

September/October 2013

A publication of the
JACL Chicago Chapter

JACL



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44th JACL National Convention

By Megan Nakano, JACL Chicago Chapter President

Over three hundred JACLers traveled to the nation's capital on July 24-26, 2013 to attend the 44th JACL National Convention at the Renaissance Washington, DC Downtown Hotel just a few blocks from the White House and the National Mall. The theme of the convention was "Justice for All," commemorating the 25th anniversary of the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988.

The opening banquet featured a history of the redress movement and recognized the key players in the passage of the Civil Liberties Act. The JACL President's Award was presented to Wade Henderson and the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights,

the late Senator Daniel K. Inouye, the late Senator Spark M. Matsunaga, the late Congressman Robert T. Matsui, and Secretary Norman Y. Mineta.

Members of the JACL National Committee for Redress and the JACL Legislative Education Committee were recognized for their dedication and commitment to gain redress. Individuals that were in attendance and recognized were Mrs. Mollie Fujioka, Mr. Tom Kometani, Mr. Phil Shigekuni, and Mr. John Tateishi.

Legislative visits on Capitol Hill were arranged for each of the conference attendees with their Congressional offices on Thursday. Attendees from Chicago met with representatives from Senator Dick Durbin's Office to discuss JACL's support of comprehensive immigration reform.



Photo: Kim Klutnick

L TO R: JACL CHICAGO CHAPTER CONVENTIONEERS MEGAN NAKANO, MAY NAKANO, CAROL YOSHINO, AND SHARON HARADA OUTSIDE ILLINOIS SENATOR DICK DURBIN'S OFFICE.

Continued on page 2

JACL

Japanese American Citizens League

CHICAGO CHAPTER

Securing and maintaining the civil rights of Japanese Americans and all others who are victimized by injustice and bigotry.

The JACLer is published by the JACL Chicago Chapter for its members, supporters and friends. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

For More Information

For information about the JACL Chicago Chapter, call 773.728.7171, or visit www.jaclchicago.org

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National Convention continued

Later that evening, conventioners attended a private reception at the National Archives. The "Words That Changed a Nation: National Archives Display of Executive Order 9066 and the Civil Liberties Act of 1988" exhibit gave guests the opportunity to view these five pages that changed and transformed our community. During the program, the JACL honored the American Jewish Committee (AJC) for its role in the successful campaign to achieve redress for the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans.

On Friday, the Chicago Chapter was presented with a grant from the JACL Legacy Fund at the Legacy Luncheon for the Kansha Project—a program that connects Japanese American youth to the continuing legacy of the Japanese American community's incarceration during World War II centering around an educational trip to Los Angeles' Little Tokyo neighborhood and the Manzanar concentration camp site.

The Legacy Fund was established by the National JACL Council on June 20, 1990 at the JACL National Convention in San Diego, after the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. The purpose of the Legacy Fund was to establish a perpetual endowment from which the earnings would be used to support and sustain research and education that would help prevent future injustices such as the forced detention and incarceration of the Japanese Americans during World War II. Other 2013 Legacy Fund awardees included a garden commemorating Japanese American ancestry and contributions; printed educational material for Camp Amache; and multimodal community conference.

During the business session held on Friday, the delegates resolved to support comprehensive immigration reform including a pathway to legal residency and citizenship. They also passed resolutions lowering membership dues for non-U.S. resident members; supporting the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities; supporting the appeal of a soldier discharged from the U.S. Army due to Chronic Hepatitis B; and honoring the life of Trayvon Martin and supporting a Department of Justice investigation against George Zimmerman.

His Excellency Ambassador Kenichiro Sasae and Mrs. Nobuko Sasae hosted the Closing Reception of the 2013 JACL National Convention at their residence. Ambassador Sasae presented the Governor Ralph Carr Award to President Ronald Reagan posthumously (accepting on behalf of the President Ronald Reagan family was James Kuhn); former House Speaker Jim Wright, who co-authored HR 442; and Glenn Roberts, who drafted HR 442.

The Governor Ralph Carr Award, established at the 2012 JACL National Convention by a resolution of the JACL National Council, honors the legacy of Ralph Carr, a former governor of Colorado, who famously defended the Constitutional rights of Japanese Americans post-Pearl Harbor. He not only advocated for racial tolerance, but also encouraged Coloradans to welcome Japanese Americans.

