



The Shokudo team of (from left) Luke Uyeda, Jon Kenzo Okeya and Michael Murata began filming their cooking videos during Covid and are now preparing a return this summer featuring all-new episodes.

PHOTO: THE SHOKUDO

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‘THE SHOKUDO’ RETURNS
The culturally-rich cooking show is set to debut all-new episodes this summer.

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Manzanar-Related Double-Feature Set.

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‘Flower Drum Song’ Flourishes.



REFLECTIONS

HAS THE TIME COME FOR THE JACL TO FADE INTO HISTORY?

By Ron Ikejiri

Recently, a group of old Sansei (yes, I know most think Sansei are “old”) got together to share ideas on the future of the JACL. The question posed to everyone: “Has the time come for JACL to fade into history?”

The bottom line: “Not Yet!”

Collectively, there remains a story to be told about the Japanese American experience past, present and future.

The JACL was founded by Nisei in 1929, with the mission to secure and maintain the civil rights of Japanese Americans. For nearly 100 years, dedicated volunteer boards gave their unselfish support, both in time and resources, to the goals of the JACL. They kept the faith.

Today, that faith is being challenged.

Among the issues that we discussed:

QUESTION: How can the JACL represent the interests of 1.6 million-plus Japanese Americans with a membership of 7,000?

With a membership of 7,000, how credible can the JACL represent the voices and concerns of the Japanese American community at the table of national, state or even local public policy decision-making?

With an enhanced and increased representative membership, the JACL can remain a strong advocate.

Simply stated, we need to increase the JACL membership to have a stronger voice at the table.

JACL GOVERNANCE

In reviewing the JACL Constitution and Bylaws, the essence of the composition of the board is unchanged for 97 years.

- Governors from each district and elected officers
- Currently, you have 15 JACL voting national board members to oversee eight paid staff?
- What is wrong with this picture?
- Are there better governance models that should be considered at the JACL National Convention by the delegates in July 2026?
- Among the qualifications for National JACL offices, the elected officers should have established paths to national, state and local public policymakers.

FOCUS ON FISCAL MANAGEMENT

The JACL budget is approximately \$2.4-plus million per year.

Summary:

\$1 million	Legacy Fund Revenue
\$455,000	Membership Dues
\$1 million	Grants/Gifts other

With a combined revenue of \$2.4 million, the JACL has been experiencing a deficit of over \$200,000-\$400,000 or more, with the added cost of sponsoring the July 2026 JACL National Convention in Las Vegas.

Six months ago, a group of Sansei were asked if we could find benefactors, donors or secure in-kind grants to support the JACL to help decrease the deficit.

I asked for basic numbers regarding the JACL operations, and through research and best-guess interpolation, we came up with the values above. It may not be perfect, but it is close.

The most difficult task is to raise money for an organization that has a fiscal deficit. There are not many that will give freely to an organization that is facing a budget deficit.

It is understandable, with any program, that there will be situations where there are unintended deficits. But, what programs are running a deficit, and why?

What identifiable programs in the past decade have made an impact on the lives of Japanese Americans nationally and locally in a substantive manner? What measurable gains have been made to improving political, economic opportunities for Japanese Americans? What is the quantitative measure that the JACL uses to identify the impact of its programs to return a benefit to the membership?

Advocacy? Leadership? Professional Networking? Community Services?

At the JACL National Convention in July, prioritizing the goals and the objectives of the members is the singular most important act of the delegates.

To overcome the tendency to try to accommodate everyone's wishes, the delegates and, ultimately, the National Board must adopt only those programs that can achieve the collective goal.

Too often, the scattershot approach

to have multiple programs in NAME ONLY may make everyone feel good, but the net result is that there is no measurable progress or achievement.

APPOINTING A NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR — NOT NOW

The JACL National Board has been in the process of vetting and will soon consider the hiring of a permanent executive director.

- The question is: What will the new executive director direct?
- So, the JACL National Board hires an executive director (for \$180,000-\$220,000, the current market rate for nonprofit executive directors nationally of the same size of the JACL) and expect WHAT from the new ED?
- Prepare the JACL for dissolution?
- Increase membership?
- Enhance advocacy?
- Identify programs?
- Recommend changes to the governance board model?
- Oversee staff? What staff?

