



Pedaling for life in Tohoku: 500 kilometers in 4 days

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When the initial violent shaking of the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake had subsided, my staff and I emerged from under our desks in Tokyo, donned our hard hats, got back to our computers, and tried to carry on as usual. Over the ensuing minutes and hours, the full horror unfolded before our eyes.

With many mobile networks across the country jammed and inoperable, we turned to the web for news, and witnessed live on Internet TV the harrowing scenes of the Tohoku coastline being inundated by one of the most powerful tsunamis to hit Japan in a thousand years. The image of the front edge of the tsunami sweeping inexorably over homes, businesses and trapped people will stay with me forever.

For all of us here on that day, it became very clear that there would be no getting back to normal any time soon. Yet, four years later, many of us in Tokyo have overcome the trauma, made up for the lost time, and carried on with making a living.

Not so for the people of Tohoku. I remember at the time feeling an overwhelming sense of tragedy, especially for the children who had lost parents. I gave what money I could spare at the time to charities involved in the relief work, but worried about whether anyone was planning for the long term support effort that would be needed at a grass roots level.

Naturally, I am not alone in this sentiment, and one group of people who have for the past three years been converting sympathy into action very effectively is the executive cycling team Knights in White Lycra (KIWL).

Co-founded by Robert Williams, partner at A.P. Advisers Ltd., and John Stanton, supply chain management director at a large multinational corporation in Tokyo, the nucleus of the group emerged out of the Brits at Lunch networking group in 2012, and today has grown into a multinational group of executive cyclists united in their passion for cycling and the desire to help people in need through their activities.

In partnership with the charity O.G.A. for Aid, led by Director of Administration Angela Ortiz, the group has now raised over ¥13 million for on-going support in Tohoku. The theme of this year's ride, which has raised over ¥6 million so far, was to fund "Place to Grow," a project aimed at teaching basic farming skills

to children in the area of Minamisanriku, which was utterly devastated by the 2011 tsunami.

I was honored to be given the opportunity to sponsor and drive the support vehicle for this year's ride, from May 20 to May 23, through my company Icon Partners K. K. which, together with other corporate and private sponsors, made cash donations to the project.

Wending our way up through Fukushima and Miyagi Prefectures gave us an excellent first-hand view of the shocking extent of the devastation, recovery from which will take decades, not years. The scenery on the way is stunning, yet descending to the coastal plains gives way to vast, flat, dust-blown construction sites, miles wide as one enters the inundation zones. It is awe inspiring and humbling to witness, and all of us on the quest silently renewed our resolve to keep helping the people of the northeast to resume their lives with dignity. ■

If you, like me, love Japan and want to help in a small way, then please visit the home page of **O. G. A. for Aid**—www.ogaforaid.org—and contribute in any way you can. I have seen the work that is being done, and can assure you that not a penny is wasted. **Thank you.**

Angela Ortiz (right), director of administration, O.G.A. for Aid, and Peleton member Ayumi Nagai, on a refueling stop

