



PACIFIC CITIZEN

SPECIAL ISSUE

INSIDE:

**JACL
National
Board**



YEAR OF THE

HORSE

CELEBRATING
97
Years

WWII: HONORING OREGON'S NISEI SOLDIERS

Historical marker on Hwy. 35 makes amends 81 years after Hood River Incident.

By Eder Campuzano

A historical marker placed Nov. 11 on Oregon Hwy 35, just outside Hood River, Ore., pays homage to the contributions Nisei soldiers made to the U.S. military during World War II.

It sits along a highway pullout frequented by travelers looking to catch a glimpse of Mount Hood. Two years ago, this stretch of road was officially designated Oregon Nisei Veterans World War II Memorial Highway.

Bend, Ore., resident Eric Ballinger, along with local historian Linda Tamura, led the charge to dedicate the highway and the historical marker.

"I think these events have created a space that really helped further the healing process, within Hood River and within the Japanese Americans community," Ballinger said.

That healing was years in the making.

Nearly 81 years ago, the local chapter of the American Legion removed the names of 16 local Nisei soldiers who had been included on a military honor roll installed on the Hood River County Courthouse. The act, which became known as the Hood River Incident, made headlines across the state and nation.

Hundreds of letters poured into the American Legion, and, in early 1945, American Legion leadership voted to restore the names. Legionnaires held on to the correspondence, much of which is available to view via the Japanese Museum of Oregon website (tinyurl.com/2upew8me).

Historians, elected officials and military officers highlighted that



Mia Ballinger (center) cuts the ribbon during the Nov. 11, 2025, dedication ceremony for a historical marker that commemorates the contributions to the World War II effort by Nisei soldiers. Ballinger's great-grandfather served in the 422nd Regimental Combat Team. Also pictured (from left) are Commander Carl Casey (American Legion Post 22), Oregon Rep. Jeff Helfrich (District 22), Hood River County Commissioner Jennifer Euwer, Hood River Mayor Paul Blackburn, former Hood River Mayor Kate McBride, Hood River City Councilor Gladys Rivera and Lisa Commander, executive director of the History Museum of Hood River County. PHOTO: EDER CAMPUZANO

history during a 2025 Veterans Day ceremony in Hood River. Former Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski told the stories of Shin Sato and Frank Hachiya, Nisei soldiers whose families were sent to Idaho's Minidoka War Relocation Authority Center.

"We are grateful for their valor and their service," Kulongoski said during the service.

More than 33,000 Nisei served in the U.S. Armed Forces during WWII, and 433 of them were from Oregon.

Japanese farmers settled near Hood River because of the region's promising agricultural fields, which bore harvests of apples, pears, cherries and other fruits. This section of the Columbia River Gorge became home to the second-

largest population of Japanese immigrants in Oregon, second only to neighboring Multnomah County (tinyurl.com/2w47f97s).

Frank Nakata, 99, was living in Portland when his family was incarcerated and relocated to the Minidoka camp in Idaho alongside 13,000 other Japanese Americans. He was drafted into the military in 1944 and served in the Army Air Corps for one year.

"We did what we had to do," Nakata said. "That's the way it was. It was my duty to go."

Eric Ballinger's daughter, Mia, was one of six descendants of Nisei veterans invited to share their family history during the ceremony. Her great-grandfather, Harry Morioka, served in the 422nd Regimental

Combat Team.

"It meant a lot to present on the history of the Nisei soldiers, knowing they were so disrespected," Mia Ballinger said. "It was really about bringing back some of our culture."

Like many Japanese Americans in the aftermath of WWII, Morioka didn't talk much about his time in the service. But in the 1990s, Eric Ballinger became engrossed by Tamura's writings on Japanese American history in Oregon.

Those readings inspired him to, along with Tamura, push Oregon leaders to recognize the Nisei's historical contribution to the region and the war effort. In 2022, he successfully lobbied the Oregon Legislature to designate Hwy 35 as the Oregon Nisei Veterans World War II Memorial Highway.

The next year, while he and Mia were home sick with Covid-19, the father and daughter filled out the paperwork necessary to get a historical marker placed on the side of the highway. And on Veterans Day in November 2025, Mia cut the red ribbon that signaled the marker was now ready for visitors.

While several people were instrumental in the dedication of the highway and the placement of the historical marker, Eric Ballinger said the members of American Legion Post 22 and its commander, Carl Casey, deserve kudos for the effort they put forth to right historical wrongs.

"For them to collaborate with the Japanese American community is a great example of how we can create change and work out historical differences," Eric Ballinger said. "I can't say enough to applaud them." ■

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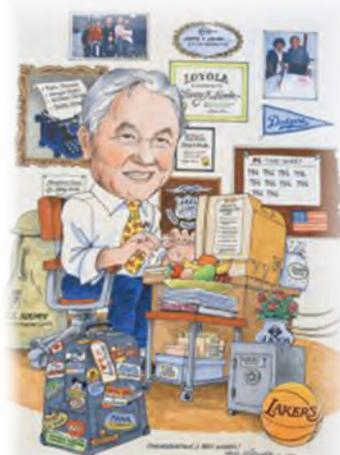
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HELP THE PACIFIC CITIZEN BY CONTRIBUTING TO THE SPRING CAMPAIGN - Harry Honda Fund

Harry Honda dedicated 61 years to promoting the *Pacific Citizen*, providing thoughtful coverage of JACL chapter activities, national news and events and issues of general interest to Japanese American and Asian American readers. The fund was launched with a generous donation from author and activist Grant Ujifusa, whose intent was to support the *Pacific Citizen* in hiring outside contributing writers. This support helps expand and strengthen coverage from across the country for our national readership.



Editor Emeritus Harry Honda as drawn by Pete Hironaka



REFLECTIONS

ARE SANSEI BABY BOOMERS STRONGER THAN THE ISSEI AND NISEI?

By Ron Ikejiri

Growing up in the 1950s, we watched and learned first-hand that the Issei and Nisei never felt entitled.

- They knew that life would not wait for them to be OK!
- They got up, they carried the burden of the day.
- They kept going.
- They did it with patience.
- They did it with dignity.
- They were respectful of others, even if others were not respectful of them.

Issei in their new land of opportunity and facing various forms of hardships, race discrimination and

economic struggles . . . The Issei did not wait for things to get better.

- They kept the belief that their sacrifices were for *kodomo no tame ni* (“for the sake of their children”).
- They exhibited *gaman* (“perseverance”).

Today, we find a new generation of Yonsei and Gosei that have little or no knowledge, understanding or appreciation of their roots and the sacrifices of the Issei and Nisei.