JACL National President David Lin remarked, "As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, we remember who our friends were when the Japanese Americans were in need after the United States declared war against Japan, and we honor them. We shall also renew our vow that such an injustice against a single ethnic group will never happen again in this country." 

**Asian American Coalition of Chicago
31st Lunar New Year Dinner
"Beyond the Bamboo Ceiling" • February 22, 2014
Hyatt Regency O'Hare
Hosted by the Japanese American Community**

2013 Kansha Project Concludes with Successful Culmination

On June 29th, 50 people attended the second annual Kansha Culmination held at the Midwest Buddhist Temple.

The 2013 Kansha Project participants, Midori Bowen, Robin Kanemoto, Lane Mita, Kenji Negi, Anna Takada, and Hatsumi Yoshida presented their video presentations. (Go to jaclchicago.org to view the videos).

The Kansha Project continues to become one of JACL Chicago's premier programs. To support this unique and exciting program, contact Bill Yoshino at 773.728.7171.

Marc Oda, also a 2013 participant, was unable to attend the Culmination event due to a scheduled school conflict. The following is Marc's Kansha Project Reflection piece. Enjoy! 

Kansha Project Reflections

By Marc Robert K. Oda, Kansha Project Participant

One of the most important factors in characterizing my personal identity is my cultural heritage and background. Through the Kansha Project, I've learned a great deal about Japanese American culture and what my role is in the community as a Japanese American citizen. Before the Kansha Project, there were few areas for me to grow in my understanding of my Japanese studies. Though I had always showed interest in my family history, opportunities to take part in the Japanese American community were rare. My grandparents gave me memorable stories and wise insight concerning their past as Japanese Americans, and I had abundant resources to study my cultural past. However, I lacked a spark to motivate me to be active in the Japanese American community. Through the Kansha Project, several events over the course of the weekend impacted me significantly and changed the way I view my identity as a Japanese American.

Hearing the stories and memories of the 442nd veterans was a humbling and encouraging experience for me. Despite being forced into the incarceration camps and facing harsh racism of the time, many men in the camps had joined the U.S. military voluntarily to prove loyalty to America. Not only did these men volunteer in the face of racism, but they proved to be one of the most successful combat teams in U.S. history. The veterans' stories revealed the horror of wartimes and the toll it takes on soldiers. But through their stories, my respect for military serviceman of the past and present greatly increased. Not only did the Japanese Americans serve in the European theater of World War II, but they also served in the Pacific. One of the veterans we spoke with, Hitoshi Sameshima, served as an interrogator for the MIS in the Pacific, and he noted that members of his family were fighting on the opposite side of the war as part of the Japanese Imperial Army. His service to America struck me because he was willing to face his own family for the U.S. The success and valor of the Japanese American veterans showed the perseverance and dedication of the JA community and the stories I heard from the veterans encouraged me to take pride in my JA heritage.

During the Kansha Project, I was also able to connect more with my identity as half-Japanese, half-Caucasian, or my "Hapa" identity. Professor Welty discussed the nature of Hapa culture and how it can be very different from Japanese, and even JA culture. Growing up, I knew very few, if any Hapa Americans, but through Professor Welty, I learned that the mixed race community is actually quite large and growing. The increasing number of Hapa people also means the Japanese



Photo: Robert Brown

BILL YOSHINO, JACL MIDWEST REGIONAL DIRECTOR, GIVES THE AUDIENCE AN OVERVIEW OF THE KANSHA PROJECT WITH THE 2013 PARTICIPANTS IN THE BACKGROUND.

ethnicity is being diluted through mixed race marriage. However, I learned this dilution of biological heritage does not mean Japanese culture must die out. Instead, as a half-Japanese American, it is my duty as well as the duty of other Hapa Americans to maintain sense of cultural identity and preserve the traditions of our culture. Even if the Japanese culture is diluted in the future, Hapa people can pass on the Japanese culture to future generations as long as they make an effort to learn about their past and connect with the JA community.

