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Japanese drummer escapes disasters

DIXON – You'd never know by looking at him that 24 hours earlier, Takeshi Horiuchi was experiencing a natural catastrophe. In fact, at the time, he didn't realize how bad it was, either.

Horiuchi, a drummer with the Irish band Switchback, boarded an airplane in Japan on Friday. About 20 minutes later, while sitting on the tarmac, he heard the pilot over the intercom asking everyone to buckle up. Unaware of the magnitude, he knew it was an earthquake.

"On the ground, we knew something was wrong," he said during a break Saturday night at the Knights of Columbus Hall, as ate corned beef and cabbage washed down with a Guinness.

"The plane was shaking like turbulence, but we were on the ground. We had limited information and no idea how big it was. We did not know about the tsunami. We stayed for 7 hours on the ground before takeoff."

Passengers were left out of the loop until the plane touched down in New York, nearly 20 hours later.

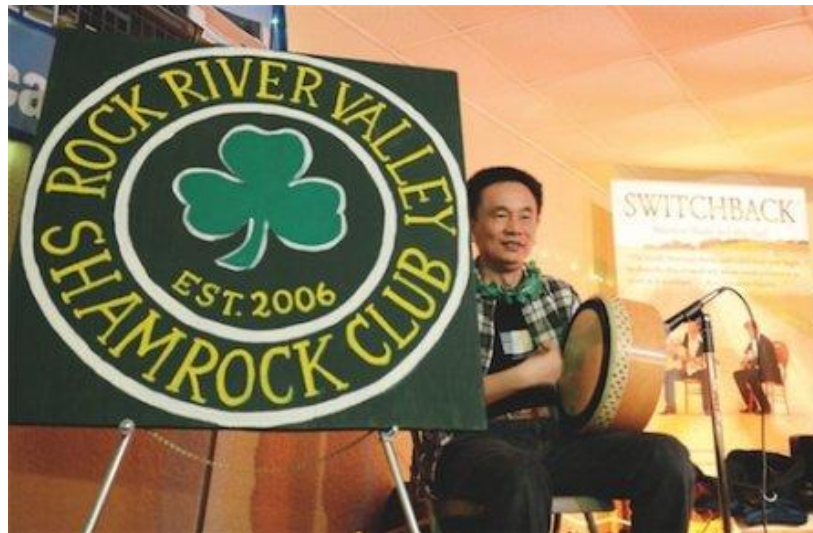
They were given a light meal and beer, "but they don't have Guinness there," he said with a smile and raise of his eyebrows.

Horiuchi lives in Fujinomiya City, 300 miles from the epicenter, and his mother, Miyoko Horiuchi, his only family member in Japan, is 500 miles from it.

He was relieved to hear that she, too, had escaped unscathed, but shocked by the devastation done to much of northern Japan.

He flies home March 23, and is apprehensive about what he will see upon arrival.

Pounding the bodhrán – an Irish drum – before the crowd of about 800 helped keep his mind off his homeland. He said he was looking forward to playing the Historic Dixon Theatre the next day, and in Texas and Minnesota, before heading home.



Horiuchi met and began playing with Brian FitzGerald and Martin McCormack, the Switchback duo, in 2003. The band plays gigs all over the world and organizers said they were honored to have them in Dixon for The Rock River Valley Shamrock Club's annual Irish Festival.

The celebration was a fundraiser for the Dixon Food Pantry and other organizations. Organizer Pat Gorman said they received about 1,000 nonperishable items and raised at least \$1,000.

There also was a silent auction and a 50/50 drawing, which made \$1,250 for the pantry and \$1,250 for winner Cory Eykamp.

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