Simply stated, *some* feel they are ENTITLED to everything that they may enjoy today by just being.

While time will tell, my observation is that the Yonsei and Gosei may go through life with the unfortunate experience of not making any bold

statement of their roots and exude exclamation marks in their respect and pride of their American Japanese ancestry experiences.

To give meaning to the Issei and Nisei experience, one last time (*mo ichido*), I ask that the Sansei baby boomers make themselves available to be ADOPTED by a Yonsei or Gosei and share with them your personal life stories. We are not talking about formal meetings or seminars. We are talking about one-on-one chats.

Share with them just “how cool” it was to have Bachan’s salty onigiri and cold tempura and karaage chicken sitting at the beach or on a mountain hike.

Share with them just how trendy in your Japanese home, dinner was more often than not *nokori no mono* or “leftovers.”

Share with them the truthful meaning of leftovers — that it was all there was to eat with the limited funds that so many Issei and Nisei had during those early years.

Share with them Mom telling you to eat every grain of rice because

she reminded you that because of the war on the Korean peninsula in the 1950s, the kids your age had nothing to eat.

During all of these chats, interject a thought or memory of Jichan or Obachan . . . Mom or Dad’s moments of joy, sadness and challenge. It will make the moment memorable for the Yonsei or Gosei that adopted you.

The late-U.S. Sen. Spark Matsunaga from Hawaii once shared with me some 48 years ago that “only through personal suffering will you truly appreciate the sacrifices of your parents and grandparents’ generation.”

What was meant is that through adversity, we learn patience and dignity.

Share with them how appreciation and gratitude was learned and taught not by some grand gift or awesome event . . . but by daily little gestures of kindness and supporting one another, a little bit of *kimochi* or “heart,” one thoughtful gesture at a time.

We Sansei Baby Boomers may not measure up and be stronger than the

Issei and Nisei. But . . .

- We can be the bridge to the Issei and Nisei for the Yonsei and Gosei.
- We need to do it now in 2026, as so many of us are leaving each day. So, please resolve to be that bridge. Rekindle not only our memories of the Issei and Nisei life stories, but also share them with the Yonsei and Gosei.

The Issei and Nisei made the American dream a reality for the Sansei, and we have a *on and giri* or “duty and responsibility” to share the roots of that American dream to help them to step up boldly, make an exclamation mark statement and take their “rightful” place furthering the Japanese American contributions to the American way of life.

- Do not *guzu-guzu* or “put it off.” Do it now.
- Time is fleeting.
- Tomorrow is too late.
- Get it started today.

Onegai shimasu . . . Yoroshiku (I am counting on you)!

Ron Ikejiri is an attorney and the former JACL Washington, D.C., representative.



LEGAL-EASE: AN ATTORNEY’S PERSPECTIVE

HOW TO DIVIDE YOUR ESTATE

By Judd Matsunaga, Esq.

Happy New Year!!! One positive part about the new year is making your New Year’s resolution. If you can’t think of one, I’ve got one for you — why not make creating or updating your will (or trust) your New Year’s resolution? Why? Because making a will or trust requires: (1) testamentary capacity; and (2) you have to still be alive. Plus, “Tomorrow is not promised” to any one of us.

Testamentary capacity, a subset of legal capacity, is a specific and lower standard required only for the execution of a valid last will and testament. This can mean that even if the doctor wrote a “letter of incapacity” stating that you shouldn’t enter binding legal contracts, you can still make a will. So, before you “lose your mind,” make sure your will (or trust) divides your estate and not your family.

Few issues cause as much disagreement between family members as inheritances.

Hundreds of years ago, dividing your estate was not a problem. If you like the old Samurai movies, you’re probably familiar with an outdated Japanese tradition where the eldest son inherits titles and

estates to keep wealth and power within one lineage. Historically, this practice maintained family status, kept power consolidated and prevented land fragmentation. However, modern day Japan favors equal distribution among all heirs, similar to current laws in places like England and the U.S.

American inheritance rules are deeply rooted in English traditions, particularly the Statute of Distributions (1670), which established a system for dividing property among family members when there was no will (intestacy).

The courts favor fairness and equality, applying the 14th Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause, striking down discriminatory practices based on gender. Most states follow a similar hierarchy, ensuring close family gets priority. The core idea is to distribute property to the closest surviving relatives. Upon death of both parents, typically to children equally (adopted included, stepchildren usually excluded). These laws prevent assets from going to the state (escheat) if someone dies without a will.

But, instead of dividing your family, what if there was a way to actually help bring them closer? I recently heard about a Nisei

couple who left provisions in their trust that encourages their family to stay close for many years to come. The estate was divided among the four children equally, with a fifth share to be used to pay for annual family vacations. I wish I thought of it. It’s brilliant!

The overwhelming majority of Nikkei parents will say, “I want to be fair, I love all my children equally.” The simplest definition of “fair” is equal. Therefore, if your goal is to reduce conflicts between your children, then you should probably divide your estate “equally.”

Sometimes, however, “fair” does not necessarily mean “equal.” “Say what?” you might ask. You might have given one child gifts during your life. For example, you might have an estranged child, or you might have provided the down payment for a child to buy their home. To be fair, you may want to reduce that child’s share by the amount of that gift. Or, you might want to give a larger share to a caretaker child who has provided support in your latter years.

So, depending on your circumstances, you don’t have to divide the estate “equally” to be fair. Start by identifying your estate and estimating its value. Then, consider whether some beneficiaries should inherit more than others.

You have the right to leave your estate however you see fit. If it’s unequal, you need to put it in writing through a trust (or will). So, the question is, ‘How should I leave an unequal inheritance to my children without damaging and dividing them?’ Once you decide on a plan

to divide your estate, that’s just part of the equation. The second part of the equation is sharing it with your children while you’re still alive and still of sound mind — that is what can make an unequal distribution work.

There are times where the worst thing you can do is “blindsided” a child after death. If you are leaving unequal shares, you should have a family meeting where you can explain your reasoning why. If they aren’t inheriting as much as they expect, it’s only fair to let them know the truth before you die.

Family meetings will lead to fewer fights after the parents are gone because the children understand what the parents are trying to accomplish. Children can “get on board” even if they don’t completely agree with it.

If choosing one child to be the successor trustee could lead to problems, you could name your attorney or a trust company as your trustee. If you’re using an outside professional trustee, let the children meet with him or her and develop a relationship.

