

# 01

Community | Partnerships, Culture, and Community

## A Future of Shared Childrearing and Culture, Rooted in Local Nature and Traditions

[Activity Overview]

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- Collaboration with Morioka University and Morioka Daigaku Junior College | AEON MALL Morioka (Morioka City, Iwate Prefecture)
- Awa Odori Special Performance | AEON MALL Tokushima (Tokushima City, Tokushima Prefecture)
- AEON MALL Hakusan Nature School | AEON MALL Hakusan (Hakusan City, Ishikawa Prefecture)





# Meiwa Dai Bon Odori Festival and Industry-Academia-Government-Community Collaborative Nighttime Disaster Drill



Strengthening the town as a whole  
community through tradition and  
disaster awareness

## Project Overview

We collaborated with Meiwa Town, the Meiwa Town Fire Department, the Meiwa Town Council of Social Welfare, and Mie Prefectural Akeno High School to hold a festival and a disaster drill on the same day.



### Meiwa Dai Bon Odori Festival

Participants danced the Meiwa Ondo, a traditional regional dance. The mayor and neighborhood association leaders also took part in the festivities, which continued into the night.



## Unique Features

We fostered a sense of unity through the traditional local Bon Odori and leveraged the strong turnout as an opportunity to raise disaster awareness among younger generations.

### Facility: AEON MALL Meiwa

Since opening, the mall has valued working with the local community to help make Meiwa Town feel like one united community.

Basic market area	: 140,000 households and 300,000 people within a 25-minute drive
No. of stores	: 82 (specialty stores)
Land area	: Approx. 140,000 m <sup>2</sup>
Parking spaces	: Approx. 3,100
Opening	: July 21, 2001

### Location: Meiwa Town, Taki District, Mie Prefecture

Meiwa Town, home to 22,000 residents, lies along Ise Bay on the gently sloping Ise Plain. Agriculture and fishing have long supported the local economy. Meiwa Town aims to be a place where people want to live and stay, rooted in history and culture fostering a strong sense of community. At the heart of this vision is a commitment to building the town together.



## Meiwa Town × Meiwa Dai Bon Odori Festival and Industry-Academia-Government-Community Collaborative Nighttime Disaster Drill Executive Committee × AEON MALL Meiwa



Masahiro Ushitani

Operations Manager,  
AEON MALL Meiwa

Mai Takahashi

Chairperson,  
Executive Committee

Takanori Araki

Chief Manager, Disaster Prevention  
and Safety Division, Meiwa Town

Rika Oishi

Operations Lead,  
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## Giving Children in Meiwa Town a Chance to Experience Bon Odori

**Mr. Araki:** The Disaster Prevention and Safety Division is in charge of disaster prevention, crime prevention, traffic safety, public transportation, and neighborhood associations. The coastal area of Meiwa Town is particularly at risk of tsunami damage. To address this issue, we focus on strengthening disaster prevention and mitigation across the entire town. However, we noticed a decline in disaster drill participation. That's when Ms. Takahashi presented me with an unprecedented project.

**Ms. Takahashi:** I'm originally from Meiwa Town, where I run a takoyaki stand and serve as the head of the volunteer organization Koko Tsuna -Share Hearts-. Meiwa Town hosts the Saio Festival, a traditional event closely tied to Ise

Jingu Shrine. The festival takes place once a year and attracts around 30,000 attendees, including local residents and visitors from outside the town. Our town should be home to a community united through traditional culture. But my own children, despite growing up here, had never heard of Bon Odori or participated in the dance. I realized something had to change. That moment became the starting point for planning the Meiwa Dai Bon Odori Festival.

**Mr. Ushitani:** So the event started with your desire, as a mother, to have your own children experience the Bon Odori dance in summer.

