

Doug Urata, Steadfast JACLeR, Dies at 72

Riverside JACL chapter member, JACF trustee had reputation for always being helpful.



Linda Hara and Doug Urata, seen in 2019 when they each received a JACL Sapphire Pin for their service to the organization; Urata (right) from the 2024 Riverside JACL installation.

PACIFIC CITIZEN DIGITAL ARCHIVE

By P.C. Staff

Douglas James Urata of Trabuco Canyon, Calif., whose expertise in financial matters helped with the creation in 2015 of the JA Community Foundation and whose always-ready-to-assist attitude for JACL and other Japanese American community organizations spanned decades, died Feb. 2. He was 72.

According to his widow, Alice Roe, Urata went into hospice care Jan. 30 after having been diagnosed with an aggressive form of a blood cancer. “He didn’t know he had multiple myeloma cancer until Dec. 29,” she said. “He was getting fractures in his back. He never had a fall, he never had an accident.”

One of Urata’s last public appearances was serving as the announcer whose voice was heard over the public address system at the Evening of Aloha fundraiser for the Go For Broke National Education Center in September. That event was one of many that he helped with over the decades, oftentimes as the master of ceremonies with fellow JACLeR Linda Hara acting as co-emcee.

Asked how their long-running partnership began, Hara said, “I honestly don’t know. It was probably somebody’s idea, and we just took it from there,” she told *Pacific Citizen*.

Likening their onstage relationship to something like George Burns and Gracie Allen or Kathy Lee Gifford and Regis Philbin, Hara added, “There was a chemistry. We kind of fed off of each other. We collaborated on the scripts, and so we’d be bouncing ideas off of each other. . . . It was just kind of a natural thing. It was fun.

“He was a great friend, loyal, loyal friend. I don’t think a lot of people realize what large of a void he is leaving.”

Urata’s contributions to many JACL and other community events cemented his reputation for being helpful, and his desire to be helpful extended beyond organizations

to the person-to-person level. “If anyone ever needed any help with anything, Doug was always the first person to help,” said Roe. “I’m not the best writer, but he would always write for me. He would also help write for others, anything, anybody. If you needed a ride somewhere, he would drive you there. He would pick up people if they had a JACL or Go For Broke (event). He would pick the people up at the airport and take them to the event. . . . He was just known as that kind of a person. All he wanted to do was improve people’s lives.”

“He just helped everybody,” Urata’s second-oldest sister, Emily Kemper, concurred. “He took after my dad. Anything he could do to help you, he would do it.”

Asked what might have motivated her brother to be so helpful, eldest sister Phyllis Hiura said, “The only thing that I can think of is my dad was always very involved in the community. I think he did a lot of things to please his dad.”

“He was really the best brother a sister could ever ask for,” Hiura added. “He was always kind and generous, and if we had a question about, you know, computer stuff or anything, really, we could call and ask him.”

A graduate of California State University, Chico, with a bachelor’s degree in business with a concentration in finance, Urata was born in San Diego, Calif., the youngest child of Helen and James Urata, who met while incarcerated at the Poston War Relocation Authority Center. James Urata went on to serve in the Army as a linguist in the Military Intelligence Service.

When Doug Urata was 10, his family moved to San Bernardino because James Urata was hired as the original building coordinator for California State University, San Bernardino, where he later became its director of Administrative Affairs. James Urata also joined the Riverside JACL chapter, and later, Doug Urata’s JACL membership was with it, too.

According to his LinkedIn profile, Urata’s professional expertise in finance included working part-time as a marketing assistant for Prudential Financial, serving as an arbitrator for FINRA (Financial Industry Regulatory Authority), a marketing specialist for Pacific Life, COO at Clientell and marketing project manager for Transamerica.

Urata’s most-impactful financial legacy may possibly have been his involvement with the JA Community Foundation, which can trace its roots to the JACL Health Benefits Trust, at which he served as a trustee beginning in 1982. According to JACF CEO Stephen Divizich, the Trust managed a Blue Shield health insurance plan for JACL members across the U.S.

“As the Trust adapted to changes brought by the Affordable Care Act, the Trust needed to form a separate company called JA Health Insurance Services to manage its existing health insurance contracts. As a result of closing the JACL plan, the Trust had a large reserve fund at Blue Shield that needed to be returned to the JA community,” Divizich told the *Pacific Citizen* via email.