Finally, during the family meeting, talk to them about your tangible personal property, e.g., all the stuff lying around your home. Put your instructions in writing. Tell your kids where you keep your important papers, accounts and passcodes. Tell your kids where to find your durable power of attorney in case of an emergency or accident. Tell your kids where to find your estate planning attorney, financial planner, CPA and any other professionals that help you manage your estate. Lastly, share how important it is for them to set up their own revocable living trust.

Judd Matsunaga is the founding attorney of Elder Law Services of California, a law firm that specializes in Medi-Cal Planning, Estate Planning and Probate. He can be contacted at (310) 348-2995 or. The opinions expressed in this article are the author’s own and do not necessarily reflect the view of the Pacific Citizen or constitute legal or tax advice and should not be treated as such.



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'WE ARE THE PROTECTORS OF THE JAPANESE AMERICAN LEGACY'

By Larry Oda,
JACL National President

As we begin a new year and hopeful 2026, I want to personally thank you for

being a part of JACL. Your continued involvement and support are what sustain this organization and keep our mission of defending our constitutional rights and preserving our cultural heritage moving forward.

We are the protectors of the Japanese American legacy. Everything positive that has happened in our community is because of our efforts. JACL has successfully fought to overturn the 500 racist laws that were written to prevent our full participation in American society. We need to keep up that fight because we are seeing that the same kinds of discriminatory interpretation of laws that happened to us are happening again to others.

Your membership truly matters. Whether you have been involved for decades or joined more recently, you are helping to carry forward a legacy built on courage, service and the belief that our voices make a difference.

This year has reaffirmed that JACL is strongest not because of any single program or leader, but because of members who care deeply about our community and our shared future.

Over the past year, we have weathered significant changes. I am grateful for the resilience and

steady leadership of our National Board of Directors and for the patience, thoughtfulness and dedication shown by our members during this time. While there is still important work ahead of us, I am confident that together we will continue to persevere and grow stronger.

We remain grounded in the sacrifices and leadership of those who came before us, even as we work to ensure that JACL remains relevant, welcoming and impactful for the next generation. Balancing tradition with change is never easy, but it is possible because of your engagement and commitment.

As we look ahead to the new year, I am hopeful. There is renewed energy, new ideas emerging and a shared desire to strengthen our chapters, develop future leaders and build a JACL that reflects both who we have been and who we are becoming.

This year is an important event for JACL because we are having a National Convention in July where we will choose a new slate of leaders to continue the legacy of our organization. We choose leaders who put our community first and drive progress.

Many of the things we fought for and won in the early years of

our organization are being lost to the changing political climate. Because we have the experience of having confronted and overcome these challenges in the past, we are tasked to give others the benefit of our experience and be ready to fight again. Situations evolve, and our leadership must keep up with the transformations.

Call to Action

As we begin the new year, I encourage you to stay connected and engaged — renew your membership, participate in chapter activities, consider mentoring or volunteering and share your ideas for how JACL can continue to grow and serve our community to inspire others to join us. Your involvement makes a real difference.

Thank you for walking this journey with us and being an essential part of JACL's past, present and future. I look forward to the work we will do together in the year ahead.

Wishing you and your loved ones a healthy and hopeful 2026. ■

Happy New Year
from the
TSUETAKI'S
Tracy, Jane, Alex, Amanda
and Bachan Hideko

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'REIGNITING OUR PURPOSE AND MISSION'



By Saki Mori,
JACL Interim Executive Director

I first want to start with a note of gratitude to the JACL National Board and staff, members and chapters, supporters, volunteers, sponsors and partners. The end of year was busy, and highlights from the last few months of 2025 include:

- In-person workshop and advocacy training on the Alien Enemies Act for the Salt Lake City chapter
- Webinar on the advocacy updates on sacred sites
- Launching our JA Experience

website and its video series

- Continuing the work of the Social Justice Action committee
- Our 2025 Kakehashi trip to Japan that included student exchange, home stays, visits to historic sites and building connections between the U.S. and Japan
- A successful end-of-year annual giving campaign that met and exceeded its goal.

With a few months into my role as JACL interim executive director, I remain steadfast with my focus on the continuity of operations and management of the organization, and I want JACL to build on the work that took place at the end of 2025.

February through the summer is the busiest duration of the year for the organization, and 2026 is no exception. Many JACL programs are taking place, the National Board is working on a biennium budget to propose to the National Council and we are busy preparing for our National Convention in Las Vegas.

I also want to ensure that the organization takes time to reflect

and discern about JACL's future and the opportunities that we should pursue to continue the organization's mission and legacy. It is with that thought in mind that led the JACL staff to develop this year's convention theme: "Reigniting Our Purpose and Mission."

This year, our staff, National Board, National Council and members are tasked with two goals to support our mission:

1. To stabilize JACL's financial health and outlook
2. To start the work on how JACL demonstrates its mission that honors its history and legacy; is responsive to and prepared for the interests and needs of our members and community-at-large; and envisions the future creatively and boldly with open hearts and minds.

This will not be an easy feat, and the dialogue, debate and decisions are necessary to determine the future and the way forward for JACL. I'm pleased to share that we received over 40 submissions for our call for proposals for Convention workshops.

In my initial review of the proposals, I believe that many of the workshops selected will resonate with our members and attendees and support the convention's theme, the

conversations that will take place, the ideas that will come to fruition and the opportunities to pursue to uphold and sustain JACL's mission.

I do hope that you will consider attending our National Convention this year for this important work. Please stay tuned for updates on registration and programs.

I wish you all an abundant and

healthy year ahead! I thank you all for your continued support of JACL and the *Pacific Citizen*! ■

Happy Holidays

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'THIS IS THE TIME FOR ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT'



By Jonathan Okamoto,
JACL National Secretary/Treasurer

As we welcome 2026, I am filled with both pride in our shared mission and a sense of urgent determination about the path ahead. For almost 100 years, the Japanese American Citizens League has stood as a beacon for civil rights and social justice — not just for our community, but for all Americans. That mission burns as brightly today as ever. Yet, the landscape in

which we carry out this vital work has fundamentally changed, and we must change with it.

I believe in being honest with you, our members, about where we stand. The realities we face are not unique to JACL — many nonprofits nationwide are navigating similar challenges — but they are nonetheless significant.

Our membership numbers have declined over recent years, and with that decline, so, too, has our revenue. Meanwhile, the costs of running an organization like ours continue their steady climb. Dues, which have remained unchanged for many years, no longer cover the true cost of operations, and as we strive to provide our dedicated staff with fair compensation and cost-of-living increases that they deserve, the numbers just don't balance. These financial pressures forced us to make heart-wrenching decisions in 2025.

