

Group taps 'vibrant' youth for '20 Games

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STAFF WRITER

A college student in Tokyo has a lofty Olympic goal: to recruit half the 80,000 volunteers that the organizing committee for the 2020 Games and Paralympics hopes to enlist.

In March, Kentaro Fujita, then a sophomore at Tokyo's Senshu University, and four others established nonprofit Wakamono Hojin (Corporation for the Young) Japanese TEAM to promote the involvement of young people, especially students, for the games.

"We'd like to solicit 40,000 people aged 35 and under who are eager to engage in volunteer work for the Summer Games," 21-year-old Fujita said.

Fujita said the organization's deeper goal is to nurture "vibrant young people" who can think and act independently, for their own sake as well as for the good of Japan and the world. To that end, it started the JAPANx2020 project to give young people the chance to volunteer to help promote the global sporting event.

"The Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics offer a great opportunity to demonstrate the potential of the young, who are often described as fragile or inward-looking in this country," said Fujita. "I'd like to shatter such negative images. ... I believe it is young people who can break through" Japan's stagnant state, that sees its economic power global competitiveness waning.

If half of the volunteers for the Summer Games are young, it would project an active and lively image of them to the world, he said.

While the official organizing committee is the actual recruiter, the organization's role is to urge young people to apply for the volunteer duties, according to Fujita.

The Tokyo-based organization plans to hold major events



Kentaro Fujita, representative director of Wakamono Hojin Japanese TEAM, is interviewed at his office in Tokyo on April 23. MASAAKI KAMEDA

leading up to 2020, including giving children the opportunity to interact with Olympic athletes and holding a festival hosted by the young to set the mood for the games.

"There are things that can only be handled by the organizing committee, for sure, but there are things that only we can do," Fujita said.

Further, Wakamono Hojin Japanese TEAM is hoping to recruit 100,000 "supporters" separate from its would-be volunteers for the Olympics and Paralympics, and who want to help promote the group's cause, with half of them hopefully under 35, according to Fujita.

"We'd like to give a boost to the Olympics and Paralympics by the hands of young people," he said.

Fujita, who hails from Aomori Prefecture, said he would call for the participation of students from across the country to make the most of the event for the nation.

"The event may be called the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, but it's actually for the entire nation," Fujita noted. "Thus, I want to set up branches in all 47 prefectures and invite students to help promote the event and maximize (the effects from) the Olympics on a nationwide scale."

Fifteen college students are running TOKYOx2020, the first local branch of the organization's broader JAPANx2020 project. Two other branches are in the making in Aomori and Fukui prefectures, according to Fujita.

Though Wakamono Hojin Japanese TEAM is mainly focused now on the Olympics

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and Paralympics, the organization has set a goal to foster "vibrant young people" beyond 2020.

"As our long-term goal, we'd like to provide 'people, goods and capital' to future young generations who need them," Fujita said, adding those three "resources" are vital to nurture young talent.

Fujita says, through the organization's activities, that he

wants to demonstrate the "power and potential of the Japanese young" to attract those resources from society, and that the 2020 Summer Games is an ideal catalyst for this.

The organization was registered as a General Incorporated Association for ease of receiving support from society, Fujita said.

Other work by Wakamono Hojin Japanese TEAM that is under way includes a career counseling service to help students find jobs and a website that gives updates on the organization's activities. It also plans to set up a facility that students can use free of charge for whatever activities they are interested in engaging in.

Having started the ball rolling for the student organization, Fujita has yet to decide what his involvement will be beyond his scheduled graduation in March 2016. But he says he will definitely be part of it in some form at least until the year 2020.

"I decided to continue to engage in the activities related to the Olympics in 2020," he said. "And I hope more people will join us — people who share our philosophy and help keep our funding spirit alive. That would be a big morale booster for us."