Visiting Manzanar also had a profound impact on my view of Japanese American culture. The conditions at the camp were physically harsh, and vastly different than the environment of the city. Not only were the physical conditions rough, but the camps also caused emotional rifts in the Japanese American community. In the early years of the camps, riots occurred, family life was dissipating, and distrust built between JA's in the camp. However, I was greatly encouraged by the determination of the Japanese Americans in spite of the difficulties. A common phrase in the camps was "shikata ga nai," or "it cannot be helped." Because their situation in the camps could not be helped, the JA's made an effort to improve the living conditions. The formed clubs, made gardens, went to school; through the experience, the Japanese Americans showed incredible resilience and diligence. Touring the barracks, exploring the desert, hearing the stories; my experience at Manzanar gave me a taste of what my grandparents had to go through as children, and I developed a much greater respect for the previous generations of Japanese Americans.

My identity as a Japanese American has always been important to me, but I never fully understood the sacrifices and experiences previous generations had to endure in the past, and how those events shaped the JA culture of today. As a result of the Kansha Project, I have a new and reignited respect for my grandparents and other Japanese Americans who grew through the trials of America's past. I also saw the significant impact of being part of a community through Kansha, and the trip has motivated me to take a more active role in the Japanese American Society. I hope to educate others on the terrible effects of racism as well as the importance of community so America can avoid the mistakes of its past. Thanks to the Kansha Project I have found new meaning and purpose as a Japanese American which I can use to stay involved in the community and instruct others.



Photos: Robert Brown

Celebrating Summer 2013 Nikkei Picnic and Ginza Holiday



Photos: Robert Brown

Josina Morita Candidate for Metropolitan Water Reclamation District



Josina Morita, an ardent community activist, is running for Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD).

She currently serves as the director of the

United Congress of Community and Religious Organizations, a multiethnic alliance of community organizations working together across 30 communities in Cook County. Ms. Morita's additional activities include service on the State of Illinois' Racial Profiling and Data Oversight Board, the Asian American Employment

Plan Council, and the City of Chicago's Commission on Equity. She sits on the boards of the Woods Fund of Chicago and the Asian American Action Fund of Greater Chicago. She has been endorsed for this position by an impressive array of elected public officials.

Ms. Morita holds a Masters in Urban Planning and Public Policy from the University of Illinois at Chicago and a B.A. in Sociology and International Race Relations from Pitzer College.

When asked why she is running for this position, she replied that she has a background in urban planning and she understands that issues of water management, infrastructure and

accessibility are crucial issues for the region. "Unlike oil," she said, "there is no substitute for fresh water. We must manage this precious resource well for this generation, and the next."

When asked about Ms. Morita's candidacy, Bill Yoshino replied, "It's vitally important for highly qualified Asian Americans to run and get elected to public offices. Josina's election to this office would represent an important step in empowering Asian Americans in Cook County. She has spent her career uplifting people and she will continue to do so in any endeavor she undertakes." ☺



Dedicated golfers braved searing heat and humidity July 20th at the Pinecrest Golf Course.



Photos: Joyce Yoshino

The Way I See It . . .

Reflections of a Retiring Board Member— A Japanese American Story (Part 2)

By David K. Igasaki

In the July/August issue of the JACLER, David Igasaki began sharing his experience as a Japanese American gay man, and being a JACL Chicago board member for many years. This is part 2 of David's story.

It is time for the civilized world to join the National JACL and to let the Boy Scouts of America know that they are no longer a sacred cow immune from criticism for a policy of bigotry and discrimination. If they will not change, it is time for charitable contributions and funding to be cut off and for sponsorship of packs, troops, and posts to be withdrawn by schools, public entities, and other institutions that support equality and fairness.

The issue did not end with the National JACL's resolution against the Boy Scouts. A candidate for National Vice President for Membership went down to defeat at a JACL National Convention after it turned out that he was an official of the National Council of the Boy Scouts of America and he was felled by his vigorous defense of the discriminatory policy only four years after JACL came out against it. I was surprised. I assumed that my question at the Candidates' Forum would be brushed off with an "I will work to change the policy from within," which I have seen in similar interviews and would usually be accepted even if not given seriously. Fortunately, the Midwest District was rooting for his opponent who then romped to victory.