I want to be transparent about the numbers because understanding them is essential to charting our path forward. Labor costs represent

approximately 57 percent of JACL's total expenses.

We have already implemented dramatic cuts across most operational areas. Further reductions to programs or events, including our National Convention, might save dollars in the short term, but they would not generate the level of savings needed to create a sustainable, balanced budget. More importantly, such cuts risk undermining the very purpose of our existence: bringing our community together and advancing social justice.

We have lived, in recent years, with a false sense of security. Large, one-time donations have provided temporary relief, functioning as a safety blanket that masked the underlying structural imbalance. But that safety blanket has grown thinner with each passing year, and we can no longer rely on it.

The uncomfortable truth is that unless we dramatically increase our membership and develop creative new revenue streams that provide consistent income, we will face even more difficult decisions in 2026.

But here is what I want you to hear most clearly: These challenges are not insurmountable. Our organization has weathered far greater storms — we were *born from* crisis, forged in the crucible of injustice. The question

before us is not whether JACL will survive, but how we will choose to evolve and thrive. The solution lies not in retreat, but in renewal.

We need a dramatic rise in membership. We need innovative thinking about revenue: What services or resources could we provide that our community genuinely needs? How can we leverage partnerships and technology? What untapped opportunities exist for mission-aligned income generation?

Each of us must ask ourselves: What can I contribute to building sustainable revenue streams for JACL? This is not the time for waiting or hoping — this is the time for active engagement.

As your Secretary/Treasurer, my focus for 2026 is clear: We will achieve a balanced budget through sustainable means. This will require difficult conversations, creative thinking and collective action. It will require all of us to step up in new ways.

The work of social justice that JACL champions has never been more important. In a time of rising division and renewed attacks on civil rights, we cannot afford to let financial constraints silence our voice or diminish our impact. But maintaining that voice and impact requires a sustainable foundation.

I am asking each member reading this to reflect on three questions: First, how can you help grow our membership within your circles of influence? Second, what creative ideas do you have for generating sustainable revenue? Third, what specific skills, connections or resources can you personally contribute to JACL's financial stability?

Please reach out to your chapter leadership, to the National Board or directly to our national office with your ideas and commitments. We need to hear from you. This is not just about preserving an institution — it is about ensuring that the critical work of civil rights advocacy continues for generations to come.

The path ahead will test us. It will require sacrifice, innovation and unwavering commitment to our shared mission. But I have faith in this community. I have seen what we can accomplish when we stand together with common purpose. The challenges before us are real, but so is our collective strength.

Let us move forward into 2026 not with fear, but with determination. Not with resignation, but with resolve. Together, we will build the sustainable future that JACL deserves — and that the cause of justice demands. ■

2026 National Tour launching at the Aratani Theatre February 19!

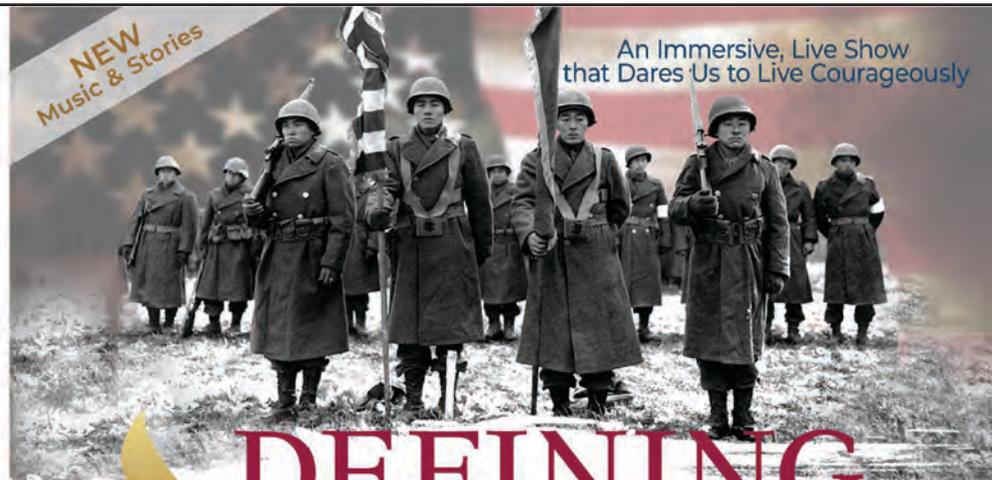
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February 19 - L.A. Aratani Theatre (Day of Remembrance)
April 11 - Seattle: Meany Hall (University of Washington)
May 29 - Salt Lake City: Mainstage Theatre at Mid Valley Performing Arts Center
July 24 - Wyoming (Heart Mountain Pilgrimage) Wynona Thompson Auditorium

Cities scheduled later this year: Chicago & Portland

And more cities coming soon!





'We Must Fulfill Our Mission'

By Gary Nakamura,
JACL VP of Planning & Development

Happy New Year, JACLers! Happy Year of the Horse! I hope and pray that 2026 will be a good year for all of us.

First, I want to sincerely thank the following people for their dedication to JACL by leading many of its most critical programs:

- National Scholarship Program Co-Chairs David Kawamoto and Carol Kawamoto and the members of the National Scholarship Committee and Matt Weisbly and Patty Wada.

- Legacy Fund Grants Program Chairperson Sheldon Arakaki and each of the dedicated LFG committee members and Patty Wada.

- Investment Policy Committee Chairperson Chip Larouche and all of the district leaders who serve on the IPC. After the unbelievably tragic passing of David Lin last year, the IPC is continuing its work and stewardship of JACL's long-

term investments. Under the leadership of David, Chip and the IPC committee, the JACL endowments had another good year in 2025.

- Our Legacy Planning Officer, Steve Okamoto, for his incredible work for more than 20 years.

- I would also like to thank National President Larry Oda for his continued leadership. I am grateful for his tutelage and guidance.

- I would also like to express my most sincere gratitude and appreciation to the late David Lin and his beloved wife, Jean. David was a wonderful person who tirelessly helped JACL and many other AANHPI organizations. David was also a mentor to me, and I will always be grateful for his time, wisdom and tutelage. My heart goes out to the Lin family, and they are all in my thoughts and prayers.

After nearly two years of not having a director of development

due to circumstances beyond our control, we are now in a much better position. Our National Board recently hired a professional HR consulting firm that specializes in the recruitment of key personnel for nonprofit organizations.

We are currently in the process of finding a permanent executive director AND director of development. As one of the five members of the Hiring Subcommittee, my intention is to see this process through until we make permanent hires.

