

LOS ANGELES *up!*

PRODUCED BY MASATO OCHI

Masato Ochi, a producer of projects of all genres, including TV programs in Japan, gets closer to the real people of Los Angeles, revealing the unique stories of success, hardship and happiness.

GUEST of the month

Mr. Masahiro Kimura

Chairman of LIVE FORUM FOUNDATION USA (NPO)
<http://www.liveforum.org/index.html>

Reckless



Masahiro Kimura is always looking for something new. It makes sense as a former news correspondent for TV Asahi and a CNN News producer in Japan. Kimura now lives in Los Angeles and works on

his NPO "Live Forum Foundation USA," which promotes cultural awareness between U.S. and Japanese students through video forums and other events. Today, Kimura talked about his "Space Balloon 999" project, where a small air balloon was launched into space carrying the train from "Galaxy Express 999," a famous manga by Leiji Matsumoto.

Ochi (O): I used to be a huge fan of "Galaxy Express 999" as a teenager!

Kimura (K): Really?

O: Absolutely! I was in Junior High when the animation version started. I was hooked! I rushed to the movie version too, and cried my eyes out. So tell us about "Space Balloon 999."

K: Well, the idea sprang when I got together with astronaut Naoko Yamazaki and manga artist Leiji Matsumoto. We made a small Galaxy Express 999 train with a built in camera and hung that on equipment with helium gas; then, we launched it up in the air. The camera captures the view as it rises. You see houses getting smaller and eventu-

ally you see the horizon of the earth and space. It went up 32 km above ground into the stratosphere! In the future, I want to launch it higher into space.

O: Wow. Does the helium balloon eventually burst causing the train to come down?
K: Yes, but the parachute opens as it comes down. Right now, we can't control where it lands. The success rate of finding the Space Balloon is one in five.

O: Do you have video of the trip?

K: Yes, it's on YouTube. We launched it on March 2012 from Avalon of Catalina Island. It landed on a rooftop of a house in Riverside about 100 kilometers North East of Avalon.

O: Was everything alright?!

K: (Laugh) Yes, but this lady came out screaming "What have you done?!!!"

O: Did the roof break?

K: No, no. She was just surprised. She had no idea that something would drop from the sky! (Laugh)

K: Our next step is to have the space balloon return to where it was launched.

O: Do you use a remote control?

K: We're thinking of an autopilot system using robotics. We want it to navigate itself back. Right now, we have NASA's space engineer, a former NASA rocket architect, and a rocket engine engineer working on it as volunteers.
O: Wow. Where do you get the funding?

K: (Laugh) El Camino College in Torrance was involved, so they got the funding from the federal government. But with President

Obama's reform, the budget was cut, so I'm paying out of my own pocket.

O: What!? How much does it cost?

K: Not much. Without the robot, it costs about a hundred something dollars for the equipment.

O: I see.

K: Of course, it would not be cheap if we had to pay the engineers who are volunteering.

O: How do you make money for your company?

K: We don't.

O: You mean, you've been volunteering with your retirement money all these years? For 23 years?!

K: Well, I sold my LA house for good money, so we have the money from that. Now we live in a one bedroom apartment. We bought a RV and made that into an office and a broadcast van.

O: A one man TV station! So challenging! What does your wife say about all this?

K: She complains, but I move fast so she doesn't have time to think about it. (Laugh)

O: My hats off to your wife!



Masato OCHI - おち まさと -
Born in Tokyo on December 23, 1965, Masato Ochi is a well-known producer in Japan. Wide range of activities includes producing a variety of TV programs and events, designing for both fashion and corporate branding.
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