It appears that the National Board is looking to the executive director to be the problem solver of all things wrong with the JACL. That is not the job of the ED.

It is the JACL National Board's fiduciary duty and responsibility to provide the direction and solutions.

The executive director implements the direction and solutions of the National Board. The JACL National Board will change at July's National Convention.

It would be unfair for any new executive director to be hired for three months and then find that the JACL National Board's direction is 180 degrees opposite to their expectation of the job description.

Professionally and personally, whoever is appointed as the executive director — that job may only be for a short time and may adversely affect that person's future professional development and opportunities.

Perhaps at that time and on the floor of the convention, the JACL delegates will be able to redirect the focus of the organization in light of today's ever-changing domestic and international challenges, and a fully informed and suitable executive director can be engaged.

MEMBERSHIP NO. 1 GOAL FOR THE NEXT BIENNIUM

Starting from the July National Convention, propose ALL members of the JACL National Board to pledge and accept the responsibility of recruiting a minimum of 100 new members per year or do not volunteer to become a JACL National Board

member.

That is the equivalent of four new chapters per board member per year. Or 60 new chapters by the board every year! (Note: You need 25 members to create a new JACL chapter.) Over four years, that is 240 new chapters. The JACL currently has approximately 70-75 active chapters.

That would be 1,500 new members, and over a four-year period, a total of 6,000 new members!

In addition, ALL members of the JACL National Board commit to raise \$100,000 or more every year. That would be another \$1.5 million toward the Legacy Fund for operational grants or \$6 million over four years.

I recognize that the JACL National Board is a volunteer board, but the reality in today's nonprofit organizations is that it takes members and funding to sustain goals. Also, by having the board “buy in,” the JACL programs using their personal network, the oversight and success of JACL-approved programs will be kept “on target” and within budget.

Greater efficiencies and success may be achieved.

It is too easy to have the JACL National Board spend “Other People's Money,” such as the annual expected income of \$1 million from the Legacy Fund, without it having any liability or risk in their decisions. If those on the National Board actually raised funds for the national programs, then there would be greater oversight of the program's success and budget reviews.

No more “throwing money” at a program and not be responsible for raising the funding for the program and not be actively involved in its success. No more budget deficits.

Final note on the JACL National Board: Over the years, we have seen well-intended individuals want to serve on the board to help build up their résumé. We are in SURVIVAL MODE, and the JACL needs problem solvers, not users.

THE PACIFIC CITIZEN — HANDS OFF!

There is only one common glue in the past 97 years that has kept the interests of the JACL together, and that is the *PACIFIC CITIZEN*. In both print and digital formats, the *P.C.* represents the single most-important benefit for the JACL membership, as well as a principal communications tool with public policy decision-makers in Washington, D.C., at state capitols and local governmental entities.

While there has been discussion that the *P.C.* is expendable and should be eliminated for budget reasons, any move toward ending the publication in print or digital form is *misguided*.

A forensic review of the *P.C.* and

its operations may find that the *P.C.*'s income stream actually *contributes* to the net bottom line of the JACL's overall operations, and characterization of line items and allocations may fit accepted accounting practices but are inconsistent with the reality of actual operations.

In addition, the *P.C.* has the legacy institutional knowledge of the JACL, which can be the starting point for All Things Digital for the JACL going forward.

Bottom Line: “Hands Off the *Pacific Citizen*!”

SILOS vs. UMBRELLA

Throughout the United States, there are hundreds of Japanese American local museums, historical societies, cultural programs, speaker events, Days of Remembrances and celebrations that commemorate sports, academics, arts, architecture, literary, military, political musical and entertainment achievements of Japanese Americans.

We have many SILOS, but for anyone wanting to know more about Japanese Americans, they must hunt through hundreds of websites and links for such information. The JACL as the only national organization representing Japanese Americans can become the digital UMBRELLA.