I am also happy to report that the major initiative that I have been working on over the past two years is finally coming to fruition. Our National Japanese American Baseball Exhibit is going have its inaugural exhibition in my hometown of Houston, Texas, this March.

The exhibit will open on March 6 at the historic Central Library in downtown Houston and will be

featured at the library's Main Gallery, which receives 25,000 visitors monthly, until early June. We are then planning to debut our traveling baseball exhibit in California this May in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo.

We want to gently educate the American public about the history of our Japanese American community and uplift the entire AANHPI community through the prism of baseball.

If your chapter is interested in hosting our traveling baseball exhibit, or if you would like to support this initiative, please reach out to me at gnakamura@jacl.org.

Thank you all for your dedication and commitment to JACL. Now, more than ever, JACL needs to be a strong leader, and we must fulfill our mission to fight for the civil rights of all Americans who are victimized by racism and discrimination. ■

The National Board Is Preparing for the Future



By Ryan Yoshikawa,
JACL VP for General Operations

Hello readers and members of the Japanese American Citizens League. This new year has been the start of major transformations for the organization, and the National Board is working hard to ensure that these changes greatly improve our ability to serve the members and the community.

We held our first ever National Convention without national business sessions in 2025. This new format was an amazing showcase of the New Mexico chapter and its dedicated membership and board, as well as its hard work and dedication to the community. The many workshops focused on presenting the history of the Department of Justice detention facilities and the Japanese Americans they housed.

With 2026 upon us, the JACL National Board is preparing for the future as we develop budgets for the new biennium, a new slate for the National Board and the upcoming celebration of 100 years of nonprofit work. The board and staff can only reach our goals with your continued support. We appreciate your belief in JACL's mission and values.

I wish you all a good start to 2026 and that we can continue to ensure equality for all people in the United States of America. ■



Renewing More Than Membership: Strengthening JACL in 2026

By Dominique Mashburn,
JACL VP of Membership

As we welcome a new year, I have been thinking about what membership means, not just in principle, but in practice. It brings us back to JACL's foundation. Membership is the people who choose to stay engaged, the chapters that keep showing up and the volunteers who carry our mission forward.

I keep coming back to one honest reflection: We are not hearing from as many chapters and members as consistently as we could be at the national level. I do not say that as a criticism. I say it as an invitation.

Many members are navigating a world that feels heavier than it used to be. In that environment, even meaningful organizations can start to feel distant. People may hesitate to speak up, ask questions or share what they need. I want to close that gap this year because JACL is at its strongest when membership feels like a relationship rather than a transaction.

Serving as vp of membership, I have been honored to work alongside dedicated members and leaders across the country. I am proud of what we have built together, not as individual accomplishments, but as shared progress.

We launched New Member Orientation, so joining JACL comes with a clearer welcome and a stronger un-

derstanding of how to get involved. We updated membership levels to better reflect how members want to participate and support the work. We also launched a new membership campaign through Kodomo no Hi to strengthen connections and bring more families into our community.

We have also been doing behind-the-scenes work to improve the membership experience. I know there have been frustrations when systems have not worked smoothly, and I am grateful for the patience and feedback many of you have shared.

I am glad to report that a new CRM system is being implemented this spring to create a more interactive, user-friendly platform for members and chapters. The goal is a system that helps us respond more consistently, communicate more clearly and better support the people doing the work at the district and chapter levels.

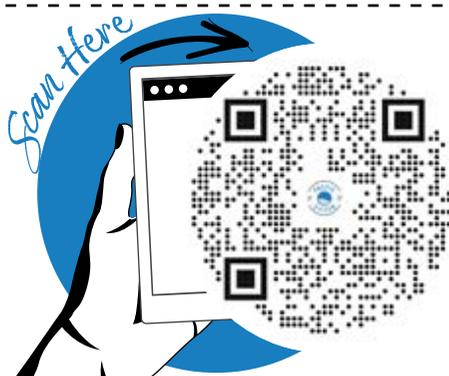
It is hard to talk about membership without discussing the world we live in currently. We are watching communities carry exhaustion, grief and uncertainty. We are seeing how quickly misinformation spreads and how easily people are pulled apart rather than brought together.

In times like these, membership matters more, not less.

JACL has always been rooted in both heritage and

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advocacy. We preserve our history while defending our future, and we draw on the lessons of exclusion and incarceration to stand firmly against injustice today. That work is only possible when members choose to sustain it.

Looking ahead, I want to make sure that our chapter leaders are more connected to the national membership work and feel more supported in the day-to-day work of running a strong local organization, **helping us support more members faster**. Within the next 30 days, we'll connect with each chapter and use what we learn to help set membership priorities as we head toward our National Convention.

I also want to say this clearly: Reaching out is always welcome. Asking questions is not a burden. Sharing concerns is not inconvenient. If you are wondering whether something is worth bringing up, it is. JACL is a membership organization, and our work is strongest when chapters and members feel heard, respected and included in shaping the future.

As we head toward the 2026 JACL National Convention in Las Vegas, I hope we will see strong participation, especially from first-time attendees and newer members. Convention is one of the best places to learn how JACL works, build relationships across districts and understand what it means to be a membership-powered organization.

Finally, as I approach the end of my term this summer, I have been thinking about how we can continue to build value for members in everyday ways. I am grateful for our current benefits, and I believe there is potential to expand member benefits further.

If there is one thing I hope members feel this year, it is that JACL is not a closed circle. It is a living community. Our chapters are doing incredible work. Our national efforts are only as strong as our local connection. And our future depends on how well we welcome and support those ready to carry this mission forward.

Thank you for being part of JACL and for what you do in your districts, chapters and communities. I'm grateful to be in this work with you, and I look forward to what we can build together in 2026. ■



WE HAVE A LOT OF WORK TO DO IN 2026!

By Paul M. Uyehara,
JACL Eastern District Governor

In my 2025 New Year's column, I wrote Happy New Year, but I wasn't thinking 2025 would in fact be a happy year, given the recent mass murder, wildfires, extreme weather and the incoming administration. Although I was right, I had no idea how bad it would be for

our country. Nor did I foresee the challenges that JACL would face. As 2026 gets underway, it's a good time to reflect on the past year and consider what is to come this year.

For the National Board, 2025 was a year for diligent, time-consuming decision making. Early in the year, it became apparent that revenues were falling significantly short of spending, so we began a series of difficult discussions and decisions, resulting in the unfortunate reduction in hours and pay for several hard-working staff members and the layoffs of two long-time, loyal and dedicated employees.