**Takahashi:** First, I formed the Executive Committee with five other members. One committee member came up with the idea of adding a disaster prevention event to the Bon Odori dance, which

would attract younger generations and convey the importance of disaster prevention. We loved this idea, and presented it to the Disaster Prevention and Safety Division of Meiwa Town. **Araki:** I found the idea highly interesting when I first heard about the proposal. Combining a disaster drill with the festival enables visitors to experience disaster prevention while having fun at the fair booths. Conducting disaster drills at night is another challenge we face. This proposal tackled this issue by conducting the drill during the Bon Odori. This idea struck me as the perfect way to get people actively involved in disaster drills. At the same time, I had my doubts. I wondered whether Bon Odori would actually attract that many people. (laughs)



## Meiwa Town × Meiwa Dai Bon Odori Festival and Industry–Academia–Government–Community Collaborative Nighttime Disaster Drill Executive Committee × AEON MALL Meiwa

### Bon Odori at AEON MALL?! Four Months of Trial and Error

**Takahashi:** We began searching for a location for the event based on our vision of making the event one that welcomed people of all ages, offered a firsthand experience of Meiwa traditions and culture, and fostered new connections. An acquaintance of mine had just so happened convey our plan to AEON MALL, which agreed to host the event. I was surprised that the event could actually take place at AEON MALL. *(laughs)* I was confident in the project itself, but I didn't expect a corporation like AEON MALL to support a local event.

**Araki:** I felt the same way. We had rented space at AEON MALL for prior events, but I never expected them to engage with the local community to that degree.

**Ushitani:** AEON MALL entered a disaster prevention agreement with Meiwa Town and had conducted joint evacuation drills, so I thought this was a really great plan.

**Araki:** We established the Meiwa Dai Bon Dance Festival and Industry–Academia–Government–Community Collaborative Nighttime Disaster Drill Executive Committee in May and began preparations for the August 18 event. We asked retired members of the fire department for their input on the disaster prevention portion of the event.

**Ushitani:** Finding the right balance was difficult. We wanted to raise awareness

of disaster prevention, but we did not want to set a high bar for participation. Everyone brought ideas for things they genuinely wanted to do, and we shaped the event around those ideas.

**Araki:** We wanted to keep the event fun, after all!

**Ushitani:** At first, we were worried that no one might show up. But as the day approached, that concern turned into the opposite kind of urgency. We started thinking this might actually turn into a major event. Every time I spoke with local residents, the conversation quickly turned to the festival. *(laughs)* Ensuring safety was our top priority, so we also reviewed and strengthened our security measures to make sure nothing was overlooked.

### 4,000 Attendees: Strengthening Community Ties Through Bon Odori and the Disaster Drill

**Ushitani:** A total of 4,000 people ending up attending the event. I was deeply moved that so many people were looking forward to the event. Nearly 500 people stopped by the disaster prevention booths, which included a knockdown game using a fire extinguisher with the local fire department and a disaster prevention quiz and cardboard maze by the Social Welfare Council. About 50 community members participated in the evacuation shelter experience training held in conjunction with the event.

**Araki:** The rooftop parking lot of AEON MALL is designated as a tsunami emergency evacuation site. Some participants during the nighttime drill expressed concern about how dark parts of the slope would be in a power outage and realized the need for flashlights along the way. The drill proved to be a meaningful experience since we never know when disaster will strike.



**Ms. Oishi:** AEON MALL specialty stores also set up booths and participated in the festival. The stores were pleased to witness the community's enthusiasm firsthand, which far exceeded their expectations. The event presented us at AEON MALL an opportunity to learn that our specialty stores have a strong desire to connect more with the community. This experience made me feel that, going forward, AEON MALL could serve as a bridge and create initiatives with our specialty stores that help build stronger connections with the community. The event also gave staff from outside Meiwa Town a chance to better understand the area and its people, leading to a shift in how these employees approached their daily work.

**Takahashi:** I'm extremely happy to hear that the festival had been meaningful not only to the residents of Meiwa Town, but also to those that commute here for work. The Meiwa Ondo played on repeat throughout the Bon Odori that day. *(laughs)* We told the Meiwa Ondo Preservation Society that it would be fine to just dance for the first hour that day because of the heat, but they stayed and danced the whole time. Seeing a large circle of dancers sharing the moment across generations was incredibly rewarding.