In addition to public policy advocacy, the JACL can be the LINK and resource to direct interested Japanese American and related Japanese topics and issues, past and present. For example, if you want an oral history interview on any subject matter, the JACL will have a direct link to Densho. If you want the history of Go For Broke, JACL will have a direct link. And so forth . . .

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AGENTIC)

From day-to-day operations, membership, human resource/personnel and development of specific initiatives and programs, the JACL must adopt and be prepared to “buy in” to AI systems to provide efficient delivery to its members.

AI Agents (i.e., AGENTICS) will reduce the staff from ministerial tasks and allow staff to use their creativity to enrich the JACL membership experience.

REVENUE SHARING . . . ‘ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL’

Perhaps the time has come for the JACL National Board to no longer ignore the importance and needs of the District Councils outside of the Pacific West Coast. When I served as the Washington, D.C., representative of the JACL in the late 1970s and early '80s, the Eastern, Midwest,

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TRIO ARE '26 WOMEN OF THE YEAR

Downtown Los Angeles JACL, JWSSC honor Kami, Minamitani and Yamauchi.

By George Toshio Johnston,
P.C. Senior Editor

A year after reaching a rare peak of six women getting honored for their outstanding and dedicated service to the local Japanese American and Japanese communities, the Japanese Women's Society of Southern California and the Downtown Los Angeles Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League slimmed down to three deserving awardees: Kay Shizue Kami, Izumi Minamitani and Shigeko Yamauchi.

With the Downtown JACL's George Kita unavailable to serve as master of ceremony for the first time in years, hosting duties were ably conducted by Darlene Kuba,

who was one of the Class of 2025's honorees.

On Kita's behalf, Kuba said, "He extends his heartfelt appreciation and greetings to everyone for your support and attending today's luncheon. He especially sends his sincere congratulations to the three distinguished honorees."

The May 3 annual luncheon at which the trio received their awards and recognition for, as Kuba put it, "significant contributions in promoting and presenting culture and values of the Japanese community," attracted about 200 people to Montebello, Calif.'s Quiet Cannon event venue.

Kuba introduced JWSSC President Mari Robinson to give her welcom-

ing remarks. She was followed by the San Fernando Valley Hongwanji Buddhist Temple's Rev. Yukari Torii of the San Fernando Valley Hongwanji Buddhist Temple, who offered the invocation and later, the benediction.

Following the prime rib lunch, Linnae McKeever, a board member of the SFVHBT, spoke about the afternoon's first awardee, Kami, and her long list of volunteerism, accomplishments and activities at places like the San Fernando Valley Japanese American Community Center in Pacoima, Calif. McKeever said, "What really defines Kay isn't her job titles. It's her heart for her community."

Kuba then introduced Yoshie Fujita. Noting how Minamitani, a teacher in the Hayami-ryu tea ceremony and the Ikenobo school of ikebana, had become a cornerstone of the local



Pictured (from left) are Darlene Kuba, Kitty Sankey, honorees Kay Shizue Kami, Izumi Minamitani and Shigeko Yamauchi and Mari Robinson. PHOTOS: GEORGE TOSHIO JOHNSTON

cultural community since moving to Los Angeles from Japan in 1994 and who eventually built the largest student base within the Ikenobo Los Angeles chapter, Fujita said her teacher "continues to bridge cultures, ensuring that the spirit and beauty of Japanese tradition flourish here in Southern California."

After noting they were not relatives despite sharing the same last name, Yuko Yamauchi praised her namesake honoree's decades of service to such groups as the Okinawa Association of America. "She's someone who does not make excuses and is unapologetically herself," Yamauchi said of Shigeko Yamauchi. "I wish I had time to give more examples of how dedicated, determined and generous she is."

In addition to the long-established clock trophy winners receive from

JWSSC and DTLA JACL, the three women also were presented with certificates of recognition from Rep. Gilbert Cisneros Jr. (D-Calif.), Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.), state Sen. Susan Rubio (22nd District), state Sen. Bob Archuleta (30th District), Assemblymember Blanca Rubio (48th Assembly District) and Assemblymember Mike Gibson (65th Assembly District).

