-enabled operating model" for a smart city that "puts its vision for a sustainable future into operation."

Terufumi Takada commented in a recent interview with The Japan Times that what counts is creating a place that keeps developing after construction work is complete, which is what the international standard was established for. "In the case of buildings, their value is usually highest when new," he said. But we aim to continue to grow after the construction is completed by applying the results of the Higashisakura project to other districts and vice versa. "We aim for growth with age, not degradation with age," he said.

The question is how to decide the direction of growth. Takada and Yuko Kishi



Urbannet Nagoya Nexta Building
FORWARD STROKE INC.

explained that to do this, they involve all the stakeholders not only in the target area but also in the surrounding districts. Takada said they are engaging with members of the association of shop owners along the Hisaya-odori boulevard in the center of Sakae, a major downtown area in Nagoya, as well as people living in neighboring residential areas. "We are trying to learn what their expectations are, because we aim to clarify and realize what those who live, work and shop there find value in and what kind of future they imagine, using the power of digital technologies instead of building the kind of town that developers design," Takada said, pointing out that this human-centric strategy perfectly aligns with the principles of ISO 37106.

Kishi said, "We incorporate technologies based on the needs of each of the stakeholder categories in the area to make this town one that continues to evolve." She said NTT's data platform is supporting this continuous evolution: "We can accumulate and analyze the area data in the platform and use the findings to create new services and solutions, as well as apply them to other places."

Some of the examples of such services and solutions include an effort to cut in half the energy consumed by air conditioning in the Urbannet Nagoya Nexta Building, an office building with commercial facilities newly built by NTT Urban Solutions and NTT Urban Development in the northwest corner of the district.

"It is said that about half of the energy used in a building is for air conditioning. We are going to halve it by gathering data from sensors that detect temperature and moisture or the flows of people and using it to create a control setup that ensures optimal operation, with low energy consumption yet a high level of comfort," Takada said.

Takada said they are also planning to implement a system that helps reduce food loss by forecasting the number of customers at each restaurant, using data drawn from past history based on weather, day or the impact of events being held in the neighborhood.

Kishi explained that they are also introducing a contactless elevator system powered by facial recognition technology



From left: Masaki Urushihara, BSI Group Japan; Andy Butterfield, BSI UK; Kok Hwee Tan, BSI Singapore; and Hiroshi Nakagawa, president NTT Urban Solutions NTT CORPORATION

in collaboration with Mitsubishi Electric Corp. "The system recognizes the face of the worker, understands which floor he is on and guides him to the elevator that will reach the floor the quickest. This allows an effective operation of elevators, prevents overcrowding and minimizes waiting time," Kishi said, pointing out that this is also an effective solution in a pandemic-aware society where people are more concerned about health and sanitation.

These solutions and more can also be deployed to other buildings and other areas. Taku Mikami of the NTT Data Institute of Management Consulting said: "We have long engaged in human-centric urban development, but this project helped us learn the evaluation process of the international standard on this. From here on out, we aim to focus our efforts on supporting municipalities and developers to build and operate human-centric cities offering well-being on the international standard."

Using technology, a resource that society now possesses, to solve social issues and keep improving cities is a way to achieve the sustainable future that the ISO guidance aims for.

NTT Urban Solutions

This section highlights the environment and a sustainable society. For more information please visit www.sustainable.japantimes.com



État d'esprit Innovative, modern Okinawan cuisine rooted in local foods and flavors



ROBBIE SWINNERTON
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Dinner at Restaurant État d'esprit opens not in chef Yasuhiro Tomari's sleek, discreetly lit dining room but rather in guests' private villas. Champagne is served along with a few small finger foods. But first, you are invited to try a small drink made from mugwort, a bitter local herb. This is the first of many bold flavors that can be eye-opening for visitors unfamiliar with the foods of subtropical Okinawa.

Tomari sources the ingredients for his elaborate, innovative dinners from his home island of Miyako, as well as neighboring Irabu, where État d'esprit forms the focal point of the deluxe eight-villa Konpeki resort. Drawing on his background in French cuisine, while inspired by the local tastes and traditions, he has developed a unique approach to fine dining that he likes to call modern Ryukyuan gastronomy, referencing the name of the former Okinawan kingdom.

Among the highlights of his eight-course tasting menu is otōri, a rich soup prepared from smoked sea snake, along with Okinawan pork, ginger and *awamori*, the potent spirit widely consumed throughout the islands. He elevates *tofu*yo, a pungent



form of fermented tofu, into an umami-rich seasoning for crab. And he transforms the meat of peacocks — an invasive nonnative species proliferating on the islands — into a rich, memorable noodle broth.

Concerned about the social and envi-

DENNY TAMAKI
GOVERNOR OF OKINAWA



I am very pleased that État d'esprit has been selected for the Destination Restaurants 2021 list.

I invite you to come to Miyakojima, which is surrounded by beautiful sandy beaches and blue ocean with coral reefs, and enjoy the cuisine that can only be found in this region.

I hope that through Okinawan food people from all over the world will be able to experience Miyakojima's blessed natural environment and unique history and culture while spending a relaxing time surrounded by the warm people of this island.



Address
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<http://www.konpeki.okinawa/>

ÉTAT DESPRIT
Ryukyu

KAZUYUKI ZAKIMI
MAYOR OF MIYAKOJIMA



I would like to express our sincere gratitude for selecting Miyako island's restaurant État d'esprit.

The dishes prepared by chef Yasuhiro Tomari, who was born and raised in Miyako island, are not limited by the rules of French cuisine, and he is particular about local ingredients and offers creative new fare that bring out their finer qualities. We would like guests to fully enjoy the fresh air of the island while facing Miyako island's blue sea, known to be the loveliest in Asia. In the dialect of Miyako island, delicious food is called "nmamunu." Please come to Miyako island and enjoy an encounter with nmamunu at État d'esprit.

Destination Restaurants 2021 AUTHENTIC JAPAN SELECTION