## Meiwa Town × Meiwa Dai Bon Odori Festival and Industry–Academia–Government–Community Collaborative Nighttime Disaster Drill Executive Committee × AEON MALL Meiwa



### Preserving a Sense of Hometown for Children Amid School Consolidations

**Takahashi:** Elementary schools in the area are being consolidated, and school districts are undergoing reorganization. One school closed in 2023, with three more to shut down by the end of March 2026, including one in the area where AEON MALL is located. Meiwa Town originally had six elementary school districts. But the children who attend school there now may no longer see those areas as their hometown. I'm truly glad we were able to hold the event here at this time to give the children a chance to build a sense of pride in their local community.

**Araki:** From coastal areas to inland, each district in Meiwa Town has its own characteristics. We want students to take pride in the district where they were born and raised, regardless of the elementary school consolidations.

**Takahashi:** With this in mind, we held a campaign on the day of the festival in which people could receive a district sticker for each time they danced the Meiwa Ondo. We invited children to collect stickers for all six districts and place them on a special Meiwa Dai Bon Odori fan. Once they completed the set, they could enter a raffle to win high-value prizes. Many children took part.

### Encore! New Day, New Preparations



**Araki:** One of the most meaningful outcomes of this Bon Odori festival was seeing children learn about the history of Meiwa Town and build connections with residents across generations. We were also grateful to have raised disaster awareness among so many participants. The event led to broader impact as well, with nighttime drills becoming a topic of discussion in disaster-related meetings. I'm impressed that a strong sense of purpose, shaped by the desire to support the community, built momentum and led to real results. I don't want this to be a one-time event.

**Takahashi:** In my mind, preparations started the day after the event!

**Ushitani:** I immediately received an e-mail asking me to confirm the date for 2025. *(laughs)* This first event stemmed from Ms. Takahashi's strong desire to make it happen. Having seen her take a leading role in other community events, I had complete confidence in her from the

start. People often say that communities are becoming more disconnected, but this event reminded me just how strong the bonds in Meiwa Town really are. The event this year allowed me to build new relationships with key local figures, and I hope we can continue working together on more future community initiatives.

**Araki:** AEON MALL is the largest gathering place in Meiwa Town and a landmark of the community. This experience showed me how deeply AEON MALL cares about the local community. I plan to spread the word at work so others know the extent of the mall's commitment.

**Takahashi:** I also grew up thinking that of AEON MALL as the big city of Meiwa Town. *(laughs)* The event took place in the middle of summer, so it was helpful from a safety standpoint to be able to tell people to take breaks and cool off inside the mall to avoid heatstroke.

**Oishi:** Working together with the community to accomplish a shared goal was a valuable learning experience. I was also able to learn how much the participating specialty stores appreciated the event. I hope to continue activities that build connections not only with AEON MALL employees, but also between specialty stores and the community.





# TOKI MEKKU Childcare

## Support Facility



### Project Overview

AEON MALL united with Toki City and a non-profit organization to strengthen childcare support. Together, we opened TOKI MEKKU, a childcare support facility in AEON MALL Toki. The facility is the first of its kind in Gifu Prefecture and serves 20,000 people annually.

No one parents alone  
Creating places to support those  
that support others



#### TOKI MEKKU

A place for parents and children to casually gather, socialize, and play. TOKI MEKKU provides a picture book corner where parents and children can read stories and books together, as well as a play zone for small children and babies to play. The facility also offers childcare counseling by professional staff and childcare information.



### Unique Features

We also hold the Picture Book Drives and the Family Base event alongside TOKI MEKKU operations. Approximately 6,000 people attended Toki City Family Base 2024, a single-day event on child-rearing support held in October 2024.