Speaking on behalf of the day's other two honorees was Yamauchi. Following the benediction, Kuba thanked the Quiet Cannon staff and the luncheon's planning committee: Joyce Chinn, Toshie Kawaguchi, George Kita, Rodney Nakada, Miyuki Namiki, Mari Robinson, Tomoko Sakurai, Kitty Sankey, Barbara Sookdet, Patricia Sookdet, Amy Tambara and Yuko Uyesugi. ■



The 2026 Women of the Year planning committee. Pictured (sitting, from left) are Kitty Sankey (DTLA JACL and JWSSC), Mari Robinson (president, JWSSC), Amy Tambara (chair, WOY, JACL) Yuko Uyesugi and (standing, from left) Kiyoe Suzuki, Itsuko Ramos, Toshie Kawaguchi, Joyce Chinn, Tomoko Sakurai and Darlene Kuba. Not pictured are George Kita (president, DTLA JACL), Rodney Nakada, Miyuki Namiki and Patricia Sookdet.

Onto the 100th Anniversary

CENTENNIAL COUNTDOWN

of the Japanese American Citizens League

Coming Soon: "CENTENNIAL COUNTDOWN"

The **Pacific Citizen** proudly announces a new regular feature as we countdown to the 100th anniversary of the JACL and the **Pacific Citizen** newspaper!

Exerpts from the **Pacific Citizen** archives — highlighting the early beginnings of the JACL and the **Pacific Citizen** — will be featured through the support of generous sponsors. Sponsors may suggest particular headlines, historical events or include their own congratulatory messages and well-wishes as part of this special centennial series.

For more information, contact

Susan Yokoyama at busmgr@pacificcitizen.org or 213.620.1767, ext. 3.

MANZANAR-RELATED DOUBLE-FEATURE

'Little Guayule' to screen May 31 with
'Manzanar Fishing Club' at Gardena Cinema.

Flyer for the double-feature screening of
"Little Guayule" and "The Manzanar Fishing Club"



By George Toshio Johnston,
P.C. Senior Editor

What's better than one movie?
Try two movies for the price of one.

And what's better than two movies for the price of one?

Try when one of the movies is being screened publicly for the first time.

Yes, squeaking in just under the wire to be a part of Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month is a double-bill beginning at noon on May 31 at the Gardena Cinema featuring the award-winning 2012 documentary "The Manzanar Fishing Club" and the new documentary "Little Guayule: The Lost Manzanar Rubber Project," both directed by filmmaker Cory Shiozaki.

At one hour, 14 minutes, "The Manzanar Fishing Club" is, of course, the true story of Japanese Americans incarcerated at the Manzanar War Relocation Authority Center who caught fish, according to Shiozaki, first at Bears Creek inside the camp and later by sneaking out to fish at the high-elevation streams and lakes of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, the only places in the world where the California Golden Trout can be found.

At about 65 minutes, "Little Guayule" (pronounced wy-OO-lee), meantime, presents another subchapter of the Manzanar experience, one that involved incarcerated with farming experience and scientific backgrounds who were enlisted to help cultivate the guayule plant (*Parthenium argentatum*) as an alternative source for natural latex, from which natural rubber is made, to help in the war effort.

At the time, before synthetic rubber made from petroleum was invented, rubber was of

great strategic importance — and remains so today, for reasons both somewhat ordinary (guayule rubber, unlike rubber tree rubber, is hypoallergenic), as well as for national security and industrial reasons. (It turns out that Japan-based Bridgestone Americas has been funding guayule research and cultivation for several years.) (See tinyurl.com/vt4jumu8.)

The problem many decades ago was that the plantations where the natural rubber made from the rubber tree (*Hevea brasiliensis*) were located in tropical Southeast Asia, which were under Japanese control. For the U.S., rubber was required for medical supplies and automobile tires, not to mention for such military needs as boots, gas masks, jeeps, aircraft, etc.

Like rare earth minerals or high-end microprocessor chips today, natural rubber was critical to the economy — and the war.

Enter the federal government's \$37 million Salinas, Calif.-based Emergency Rubber Project and guayule, a different plant — a desert shrub — that also produces latex but grows in nontropical, semiarid parts of North America. It had never, however, been cultivated at scale. But just because no one had tried it before didn't mean it couldn't be done.

