

# THE RIVERTOWNS Enterprise

The Hometown Newspaper  
of Hastings-on-Hudson,  
Dobbs Ferry, Ardsley  
and Irvington



Isami Shiroma's photo of a girl performing with a taiko group in Okinawa.

## Camera connects Shiroma to tsunami's toll

By Eric Lebowitz

When Ardsley resident Isami Shiroma learned of the earthquake and tsunami that had devastated his homeland last year, he knew immediately that he wanted to capture the event with his camera. Shiroma, a karate instructor and antique watch dealer who also takes professional-quality pictures, wanted to preserve images of Japan's devastation and create hope for the future. Four months after the tragedy, he traveled to the city of Ishinomaki, where some 3,800 people perished, making it one of the places hardest hit by flooding.

"It's on the coast, and it was completely knocked out," Shiroma said in an interview last week.

The results of that trip are now on display in an exhibit called "The Moon of the Rising Sun," at the Resobox Japanese Art Gallery in Long Island City, Queens. Shiroma will donate the proceeds of all photo and poster sales to the Taylor Anderson Memorial Gift Fund, created in memory of the young American English teacher killed in the tsunami. The exhibit opened on March 11, the one-year anniversary of the earthquake, and runs through this Sunday, April 1.

Shiroma, 67, was born and raised in

Okinawa, and lived there through high school. In 1965, he left for the University of Hawaii, and as a parting gift his family gave him his first camera.

"I've been taking pictures ever since," Shiroma said. "I took pictures all over Hawaii, all the islands."

After graduating in 1970, Shiroma hitchhiked across the United States and Central and South America. He settled in Cartagena, Colombia, where he met his first wife, with whom he would have

two sons and eventually move to New York. (He returned to Cartagena, where he still has friends, for a wedding two weeks ago.) Shiroma took pictures during the six years he spent in Colombia, but taught karate — which he had learned as a boy in Japan and become more involved with in Hawaii — to support himself.

Shiroma met his second wife, Eliza-

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### Shiroma

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beth, through friends, and the couple moved to Hartsdale in 1994. Three years later they came to Ardsley, where they reside with their daughter, Yumi, a senior at The Masters School in Dobbs Ferry. Shiroma's primary business now is vintage timepieces.

"That's how I make a living, otherwise I could never take pictures," he said. "I'd be a hungry artist."

As he photographed the damage in Ishinomaki, located in Japan's northeast Miyagi Prefecture, Shiroma learned about Anderson, the 24-year-old from Richmond, Va., and her heroic efforts to get her young students to safety in their homes. It was at that point that the pho-

tographer decided that should the photographs from his trip become an exhibit, he would dedicate proceeds and donations to her foundation.

"I heard about this young American girl who helped all these children even though she was not Japanese. They found her body between the [Mangokuura Elementary] school and her apartment," he said. "I was so moved."

The pictures from Shiroma's trip were on view at an exhibit in Okinawa last year, raising over \$1,000 for Anderson's foundation. He was teaching karate at Resobox, which rents space for Japanese cultural activities, when he struck up a conversation with owner Fumio Tashiro. Tashiro eventually asked Shiroma if he'd like to put his work on display at the gallery.

The exhibit is divided into four parts. The first, called "Disaster," is made up of

post-disaster photographs from Ishinomaki. The second section, "Nightmare," is photographs of lighted structures or people in motion that represent what a natural disaster in New York could look like. "Prayer" is a collection of photographs taken at a shrine in Okinawa in the 1980s that represent the prayers offered around the world to victims of the earthquake and tsunami. The final segment, "Hope," consists of pictures of children and other inspirational images, like the dragon from the closing parade of the 2011 Worldwide Uchinanchu Festival, which

"We have enough natural disasters; we have to work together to cope," Shiroma said. "Instead, we are fighting in Africa, Israel — all over the world. We should get together."