At the same time, difficult staffing issues required intense board involvement. With David Inoue's departure in July, we had to manage the appointment of temporary executive leadership, the Albuquerque National Convention and the hiring of Interim Executive Director Saki Mori. It was a very difficult year for our staff, and I am grateful for their perseverance in supporting JACL's mission.

That mission became especially important last year as the president undertook discriminatory immigration enforcement, detained individuals using the wartime Alien Enemies Act despite the lack of a war and crippled federal civil rights enforcement while prioritizing protection of white people, men and Christians.

In 2025, working with our coalition partners and members, JACL has

taken positions on these issues and supported litigation consistent with our civil rights agenda, especially in opposition to the peacetime use of the Alien Enemies Act. At the successful convention in Albuquerque, the AEA work was explained at a workshop, and the National Board authorized the creation of the Social Justice Action Committee to house this advocacy, as well as several other ongoing issues. Despite having to spend a lot of time on internal personnel and fiscal issues, JACL continued to actively support civil rights in 2025.

There is every reason to expect that 2026 will see continued civil rights violations, including those relating to federal policy and leadership. JACL will need to continue supporting litigation, advocacy, education and coalition building.

Our shared history of race-based incarceration without due process, being targeted by AEA arrests and securing redress provides both the obligation and the authority to speak out in defense of others as well as ourselves. We must engage in this work as we continue to manage internal issues.

Two internal issues from last year will carry over into this one. The National Board having retained a consultant to manage hiring last fall, we should be positioned to hire a new executive director, followed by a development director, hopefully soon.

We will also have to revise the 2026 budget to further reduce spending from last year — unless unbudgeted revenues can be added. At the same time, we'll be assembling the 2027-28 budget proposal that must be distributed by late May to the chapters. While handling these issues, we'll also need to oversee the planning for convention in July in Las Vegas.

As we proceed into the new year, I encourage fellow members to do One More Thing for JACL. Consider running for national office or recruiting someone else to do so. How about increasing your membership level, sending a donation or recruiting a new member? Have you ever served on a national committee? Would you be willing to keep the books for EDC or write an article for the *Pacific Citizen*? Does your chapter need a recognitions chair? And think about attending convention this summer! Feel free to reach out to me — or other board members, staff or your chapter leaders — if you need more information.

There is also One More Thing we can all do for our nation in 2026: Vote and encourage others to vote. Better elected officials at all levels of government could do wonders for making a better future for all.

Thank you for reading the *P.C.* and supporting JACL. Best wishes for a Happier New Year! ■



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Okage Sama De

By Kelly Asao,
JACL Intermountain District Governor

Happy New Year and greetings from the Intermountain District Council! As I write this greeting on the eve of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day, I cannot help but reflect upon how Dr. King's words and actions still bring clarity to the challenges and opportunities of today.

In Dr. King's acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1964, he said: "I accept this award today with an abiding faith in America and an audacious faith in the future of mankind. I refuse to accept despair as the final response to the ambiguities of history. I refuse to accept the idea that the 'isness' of man's present nature makes him morally incapable of reaching up for the eternal 'oughtness' that forever confronts him."

I love the phrase "audacious faith in the future of mankind" because it takes audacity to maintain hope in the face of injustice, inequality and indifference. Dr. King recognized that radical hope is an act of resistance. While despair drives us toward complacency and cynicism, hope compels us to hold ourselves to a higher moral standard and uplift others in the fight for social justice.

In the face of ongoing attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion, it is easy to give in to despair. But faith in humanity empowers action, strengthens communities and facilitates change.

In my short time as governor of IDC, I have been inspired by JACL's efforts to protect our communities and our values in these times. We have faced adversity and change, even within the organization, but we remain steadfast in our mission to fight for the rights of all those victimized and marginalized by injustice.

Dr. King's legacy also teaches us that the fight against inequality is the product of communities, of many uncelebrated others working toward a common goal. So, as we begin 2026, I want to recognize the incredible efforts from our National Board and staff, chapter presidents and board members and chapter members across the IDC.

Recently, Alex Tokita and the NY/SC created the Intermountain District Youth group. This group will bring together youth from across Colorado, Utah and Idaho to build community and carry on the legacy of JACL. I am encouraged to keep fighting because the

younger generation is taking up the mantle to protect our rights and create spaces for our community.

I also had the privilege of being a chaperone for the December Kakehashi Project. Due to the tireless efforts of our D.C. staff — Cheyenne Cheng, Matt Marumoto and Katie Hill — it was an incredible experience where young Japanese Americans from around the country traveled to Japan to immerse themselves in Japanese culture and build bridges of understanding. This powerful cultural exchange led to meaningful friendships and powerful reflection on identity and culture among the participants. I got to watch as students and young professionals explored their connection to the land, culture and people of Japan. It instilled in me a renewed appreciation of our connections to each other and to the larger world around us.

As part of JACL, we are united in a shared cultural identity, a shared sense of responsibility to one another and a shared commitment to equity and justice. As Japanese Americans, we have a unique history of activism and resistance in the United States, a unique story of racial injustice and resilience, a unique responsibility to ensure that what happened to our community does not happen to other communities.

I am forever grateful to serve JACL and be part of this amazing national organization where I get to learn and fight alongside people who give me a radical hope for the future. Let us continue to honor the legacy of those who came before us, *okage sama de*. ■



Growing Community Leaders

By Mariko Fujimoto,
JACL Northern California-Western Nevada-Pacific District Governor

Best wishes for a Happy New Year from NCWNP! As the newly elected District Governor for NCWNP, I aspire to help our chapters reinforce their communities and connect with each other to strengthen that network of support. Although I have the usual nerves about stepping into a new role, it is thanks to the tireless efforts of past-Governor (and current Vice Governor) Carol Kawase and the rest of the NCWNP District Board

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It is clear that in order to thrive, JACL needs to put the time and effort into building up confidence in new leaders. Succession planning will be one of the keys to JACL's long-term survival. We need to create spaces for emerging leaders to learn and develop their skills and connect with them on their leadership journeys to keep them involved.

The strength of JACL is in the chapters and the local communities they build. It is our responsibility, as leaders of this organization, to ensure that our members feel motivated and inspired by JACL's purpose.

Our obligation as a board is to maintain JACL's nearly 100-year-old legacy while continuing to move forward and grow. So, we must ask ourselves: Why is there such a disparity in volunteerism? What can we, as community leaders, do to encourage our members to step up? How do we make leadership roles more accessible?