So, if the Salinas-based ERP was "big guayule," it makes sense that the smaller, rival Manzanar Guayule Project was "little guayule." But as Shiozaki's documentary conveys, "little" is open to interpretation.

Despite the challenges that faced the Manzanar guayule project, like being comparatively underfunded, the "little guayule" team, which received its sponsorship from the California Institute of Technology, punched above its weight. According to the Manzanar Committee, the Manzanar Project "produced a higher yield of plant and a higher quality of rubber than the Salinas Project or tree rubber" (see tinyurl.com/yrnsthxn).

Thus, "Little Guayule" is also the story of a Cal Tech scientist named Robert A. Emerson, who happened to be a pacifistic Quaker sympathetic to the plight of incarcerated Japanese Americans.

Emerson insisted on using the high-level Japanese American talent he knew was within the camp for the guayule project. Again, according to the Manzanar Committee, that team included such names as Dr. Shimpe Nishimura, Dr. Kenji Nozaki, Dr. Masuo Kodani, Frank Hirasawa, Homer Kimura, Frank Kageyama and Tomoichi Hata. And this is where the



documentary's importance lies: It turns out that the "little" Manzanar guayule project was actually more successful than the better-funded Salinas project.

In addition to the double-feature screening of Manzanar-related movies, Shiozaki told the *Pacific Citizen* that "there's going to be a Q & A for both films that are going to be moderated by Tamlyn Tomita because her Uncle Sets is one surviving fisherman who is still alive, and he's on the panel, as well as Mas Okui."

Thanks to Shiozaki, the screenings offer another perspective on Manzanar and, by extension, the Japanese American incarceration narrative that is as important as those telling the story of the abrogation of civil liberties and civil rights that occurred.

There are two ticket tiers: a \$20 admission and a \$30 ticket that includes an eight-piece sushi bento. Either way, the motivation is not to make a buck but to make the films available and cover the costs involved, Shiozaki says.

"We want to do this for the community. We don't do it for the money. We don't do it for the fame. . . . We do it because we're giving back to a community that gives us so much," said Shiozaki.

In addition to the May 31 double-bill, on May 23, Shiozaki is also involved with the noon screening of a 29-minute version of "MFC" that takes place at the West Theater at the Manzanar National Historic Site (5001 Highway 395) in Independence, Calif., which also includes a guided driving and walking tour to "key sites in Manzanar's fishing history."

Back to the double-feature of "The Manzanar Fishing Club," to preorder tickets, visit GardenaCinema.com or use the QR code in this article.

To view a trailer for the double-bill of "The Manzanar Fishing Club" and "Little Guayule: The Lost Manzanar Rubber Project," visit tinyurl.com/mmx5tkcz.

The Gardena Cinema is located at 14948 Crenshaw Blvd. in Gardena, Calif. ■

GARDENA VALLEY JCI IS SITE OF CONCERT WITH EFFRON, ATREO

GLA JACL, Intercollegiate Nikkei Council set to co-sponsor the May 30 concert.

The Greater Los Angeles chapter of the JACL is co-sponsoring a live concert on May 30 featuring a pair of up-and-coming music artists, Hana Effron and Travis Atreo.

The GLA JACL event, held in cooperation with the Intercollegiate Nikkei Council, will take place at the Gardena Valley Japanese Cultural Institute Main Hall in Gardena, Calif.

According to the two organizations, Effron, 20, was born and raised in the Los Angeles area, and she "blends emotional storytelling with melodic fluency and the innate ability to compose by ear. As a true multi-instrumentalist, she brings to life her songs on both piano and guitar." Effron is currently working on her third studio album, set for release later this year.

Originally from Seattle, Atreo is a singer, songwriter, producer and engineer who spent about eight years as the lead singer of the band New Heights before moving to Los Angeles to pursue his career as a music producer.

The price of admission to the concert is student, \$25; youth (25 and younger), \$30; and adult (26 and older), \$35. The show begins at 5:30 p.m. and will end at 8 p.m.