#### Location: Toki City, Gifu Prefecture

Toki City was developed as the City of Mino ware. The city is located at a junction point of the expressway network, brining an influx of large-scale commercial facilities and companies continue into the area. As a result, visitor traffic has increased significantly. Celebrating its 70th anniversary of its municipal organization in 2025, the city is working to create a community where people can truly feel a sense of happiness, guided by its vision of becoming a cultural and exchange-driven city rooted in harmony between people, nature, and the land.

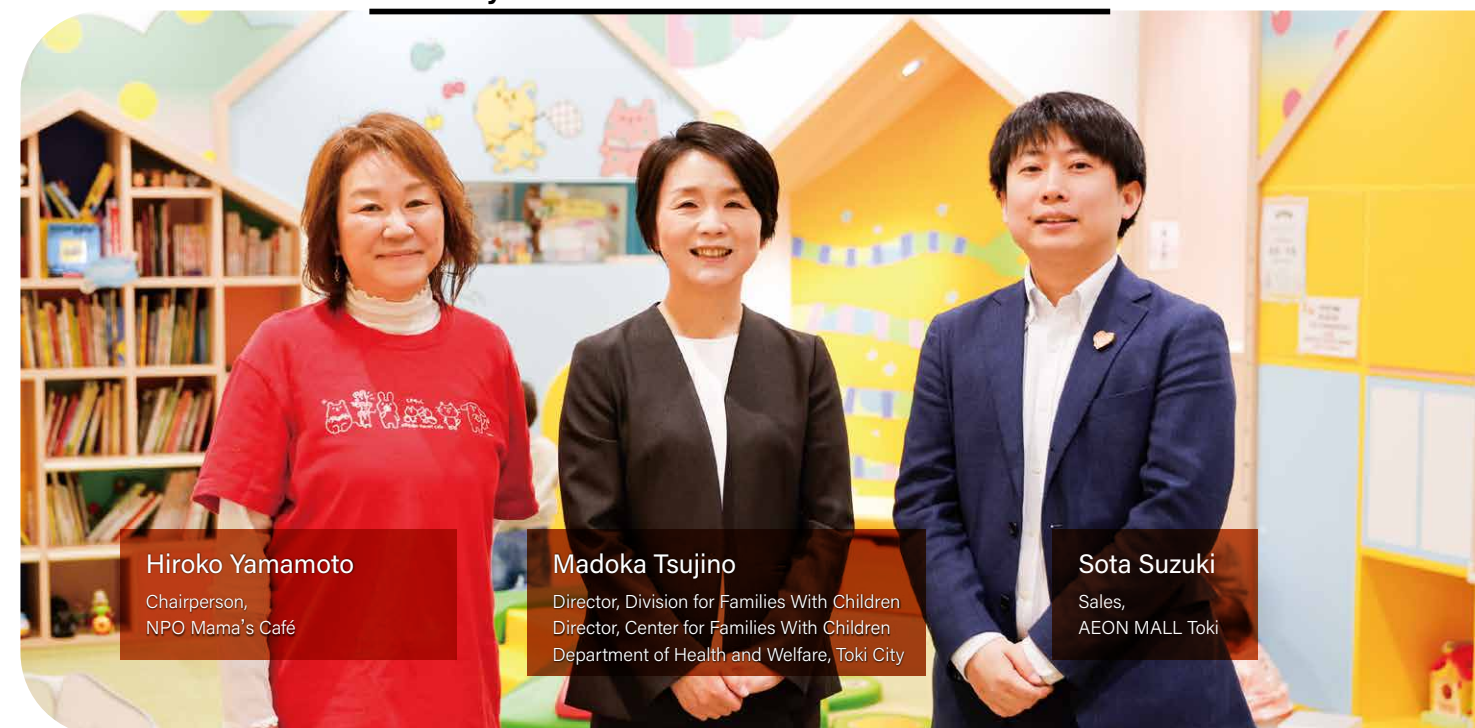
#### Facility: AEON MALL Toki

AEON MALL Toki is located 2 km north of the Toki Minami Tajimi Interchange, offering easy access from inside and outside the city. The mall features a lawn area with terrace seating, a hot spring bath, and a large-scale entertainment facility, aiming to create a new bustling atmosphere that people will want to visit again and again.

