

Hiroki Taniguchi: Experiencing India

Hiroki Taniguchi wanted to know India. That is why he joined the 2007 JELA Artificial Limb Work Camp in Jamkhed.

“But I’ve notice a change in myself,” he said, speaking near the end of his one-week experience. “I’ve changed from wanting to visit India to wanting to do something to help. Perhaps not just with India, but with any developing nation.”

A student of Nippon Sports Science University, Taniguchi made his journey to India with an open mind. He expected conditions to be rough, the weather to be hot and the food to be spicy. The only way to adjust, he felt, would be to accept Indian life as it was and learn from it. With that attitude, he said he encountered very few difficulties.

Still, he cited one difference between Japan and India as being a lack of green spaces. Jamkhed was in dry season during the February camp and most fields and hills were a dusty brown, dotted here and there by flat-topped Babhal trees, experts at surviving off little water.

An exception to this ocean of brown was the model farm operated by the Comprehensive Rural Health Project, which co-sponsored the work camp with JELA. For 38 years, CRHP has employed a comprehensive approach to helping the disadvantaged of Jamkhed, including programs in healthcare, micro-financing, agriculture and more. The construction of

lightweight and affordable artificial limbs, for example, is but another CRHP project to help local farmers who are handicapped.

Taniguchi spent much of his week making just such an artificial leg, yet he and other volunteers also helped out on the farm, where CRHP workers employ vari-

ous means to conserve water, turning the land into an oasis of green in the midst of the dry season. The farm serves as a training site for area farmers who wish to learn from its methods.

This island of greenery made Taniguchi more appreciative of the plentiful nature in Japan. He was also touched by the impact of what a few individuals can have.

“And everyone had a smile,” he said. “That is one thing I learned: A smile is the same the world over.”

In his future Taniguchi hopes to work with Japanese children in Outdoor Education to increase their respect for nature and the environment.

But maybe, he thinks, one day India too will have a need for Outdoor Education, as the nation is developing rapidly. The environmental dangers of over-development might be something Indian children of the near future will need to learn.

Perhaps that will be the way he can help. In any case, he hopes to return to India. The one-week JELA work camp has kindled his interest in the world.