These are difficult conversations with no easy answers, though I look forward to pursuing these discussions at the chapter, district

and national levels. I encourage you, as members, to take some time at the beginning of this new year to reflect on your time with JACL. How do you choose where you interact with JACL? What would it take for you to increase your involvement? Members are the heart of JACL, and our future leaders will come from your local communities.

We are living in a world where civil and human rights are under threat every day. It will take time and a considerable amount of effort to provide adequate mentorship to a new generation of leaders. This work needs to start now.

Some new leaders are young, other new leaders could be older, starting different phases of life. No two paths to leadership look the same, and I hope that JACL will start stepping in to become an integral part of the journey for next-gen leadership.

JACL is entering a phase of transition, and I look forward to serving as NCWNP District Governor and contributing to these vital conversations as we look forward to our 100-year anniversary. Thank you for entrusting me with this position. ■



'What Programs and Policy Work Do You Value?'

By Sheldon Arakaki,
JACL Pacific Northwest District
Governor

The *Pacific Citizen*, membership, D.C. Leadership and Kakehashi are just some of the programs of the JACL. Funding the Japanese American Confinement Sites grant program, repealing the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 and protecting Minidoka from "green" energy commercial development are some of the federal policy and funding issues JACL fights for at the national level by advocating on Capitol Hill and mobilizing the membership to contact their congressional members in support.

As the Governors Caucus chair and as a district governor, I basically ask the same questions to the other governors and my district council along the lines of, "How are the chapters consuming these programs and these policy opportunities?" Our membership dollars go toward staff time to plan and implement programs and work on moving JACL's policy positions forward.

Programs and policy work offer opportunities to engage our membership and for follow-up accountability and ownership. How are we and what are the challenges engaging programming alumni, such as D.C. Leadership and Kakehashi, in furthering the JACL mission and building up our chapters?

This past March, the board voted to reduce budgeted expenses by \$350,000 while recognizing that we would probably need to reduce budgeted expenses by a further \$200,000 if plans to bring in more revenue by end of 2025 did not achieve goals.

I noted to fellow board members that 30 years prior in March 1995, that board then implemented a plan to reduce expenses. . . . JACL now finds itself in a familiar place.

The proposed timing of the next budgeted spend reduction proposal was floated for the fall 2025 board meeting but was deferred to the February 2026 meeting to give interim Executive Director Saki Mori time to assess the national programs, policy work and their processes and procedures.

We will be just days from the February board meeting and a possible decision by the time JACLers read this. I do not know if the board will act, what the action will look like or if the board will kick the can down the road again. There is no good time to reduce budgeted spend and staff headcount. I have asked the board president to not leave this decision for the incoming administration elected at the Las Vegas convention.

JACL's secretary/treasurer has emphasized to the entire board that personnel costs are JACL's largest expenditure. Period. Any further reduction in budgeted spend will impact staff headcount. Our membership dollars go toward funding staff time to plan and implement programs and move JACL's policy positions forward.

What programs and policy work do you value, and how do you express that?

How does your chapter consume these national programs and leverage the policy opportunities in your chapter's annual planning to further the mission of JACL? ■



Where Do We Go From Here?

By Eric Langowski,
JACL Midwest District Governor

It's promising to be a year of change. JACL is a national organization with chapters across the country and offices in Washington, D.C., San Francisco and Los Angeles. This year, we will change our organization's leadership with the election of a new National Board at the 2026 Las Vegas Convention and the appointment of a new executive director. As part of these changes, we need to decide where we go from here as in both our organization's priorities and our physical presence.

When I think of our collective priorities for me, I ask what does it mean to be a national organization in 2026? This is a big challenge.

We all live local lives, and what our members and chapters go through across the Midwest varies dramatically.

Things like the National Guard coming to Chicago, ICE in Minneapolis, redistricting in Texas — they all make the national news but don't neatly fit into JACL's established national work. In the past, perhaps, these salient events might have been addressed by the Midwest JACL office in collaboration with local chapters, but now, JACL's staff is hundreds of miles away.

Traditionally, JACL's national work leveraged partnerships with the National Park Service and Congressional representatives on education and preservation of Japanese American history through grants like the Japanese American Confinement Sites program and direct oversight of historic sites. This work has become more difficult recently as funding becomes more limited and the telling of history more contested.

So, where do we go from here? There are a lot of possibilities, and I'm not sure of the right path, but I generally think we need to try new things, particularly in supporting the work of our staff at the state and local level, as evidenced by our educational work in California, for example, or a recent rapid response joint statement between Washington, D.C., staff and the Chicago chapter.

I think at least a temporary de-emphasis of "national" work for this more local work can maximize our impact for the next biennium beyond the gridlock we see at the federal level. ■

Happy New Year!

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In MEMORIAM

Longtime P.C. Columnist Marsha Aizumi Dies

Author-advocate sought understanding, acceptance between communities.

Marsha Aizumi, whose life's mission became one of turning "shame, grief and fear" into understanding, acceptance and support of individuals dealing with sexual and gender identity issues, died Dec. 18, 2025, in Duarte, Calif., from an infection that followed stem cell treatment to counteract the rare form of leukemia she was diagnosed with last March. She was 78.

Aizumi penned the long-running *Pacific Citizen* column "A Mother's Take," in which she documented her journey as a speaker, organizer and leader of groups and events in support of those in the LGBTQIA+ and transgender com-

munities — especially within the Asian American and Asian community context — and their inter-familial relationships, and mused over interactions with people she encountered along that path. (To read the archive of her columns, visit tinyurl.com/3rr5ahp5.)

With her son, Aidan Aizumi, she also co-authored the memoir "Two Spirits, One Heart: A Mother, Her Transgender Son, and Their Journey to Love and Acceptance."



Marsha Aizumi in 2014 founded Okaeri, a Nikkei LGBTQ+ community organization that

in November 2025 became a program of the Little Tokyo Service Center. In a statement to the LTSC, Aidan Aizumi said, "My mom lived her life rooted in love, advocacy, and deep care for others. She touched countless lives through her kindness and courage, and her legacy will continue through the people she inspired. Thank you for the outpouring of love and support

during this time."

JANM President and CEO Ann Burroughs said, "JANM is deeply saddened by the loss of Marsha Aizumi. ... Her legacy of connection and inclusivity will continue to inspire future generations."

Aizumi was born in Cleveland, Ohio, after her parents were released from incarceration in an American concentration camp for Japanese Americans. The family returned to California when she was 5, settling in Temple City, Calif. Years later, after meeting and marrying her husband, Robert T. Aizumi, they decided to start a family. Due to difficulties with conception, they would adopt a daughter from Japan, and later, a son, Stefen.

