

DECEMBER DEATHS OF OCHI AND IMURA LEAVE 2020 ON A DOWN NOTE

Their lives are remembered for achievements and lasting legacies.

By P.C. Staff

Last year saw several barrier-breaking Nikkei women die, and before it ended, two more distaff Japanese Americans were added to that mournful list: attorney Rose Matsui Ochi on Dec. 13 at 81 and former California Legislature staffer Georgette Imura on Dec. 17 at 77.

Ochi, who was already battling health issues, was fighting COVID-19 for the second time when she died in Los Angeles, just two days short of her birthday.

Imura succumbed to lung cancer in Sacramento, Calif., after a three-year battle with the disease.

Ron Wakabayashi, who served as JACL's national director when Imura was at the California Legislature, praised Imura and her colleague, Maeley Tom, for their work that helped the Asian American community.

Imura, who was born Georgette

Yamamoto in 1943 while her family was incarcerated at California's Manzanar War Relocation Authority Center, was known as a politically savvy behind-the-scenes operator at the state capital and began her career in 1967 working for state Sen. Leroy Greene.

"Georgette was a workhorse. She would look at it like, 'How do we get this implemented, what do we need to do?'" said Wakabayashi. "All of the logistics and the planning — if I wanted to carry something out, it would be Georgette."

Imura also worked for Assemblywoman Yvonne Brathwaite and Assemblyman Julian Dixon. Later, she became Calif. state Sen. Diane Watson's chief of staff, and following that, she served as the director of the Office of Asian Pacific Affairs for state Sen. David Roberti when he was the Senate president pro tempore.

During her career, Imura noted the dearth of Asians involved in state politics and with another Asian

American woman and fellow state legislative staffer, Maeley Tom, co-founded the Asian Pacific Youth Leadership Project, a workshop designed to familiarize Asian and Pacific Islander Americans with California's political process, and inspire and encourage participation in public service and politics. Imura would also mentor younger Asian Americans, and she later used her leverage to help with the Japanese American redress movement.

Tom and Imura also helped lead the successful opposition to the appointment of U.S. Rep. Dan Lungren (R-Calif.) from becoming California's state treasurer. Lungren who was the vice chairperson of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, opposed the monetary component of Japanese American redress.

Wakabayashi also credited Imura and Tom with raising awareness at the state and federal level to what is now known as hate crimes toward Asians, aka anti-Asian violence.

After a 28-year career in the California Legislature, Imura became a political consultant via Liberty Con-



Georgette Imura (pictured at bottom) is pictured with Maeley Tom and Ron Wakabayashi.

Imura had a 28-year career in the California Legislature.

sulting and helped pass legislation to preserve the state's remaining Japantowns. She also served on the boards of several community organizations.

Georgette Imura is survived by her husband, Roy Imura, sons Todd and Aaron and four grandchildren.

Meantime, Ochi's place in history was sealed on Aug. 10, 1988, the day President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. During the ceremony and with Ochi present, Reagan said, "And now in closing, I wonder whether you'd permit me

one personal reminiscence — one prompted by an old newspaper report sent to me by Rose Ochi, a former internee. The clipping comes from the *Pacific Citizen* and is dated December 1945."

Reagan's allusion was to an article published in the *Pacific Citizen* about the posthumous presentation of the Distinguished Service Cross by Gen. Joseph Stilwell to the family of Kazuo

