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Big thank you to Naoko

KLI' longest serve teacher calls time on being college head



Naoko Nakamura receiving flowers from students at the 2023 graduation ceremony.

by Lishu Kinjo

KLI's headteacher Naoko Nakamura brings down the curtain after 25 years at the Kadena college.

Naoko started working at KLI when it was first opened in 1998 as an English teacher and became the vice principal in 2012. During her time at KLI, she has helped hundreds of students come through KLI's doors. She has taught them

English, helped with their Japanese improvement too, and given them support as they make decisions about their steps after graduation.

Many of those students have gone onto successful careers using English, and some have seen their own children come here some years later, following in the footsteps of their parents and also being taught by Naoko. Naoko has also worked with an international group of teachers

and office staff from many backgrounds, with staff coming from the U.S.A, Peru, the United Kingdom, China, and various prefectures from across Japan. Although Naoko officially retires this year, she has decided to stay on as a part-time Eiken teacher for the Beginner and Intermediate classes.

So even the new students at KLI will have the chance to enjoy her support as they find their own paths in life.

An international life

Naoko Nakamura was born in Nakijin village and moved to Kadena town when she was a pre-school student. After graduating Yomitan high school, she studied English at Okinawa Christian Junior College. After college, Naoko got a job using English but she worked at a town office and a clothing company along the way. Naoko's grandparents were immigrants to Peru, her father was born in the Philippines. The grandparents could speak three languages when they talked to Naoko: Japanese, Okinawan and Spanish. This stimulated Naoko to study English, which eventually brought her to KLI.

KLI Times' Meg Kamiunten caught up with the outgoing head to find out how she came to be such an integral and influential member of the college's life.

How did you come to work at KLI?

"If we don't have enough land to cultivate we should cultivate our minds".

These were the words of the former mayor, Tokijitsu Miyagi, when he established KLI with passion in 1998.

Kadena has focused on nurturing young individuals who have an internationalized mind and will actively contribute to society in the future and so this is why it founded the college. I

joined the college's preparatory committee as a member in 1997 and when KLI started I also started my career as an English teacher at KLI. A few years later I became a head teacher, then I became a vice principal.

Thinking back to those days, it was a quite natural step for me.

Have you ever had a hard time? What was that?

Thinking back to my days as a vice principal, yes, I have had some hard experiences. When I couldn't communicate with students well or couldn't make the students understand my thoughts, it was a tough time.

What do you personally get from the role of a vice principal?

Well, my great joy is being a witness to the dramatic growth of young people. Not only English skills but also social skills.

What is your most memorable experience?

I can't pick up just one, I have so many.

I had great colleagues, they supported me perfectly.

I have met many interesting people through my job and I was inspired by them, especially when graduate students were visiting me and making me cry with joy.

What are you going to do after your retirement? Do you have a plan?

I will continue to work as an English teacher so I have to study and improve my English skills.

Secondly, I will put more effort into another career as a mediator at the family court.

For my fun things, I will enjoy gardening and trips.

I'd like to climb a mountain to see beautiful wild flowers.

Do you have a message for KLI students?

Yes, enjoy all the things coming to you at KLI. Enjoy even the hard things, it will surely mature you.