It was their first child's eventual challenges with sexual and

gender identity that would lead her to come out as a lesbian and then go on a journey to become a male named Aidan. This, in turn, reoriented Aizumi on a life- and priority-altering path of her own.

It would also affect Robert Aizumi. "It kind of blew my mind, and it took me time to understand what was happening," he told *Pacific Citizen*. He praised his late wife, saying, "Her heart was open to everybody. She goes around and creates new friends. It was amazing to me."

In addition to being survived by her husband, Robert, and Aidan and his wife, Mary, Marsha is also survived by son, Stefen, and his girlfriend, and her brother, Paul Ogino, and his wife, Arlene. She was predeceased by her brother, Martin Ogino. ■

TRIBUTE

MARSHA AIZUMI



Marsha (Ogino) Aizumi was a beloved wife, mother, educator and activist, and a pillar of love, strength and acceptance. Born on May 28, 1947, in Cleveland, Ohio, Marsha was known for her courage, integrity and fierce love for her family, as well as the way she consistently showed up for others.

Marsha peacefully passed away on Dec. 18, 2025, in Duarte, Calif.

She shared 53 wonderful years of marriage with her husband, Robert (Tad) Aizumi. Their life together

was built on commitment, mutual respect and standing side-by-side through change, challenge and joy. From everyday moments to shared adventures, like disco dancing, they created a home grounded in care, honesty and deep devotion to family.

Marsha was a devoted mother to her sons, Aidan and Stefen, a loving mother-in-law to Aidan's wife, Mary. She was a caring presence in the lives of those her children loved, including Stefen's girlfriend, Catherin. Being a mother was one of her greatest sources of pride and purpose. She believed deeply in listening, learning and loving fully, even when it required growth or courage.

Naturally funny and playful, Marsha brought warmth and light into the lives of those around her. She was always game for an adventure, loved to dance, especially disco, and never turned down a sweet treat. Her humor, curiosity and openness made people feel at ease and welcome.

Marsha's advocacy grew from love and lived experience. She became a respected leader within LGBTQIA+ and Asian Pacific Islander communities, offering education, support and hope to families navigating their own journeys. She was the founder of Okaeri and a co-founder of the PFLAG San Gabriel Valley Asian Pacific Islander Chapter, creating spaces rooted in compassion, understanding, and belonging.

She co-authored "Two Spirits, One Heart," a memoir that shared her family's journey navigating Aidan's transition with honesty and heart, and continues to support parents, families and allies learning how to accept and love more fully.

Marsha is survived by her husband, Robert Tadashi Aizumi; her son, Aidan, and his wife, Mary; and her son, Stefen, and his girlfriend, Cat. She is also remembered by extended family, chosen family and a wide community of friends, colleagues and loved ones whose lives were shaped by her kindness, courage and care.

A public Celebration of Life will be held on Jan. 31, 2026, at Centenary United Methodist Church at 11 a.m. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made in her memory to Okaeri (Little Tokyo Service Center) or PFLAG Pasadena, or PFLAG San Gabriel Valley Asian Pacific Islander.

TRIBUTE

DOLLY OGATA



Dolly Ogata, age 103, of Riverside, Calif., passed away on Dec. 17, 2025, at Coastal Haven Living in Murrieta, Calif. She was preceded in death by her beloved husband, Dr. Gen Ogata.

Born on May 25, 1922, in Seattle, Wash. Her parents had emigrated from Japan in the early 1900s and started a farm outside of Seattle. Dolly attended high school and later a private business school. Early in her career, she worked as a legal secretary for a young Nisei attorney. When WWII began, she moved to

Montana and then eventually to Minnesota, so she was able to avoid being placed in a Japanese relocation camp. In the summer of 1946, Dolly married Gen Ogata who had returned from the war as a member of the renowned 442. She and Gen stayed in Minnesota while Gen finished his Ph.D. They moved to Riverside in 1954 where Gen accepted a job with the U.S.D.A. Salinity Lab.

In 1967, she took a job with the YMCA where she worked for 20 years. Besides her job, Dolly was quite active with the school PTA, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, First Congregational Church and Riverside JACL.

Dolly and Gen were proud charter members of Riverside JACL. The Ogata family shared many treasured memories through Sendai Festivals, community picnics and scholarship dinners. Dolly served for many years on the Riverside JACL board of directors and remained an active, dedicated and supportive member throughout her life.

Dolly found great joy in caring for her family and home. She loved baking fresh bread and was especially known for her generous Christmas cookie plates, filled with a wide assortment of homemade treats. She also cherished preparing and hosting her annual Japanese New Year's Day Open House and cooking traditional family holiday meals. A devoted pet owner, Dolly was famous for spoiling her miniature beagle, Dusty, with an ever-present buffet of dog treats and goodies.

A memorial service will be held on Jan. 31, 2026, at 11 a.m. at the First Congregational Church, located at 3504 Mission Inn Ave., Riverside, CA 92501.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation made to Riverside JACL for the Gen & Dolly Ogata Memorial Scholarship. For more information, please contact Riverside JACL President, Michiko Yoshimura at michiyosh677@gmail.com.

News Briefs

S.F.: Manslaughter, Not Murder, for Attacker of 84-Year-Old Thai man

A jury has found Antoine Watson, who as a 19-year-old in 2021 attacked Vicha Ratanapakdee in the city's Anza Vista neighborhood and which subsequently resulted in the 84-year-old Thai immigrant's death, guilty of involuntary manslaughter and assault with force likely to produce great bodily harm. Many in the local community believe that the attack was racially motivated and that a first- or second-degree murder verdict was warranted.

City of Philadelphia Sues Over Park's Slave Memorial Removal

The lawsuit against Interior Secretary Doug Burgum and acting National Park Service Director Jessica Bowron comes after the NPS removed exhibits in Independence National Historical Parks' President's Home site — where George Washington lived when the city was the nation's capital — commemorating nine slaves owned by the nation's first president. The suit seeks to halt the display's permanent removal.

JANM Taps New Board Members

The Japanese American National Museum has announced the addition of former IBM executive Ford Fujii to its board of trustees and artist Glenn Kaino, former Hawaii Gov. David Ige and former Nikken Global President and CEO Toshizo "Tom" Watanabe to its JANM board of governors. JANM Board of Trustees Chair Bill Fujioka said, "We look forward to working with them to tell the full story of the Japanese American community . . . and honor the legacy of generations who came before us."

— P.C. Staff

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