“In 2015, the Trustees formed a 501(c)(3) nonprofit called the JA Community Foundation and donated the reserve fund to the new foundation. The foundation began granting in 2016 and has since donated over \$3 million to Japanese American nonprofit organizations. At the time of his pass-

ing, Doug was a current member of all three boards: a Trustee with JACL Health Benefits Trust for 42 years, a founding Board member and chairman of the JA Health Insurance Services, and a founding member and chairman of the JA Community Foundation.”

In addition to his track record with JACL, Urata also served as a trainer with LEAP or Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics. From 1988-92, he helped with the Conquer the Bridge 8K run and in 1996, he served as the co-chair of the annual mayor’s dinner for Los Angeles Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. According to Roe, her late husband also wrote the first curriculum guide to be taught in the high schools for Go For Broke National Education Center when Christine Sato-Yamazaki was in charge of the nonprofit.

The recollections of the many with whom Urata interacted with follow.

J. D. Hokoyama (LEAP president and CEO): “He was a good trainer. . . . He was happy to do things in the background that nobody ever knew. . . . Always very enthusiastic, and he was pretty outspoken. He wasn’t afraid to express his opinion” (see “*Exec Director’s ‘Us,’ ‘Them’ Rhetoric Is Divisive*,” Feb. 7, 2025, *Pacific Citizen*, [tinyurl.com/yh2ksesd](https://www.pacificcitizen.com/yh2ksesd)).

Jon Kaji (City Council, Torrance, Calif.): “Doug was very active in PSWDC JACL during the 1980s into the ’90s. He supported a range of activities including the Conquer the Bridge run. We will miss him.”

Mitch Maki (GFBNEC president and CEO): Doug was a longtime supporter of GFBNEC because he deeply appreciated courage and patriotism that our World War II Japanese American veterans demonstrated. Doug will be sorely missed.”

Gary Mayeda (JACL national president, 2016-18): “Doug was the quintessential volunteer that can do anything you ask of

him. He was a busy guy but when you needed someone to get things done, Doug was your guy. The community lost a very sincere, dedicated and caring scholar. I will miss him dearly.”

Stephen Divizich (JACF CEO): “Doug loved working with the JACL health insurance plan and was a dedicated board member. He would come up from Orange County to the bay area at least five times per year, every year for 43 years to attend meetings, and was on nearly every committee we had. When I joined in 2001 as the trust administrator, I did not have much experience with boards, but I spoke with him regularly, and he was always kind, professional and happy to help. I also relied on him heavily when we started the JA Community Foundation as he had extensive experience with nonprofits. Doug served as an important mentor to me, and our organization has much to show for his dedication.”

Michiko Yoshimura (Riverside JACL chapter president): “We will truly miss Doug. Our active members have diminished so Doug was willing to take up the slack and do the work necessary to keep our chapter functioning.”

Urata’s widow believes that in death, her late husband may still be helpful to others. “If anyone gets a fracture that appears out of nowhere, you might want to get the special blood test that tests for multiple myeloma because that’s the only way you can discover if you have it or not,” Roe told the *Pacific Citizen*. “Get it checked out for cancer.”

Doug Urata was predeceased by his parents. He is survived by his widow, Alice Roe; sisters, Phyllis Hiura and her children, Rodney, Kimberly and Joe; and Emily Kemper and her children, Jennifer and Mark.

A celebration of life is planned for April 25 at the Wintersburg Presbyterian Church in Santa Ana, Calif. ■

Hawaii’s Former Rep. Hanabusa Dies at 74

HONOLULU (AP) — Former U.S. Rep. Colleen Hanabusa, who was the first woman to serve as president of the Hawaii State Senate, has died. She was 74.

Hanabusa died early March 6 after a five-month battle with cancer, said Mike Formby, her friend and former chief of staff in the U.S. House.

In announcing her death, Gov.

Josh Green ordered the U.S. and Hawaii flags to be flown at half-staff.

She “broke barriers” as the first woman president of the state Senate and “spent decades advocating for her community with strength, determination and heart,” Green said. “Her legacy of leadership and public service will continue to inspire generations to come.” ■

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