The May 30 event program is made possible by JACL Legacy Fund Grants. Proceeds will go to support Greater Los Angeles JACL and Intercollegiate Nikkei Council Youth programs.

Tickets may be ordered online at tinyurl.com/39xyxe86. For details, visit glajacl.org or email greaterlajacl@gmail.com.



The Manzanar Guayule Project team was led by California Institute of Technology scientist Robert A. Emerson (seated at center) and was comprised of Japanese incarcerated.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF CORY SHIOZAKI



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'THE SHOKUDO' RETURNS

The culturally-rich cooking show plans to debut all-new episodes this summer.



Chef Jon Kenzo Okeya presents his delicious offerings.

PHOTOS: THE SHOKUDO



The Shokudo team's (from left) producer and co-host Michael Murata, chef and host Jon Kenzo Okeya and videographer Luke Uyeda

Michael Murata (below) performed and composed the opening theme song.



*By Athena Askliadis,
P.C. Contributor*

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Grateful Crane Ensemble was searching for a creative way to engage the community virtually. Michael Murata, former board chair of the nonprofit theater organization, was also a part of "The Grateful 4," a Yonsei acapella group, when he was tasked with the assignment of creating new programming for its YouTube channel.

Murata, who would serve as the show's co-producer and co-host, recruited the talents of videographer and director Luke Uyeda and co-producer and co-host Jon Kenzo Okeya to embark on a culturally rich adventure through community stories and recipes.

Together, they named the new cooking show "The Shokudo," which debuted in February 2022. For the last few months, the series has been on pause, but it is set to return with new episodes this summer.

Shokudo (食堂, *shokudō*) are diners or small casual eateries in Japan that serve a variety of dishes. Inspired by Netflix's "Midnight Diner" (Shinya Shokudō), Okeya sought to replicate the cozy atmosphere, warm conversations and comfort foods with his backyard kitchen.

Each episode begins with an intro monologue from Okeya over whimsically pleasant music produced, composed and performed by Murata on a keyboard.

"I'm no different than any other Japanese American person here in Los Angeles. I work as an artist, run errands and I pay my bills just like everyone else. But sometimes, when

the day is done, and the opportunity arises, I open my secret little restaurant. It's there where I discover who I truly am, one dish at a time. I call that place "The Shokudo,"" said Okeya.

Murata shares that his goal for filming the series was to "document and preserve culture," as well as "learn more about ourselves and our own community, meeting new people and learning more stories."

With Okeya and Uyeda, the three friends are committed to helping their community record and share valuable traditions that might otherwise be on the brink of being lost or forgotten.

Okeya, who lives in a full house with his wife, parents, sister, brother-in-law and two nephews, provides the setting for capturing this unique show.

Formerly his father's 10-by-12-foot tool shed in the family's backyard, the quaint space was transformed into a mini-secret kitchen complete with decorative string lights and a chalkboard-style menu for episode filming.

By day, Okeya is actually a full-time artist who creates stationary, cards and an illustrated series for his company Okeya Stationary Co., which he co-owns and operates with his wife, Audrey.

But his creativity goes beyond his pen and pad through his love of cooking and enthusiasm for Japanese American culture, which made Okeya the perfect fit for co-hosting such a show with Murata.

Having a Chinese mother from the Philippines and a Japanese father made Okeya's experience growing up a bit different than Murata's and Uyeda's, who are both Yonsei, each

with two Japanese American parents.

It is also Okeya's excitement and introduction to a lot of things he did not grow up with that really draws the audience into each YouTube episode. Kind of like a Huell Howser, if you will, who enthusiastically listens, learns and speaks with various JA SoCal locals, Okeya's jovial personality really makes each episode engaging.

Murata, who co-hosts some of the episodes, provides banter and heartfelt conversations that really balance out the sometimes comedic situations of the show.

Murata, like Okeya, has a career unrelated to entertainment and very much on the opposite end of the spectrum from his passion for music. Murata, a self-proclaimed "scientist and musician," actually works in medicine in the surgery department at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles and is also a husband and new father to an 18-month old. Surprisingly, he somehow manages to still find time to produce music, perform and film "The Shokudo."