Basic market area	: 110,000 households and 350,000 people within a 30-minute drive (approximately 10–12 km radius)
No. of stores	: 140 (specialty stores)
Land area	: Approx. 203,000 m <sup>2</sup>
Parking spaces	: Approx. 3,600
Opening	: October 7, 2022

Life Design Developer

Toki City × NPO Mama's Café × AEON MALL Toki



Hiroko Yamamoto

Chairperson,  
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Madoka Tsujino

Director, Division for Families With Children  
Director, Center for Families With Children  
Department of Health and Welfare, Toki City

Sota Suzuki

Sales,  
AEON MALL Toki

### Establishing a Multifunctional Child-Rearing Support Center in the Mall in Response to Caregiver Feedback

**Ms. Tsujino:** The birthrate is declining and the population is aging rapidly in Toki City, making it urgent to create an environment where younger generations in particular can marry, give birth, and raise children with peace of mind. The Division for Families With Children strives to support child-rearing to ensure that children feel glad to have been born in Toki City, and their parents feel glad to have raised them there.

**Mr. Suzuki:** When we opened AEON MALL Toki, we submitted several proposals to Toki City aimed at supporting child-rearing through community-based events designed to address these challenges. We then began discussing the possibility of establishing a multifunctional childcare support facility within the mall to be used year-round. After further meetings, we obtained approval for a community collaboration project with Toki City and opened the childcare support facility TOKI MEKKU in AEON MALL Toki.

**Tsujino:** This idea was prompted by feedback from parents gathered through city parenting lectures and public awareness surveys. Many expressed a need for an indoor child-rearing facility available on weekends, a place to talk when feeling anxious about parenting, and

an environment where children can play while the parents shop. We felt that AEON MALL's location and ability to attract customers made them the perfect fit.

**Ms. Yamamoto:** Mama's Café took on the operation from that point. We felt a great sense of anticipation from the start, knowing this was the first multifunctional childcare support facility to be located inside a large commercial facility in the prefecture.

**Tsujino:** There were some difficulties in getting approval within the city along the way. *(laughs)* But we received a great number of visitors from the pre-opening and realized how great the need was.

### Expanding the Family Support Center Program to Connect Families With Childcare Support

**Tsujino:** TOKI MEKKU is a place where child-rearing parents and their children can gather, interact, seek childcare consultation, and be connected with support services tailored to their needs.

The facility also serves as a base for the Family Support Center program, which promotes mutual assistance in child-rearing within the local community.

**Suzuki:** The Family Support Center program connects those seeking childcare support with community members seeking to provide it.

Mama's Café specializes in this area.

**Yamamoto:** Yes, we do. Family Support,

as the program is more commonly known, is an assistance program administered by the Agency for Families With Children. As of fiscal 2024, 996 municipalities across Japan operate the program. These municipalities started out managing the program directly but began facing difficulties in expanding support to more families. In response, many municipalities are now outsourcing the program to NPOs and other organizations with stronger abilities to take action, such as Mama's Café. TOKI MEKKU has established a system to explain how the Family Support program works and to facilitate new member registration, steadily growing the program user base.



#### Co-Creation Partner NPO Mama's Café

Based in Tajimi City, Gifu Prefecture, NPO Mama's Café operates a family support business, café business, and event business under the theme of child-rearing. Toki City began entrusting Mama's Café with the operation of TOKI MEKKU in October 2022.



