



Your Local Kouminkan

By **KARLEE KEYSER** April 2015

How many times have you moved in your life? Digging up roots to plant them elsewhere involves a lot of work, but since coming to Hiroshima last summer, I'm happy to say that I haven't regretted it one bit! As someone who has always lived in suburbs in the U.S. and outside of large cities in Japan, Hiroshima often amazes me with its wealth of social events that streamline the process of making new friends. Sometimes, I'm left feeling like an *inaka-mono* (田舎者, country bumpkin), wondering if I really belong in such a dense area. Luckily, I'm always reminded of Hiroshima residents' easy friendliness during some event or another, and remember that it's *us* who shape the community, rather than our physical surroundings.

This is the first of a new column in which I would like to introduce some ways that I've made connections with people, both Japanese and expatriates, in Hiroshima City. I hope that many will have already participated in local events and utilized the community-building resources I plan to mention, but I would be just as happy if people are inspired to do so after reading this column. Maybe you can be the next person to welcome someone new to the community! ☺

To get started, the community resource I have used most are *kouminkan* (公民館, community centers), which can be found all over Hiroshima City. My first experience with a *kouminkan* was as a cooking instructor; as part of my work duties I led a class on how to bake homemade apple dumplings. My aim was to facilitate cross-cultural understanding by demonstrating the diversity of American cooking (far from the super-sweet desserts sold in grocery stores, this home-cooked seasonal treat seems to please everyone's taste buds, regardless of age!). During this event, I was happy to hear from the *kouminkan* staff about other community center activities I could join as a participant, like an "eco-cooking" (economical cooking) class.



After leading and participating in a couple *kouminkan* cooking classes, I looked up community centers near my workplace to see what they had to offer. I certainly wasn't disappointed—opportunities included a Tai Chi group, guest music lecturers, family- and child-based gatherings, a Thai food club, a free study space, and more! With over 70 *kouminkan* in Hiroshima City, why not see what great activities are going on near you?