

# Two cities bound together by waves

## *Japanese tsunami boat heads home*

**Lorna Rodriguez, Eureka Times-Standard, 9-15-13**

A barnacle-covered fishing skiff that became a symbol of hope for a Japanese town devastated by the March 2011 tsunami is heading home after finding its way to North Coast in April -- the first official piece of debris to hit California's shores. "It's rewarding that it's finally on its way," Del Norte Sheriff's Office Cmdr. Bill Steven said. "We've kind of become attached to the boat, but it is proper it's going to its rightful place."

The boat washed up just south of Crescent City in April, and was soon determined to belong to Takata High School in Rikuzentakata, a Japanese town almost swept away when the tsunami hit shortly after a magnitude 9.0 earthquake struck off the country's coast.

"It's a city that really took a big blow," said Lori Dengler, a geology professor at Humboldt State University. "For this boat to basically have survived two years floating in the ocean almost unscathed ... it means so much to the school and the people there."

The boat left Crescent City as repairs continued at the Del Norte town's harbor, which was damaged when tsunami waves from the Japanese earthquake hit on March 11, 2011, crushing 35 boats and sweeping away most of the harbor's docks.

The small skiff is scheduled to depart from the San Francisco Bay Area for Japan by ship on Sept. 22. The voyage is expected to take about two weeks, Steven said. Free transportation is being provided by the shipping company Yusen Logistics.

"I think it's wonderful," Dengler said. "This is, as far as I know, the largest object that has been returned to Japan so far. There was a soccer ball returned earlier. There's really been very little of the debris identified. The last I heard, there were 29 objects."

The Del Norte Sheriff's Office took possession of the boat after deputies discovered it being carried off by group of men on April 7.

Steven took the lead on the project, saying he figured: "Well, if they want their boat back, somebody's going to have to do some work on this."

He contacted Del Norte High School officials because he believed Crescent City students should be involved since the boat came from a high school.

A handful of Del Norte High School students began working on the project last spring, including Steven's son.

"They took it on themselves to say, 'Hey, what if our little town was that town? What if we were those people? What if we had lost everything? Would this be important to us?'" said Del Norte High School teacher Joyce Ruiz.

"They have the opportunity to give those people hope when they had nothing," Ruiz added. "It's made them very humble. It's made them understanding and compassionate and thinking about something else besides themselves, and that's a good thing."

The students didn't stop with brainstorming how to return the boat. They have worked hard to connect with Rikuzentakata, and hope to visit the city at the end of October.

During the visit, they would like to officially present the boat, visit the school, meet students' families and learn about the city's culture.

The students are trying to raise enough money to make the trip. Donations can be made at [www.gofundme.com/3vvsgc](http://www.gofundme.com/3vvsgc).

"We haven't suffered the same amount of devastating human loss, but at the same time, we kind of share something in common," Steven said.