Local residents Steve and Jaylyn Hawks are heading to Japan for one year. Steve, a Utah State University Moab public health professor, has accepted an invitation to be a Visiting Professor of Public Health at the University of Tsukuba, beginning in January. He will be joining the faculty of public health science, where he will pursue a number of research and teaching initiatives with Japanese colleagues at Tsukuba—a world-class research university.

“I lived in Japan for two years when I was younger and am excited to become reacquainted with the language and people,” he said.

Steve is planning on bringing USU study abroad students to Japan in the summer of 2021 for an in-depth, public health practicum experience.

“Being with USU students in Japan, working side-by-side with students and faculty from the University of Tsukuba, will definitely be a career highlight,” he stated.

Steve has been heavily involved with the development of a new Master of Public Health (MPH) program at USU and is helping to grow enrollments in the Southeast Region and at USU Moab. Creating study abroad opportunities for research and practicum experiences has been a priority for Hawks, beginning with a trip to Thailand in 2019. Being able to create international engagement opportunities for USU public health students, including his upcoming trip to Japan, is taking the MPH program to a global stage.

After returning to USU Moab, Steve looks forward to maintaining strong ties with the University of Tsukuba, including ongoing student and faculty exchange opportunities that will benefit both institutions. Before leaving, he will be on hand for the groundbreaking ceremony for the new USU Moab building and plans to be back to USU Moab in time for the ribbon cutting.

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world,” he said.

After six years of service as a member of the Grand County Council (now Commission), Jaylyn will be regretfully resigning from her position.

“‘I thought about letting him go by himself,’” she stated, “‘but I consider this the chance of a lifetime and didn’t want to miss out—so I have decided to step down from my County position at the end of the year and let someone else have a chance.

During her tenure as a very engaged Council Member/Commissioner, Jaylyn has been heavily involved with a number of challenging issues and initiatives. Even though her work with the County was deeply satisfying on many levels, she doesn’t mind the prospect of “taking a break.” She shared what she plans to do during her time in Japan.

“I will study the language, enjoy new places and people, immerse myself in the amazing cultural opportunities Japan has to offer, and take my sushi habit to a whole new level!” she said.

With the COVID-19 pandemic still very much a factor in relation to international travel, the Hawks will undergo testing just before leaving for Japan and again upon arrival at the Narita International Airport outside of Tokyo. They will self-quarantine in Narita for two weeks before joining colleagues at the nearby University of Tsukuba.

“We will miss friends and family while away,” they said, “but can’t wait to reunite after a year and share stories and experiences as we reconnect with our hometown community.”