## Toki City × NPO Mama's Café × AEON MALL Toki



## Encouraging Families to Step Outside the Home Through Community Events

**Yamamoto:** I believe it's important for parents and children to step outside the home and into the community. Doing so can be a source of relief for caregivers and a step toward preventing child abuse. Imagine, for example, a mother raising an infant. She's carrying large bags and a crying child. She may start to feel that going out just isn't worth the effort and choose to stay home, which can lead to a sense of isolation. This is



where AEON MALL helps.

Having just one reason to leave the house wouldn't be worth the effort. But when there are multiple motivations, such as enjoying a good meal, shopping for groceries, browsing baby clothes, or checking out other merchandise, it becomes much easier for that mother to take that first step outside. I hope to offer individuals like this mother additional motivation through various events, including sleeping pose art photo sessions and birthday celebration gatherings. Our Family Base 2024 became the biggest such event. Mr. Suzuki and I approached local businesses and schools and proposed collaborations with specialty stores in the mall, seeking to increase participation from the community. As a result, over 100 booths set up shop, creating a sense of unity throughout the mall.

**Suzuki:** I personally visited around 150 booths to greet each participant. That direct engagement led to co-creation inquiries from local businesses, and many participants commented that they were glad they took part in the event.

**Tsujino:** This was the first time Toki City and AEON MALL Toki co-hosted this event, and we received a great response. Participant surveys included feedback expressing a desire for the event to be held again, as well as comments that both children and parents enjoyed the experience. The Toki City government also set up a booth, and expressed that it was a valuable opportunity to engage with caregivers facing parenting challenges and to share information about the new hospital. The booth also helped disseminate information on city child-rearing support services and provided insight into the needs of local families.

## Opening the Door to Support Through Initial Consultation

**Yamamoto:** TOKI MEKKU is a new space for parents and children. We will hold training for childcare supporters at AEON Hall in 2025 to help people feel proud to raise their children in this area. I hope to see a cycle where those who once received support are now able to offer it to others. We also developed our own app as a point of contact with TOKI MEKKU users. I hope to use TOKI MEKKU as a starting point to provide multifaceted support for child-rearing mothers and fathers.



Mamapli: An app for checking crowd levels and event updates at the Oyako Hiroba Tokimekku community space



**Tsujino:** Through my work with TOKI MEKKU, I realized that more people than I expected are struggling to find anyone to talk to or are seeking connections with other parents raising children of the same age. Many child-rearing households visit AEON MALL daily. So, we believe our malls can serve the starting point for consultation and offer pathways to support services through our specialists as needed. AEON Cinema Toki is also set to open in April 2025. I hope Toki City becomes a place where young people go on movie dates, fall in love, and eventually choose to live.



**Suzuki:** Exactly! I would be delighted if more people chose to move to Toki City, drawn by the convenience and enjoyment of having AEON MALL nearby, along with the sense of security provided by our disaster prevention measures. Over 20,000 people use TOKI MEKKU annually. I look forward to continuing to share our perspectives on the community with everyone, and to working together on a variety of initiatives.



## Community Projects

The following section introduces a few of our regional initiatives.

## PROJECT | CASE 03



## Collaboration With Morioka University and Morioka Daigaku Junior College

AEON MALL Morioka | Morioka City, Iwate Prefecture

## Local Students, the Future Leaders of Morioka, Working Together With Community Co-Creation Partners

We signed an industry-academia agreement with Morioka University and Morioka Daigaku Junior College in 2023. Students took the lead in the open campus event, the cultural festival, Morioka traditional Sansa Odori dance, and presentations of club activities in the building. We will continue to share the strengths of the region and the university with the local community and aim to create spaces where young people can thrive.



## PROJECT | CASE 05



## AEON MALL Hakusan Nature School

AEON MALL Hakusan | Hakusan City, Ishikawa Prefecture



## Fostering Roots in the Local Community Through Hands-On Experiences

The entire city of Hakusan is recognized as a UNESCO World Geopark. To this end, we make efforts to give local parents and children the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the city while nurturing their roots in the community. Our initiatives include workshops using natural materials from Hakusan and bus tours to enjoy the nature of the surrounding mountains.