My Chicago colleagues were less pleased when I took off after the Salt Lake City Convention Committee when we were trying to promote our own upcoming convention. Salt Lake City, admittedly one of our most conservative chapters, should have known better than to give exhibit space to the Boy Scouts of America. (Since the Delegate from the Salt Lake

City Chapter spoke against the Boy Scout resolution, it is hard for me to interpret the booth as anything other than a deliberate thumbing in the nose against the position of the National JACL. The chapter must have known the National position. This was nothing less than an intentional symbolic statement that the Japanese American community must stand against the civil rights and human rights of gay youth). I was quite ashamed that a JACL chapter wanted to publicly support and endorse discrimination and bigotry.

I got no reply to my letter of complaint. However, I did copy the National JACL, which hopefully did take the lesson to heart.

If there is an issue that I have with the National JACL (and the Districts and Chapters), it is that it has had virtually no LGBT programming of any sort. I represented the Chicago Chapter as a Delegate to eight National JACL Conventions, was an Alternate Delegate to a ninth, and was a booster at a tenth. I was at most District, Bi-District, and Tri-District Conventions. I was also familiar with the programming at the handful of Conventions that I did not attend. The only LGBT programming during my entire tenure with JACL was a workshop panel on LGBT Asian Americans at the 1992 Convention in Denver. It was coordinated by our short-lived LGBT chapter- Lambda Los Angeles. At a later Convention, there was a lesbian panelist on a panel on diversity within the Asian American community. That is it. No other gay related programming of any sort at the National and District levels.

I assure you that there is an LGBT component within the Nikkei community. It would be useful to us to have our issues, needs, and identity addressed. The workshop at the Denver Convention was



DAVID IGASAKI AT CHICAGO'S FAMOUS BILLY GOAT TAVERN.

attended by many curious heterosexual Nisei and it served an important educational function. LGBT issues can, and should, be an important part of youth programming as well. Unlike the Boy Scouts of America, we should be welcoming and affirming for LGBT Japanese American youth.

As to issues, though, the Japanese American community has been in the forefront in advocacy for human and civil rights and the Japanese American Citizens League, and particularly our Chicago Chapter, has much responsibility for that. As I draft and compose this article, I have circulated perhaps my last motion on the Chicago Chapter Board, perhaps my last vote, a motion to endorse Illinois Senate Bill 10, a bill to bring marriage equality to Illinois, the culmination of a struggle that seemed much more remote and distant when we asked the JACL National Council (Convention) to endorse marriage equality.

I am proud for playing my part in this work.


Have something you'd like to say?

Submit your comments via email to chicago@jacl.org, or by mail to JACL Chicago Chapter, 5415 N. Clark St., Chicago, Illinois 60640

The views expressed in "The Way I See It . . ." column do not represent a position of the JACL or its Chapters.

**Chicago History Museum
Opens Saturday, October 19, 2013**

**American Heroes
Japanese American WWII Nisei Soldiers
and the Congressional Gold Medal**

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Ken and Jacqueline Nitahara
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Victor and Sandra Miyata
(2013 Golf Tournament)
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(in memory of T. Iwata)
Arnold and Asako Watanabe
(in memory of T. Iwata)
Dean and Phyllis Whitford
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(in memory of T. Iwata)
Jack and Pat Yuzawa-Rubin
(in memory of C. Tomihiro, in memory
of H. Sakai, in memory
of M. Nakagawa, in memory
of M. Yamamoto, in memory of
H. Ozaki, and in memory of
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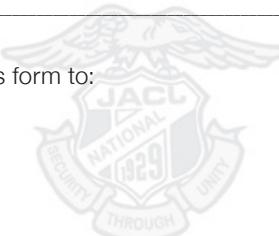
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The Japanese American Citizens League is a non-profit human and civil rights organization dedicated to preserving the civil liberties of Japanese Americans and of all Americans.

We welcome your participation.

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Calendar of Events

Wednesday, September 11

JACL Chicago Board Meeting
JACL Chicago Office

Saturday, September 28

JASC Boogie Night
White Eagle Banquet Hall, Niles, IL

Saturday, October 5

Fall 2013 Midwest District Council Meeting
Houston, TX

Wednesday, October 9

JACL Chicago Board Meeting
JACL Chicago Office

Thursday, October 10

JACL National Gala
Washington, D.C.

Saturday, October 19

Exhibit Opening
Americans Heros
Japanese American WWII Nisei Soldiers and the Congressional Gold Medal
9 AM, Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark St., Chicago