Currently, the trio are reconstructing the entire set of "The Shokudo," which endured weather and termite damage in the past year. They hope to complete construction in the next few months and resume filming new episodes this summer.

Uyeda, Okeya's childhood friend and the third part of show's trio, is a talented photographer and videographer who works in plumbing with his family's longtime company, Jo-Mi Plumbing & Solar.

Although the frame of the new build was started by contractors, the rest of the renovation will be completed by these three multital-



Luke Uyeda films Jon Kenzo Okeya cooking in an episode of "The Shokudo" series.

ented young men during their free time on evenings, after work and on weekends.

Uyeda shares that they are currently determining electricity and plumbing options to make it safer than the previous set up.

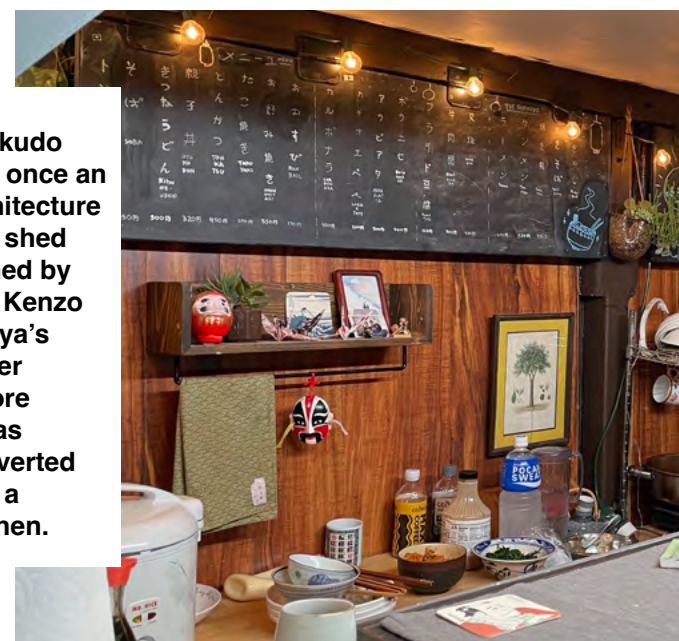
While they rebuild the show's set, the trio have a lot of show ideas in mind. Shared Murata: "With Luke and Jon, there's no shortage of ideas; it's just tough to find willing participants to be on camera and join episodes." He went on to say that they need more folks

community to be a part of their series.

The trio's most successful past episodes have featured favorite tasty staples of the JA community — spam musubi, rainbow jello and chili rice, with various guest cooks sharing their cooking skills and family stories.

During the "The Shokudo" series episode "On the Level With Rainbow Jello," Okeya jokes that the audience will be "learning the mendokusai (めんどくさい) art of rainbow jello."

The Shokudo was once an architecture tool shed owned by Jon Kenzo Okeya's father before it was converted into a kitchen.



from
the



At the GVJCI/Grateful Crane “Showa Alley” by Shokudo benefit event, Jon Kenzo Okeya is pictured at the Shokudo booth alongside his Okeya Stationary offerings.

The Shokudo team transformed the GVJCI into a *yokocho*, immersing visitors into the sights, sounds and tastes of a bustling Japanese alleyway.



Jon Kenzo Okeya (left) and Luke Uyeda discuss filming.

our grandmas and aunts making.

It was something welcomed at potlucks and gatherings where the patience and hard work in making such a dessert was appreciated. Memories of peeling each layer apart as children and eating each one by one is also a common experience of which we all can relate.

These sweet little recollections we might take for granted is what makes “The Shokudo” so special and so specifically Japanese American.

Another must-see episode is the “The Culture Around Kaki (Persimmon).” Not only is a kaki/persimmon bread recipe shared by guest Mike Okamura, but the show really does a great job at capturing the essence of the fruit and its place in our community.

Okamura shares his recipe from a Japanese American National Museum Volunteers recipe book “Cooking With Love” while recalling the importance of having kaki trees amongst our community members and the culture of giving, in this case, sharing fruit.

Murata even makes a visit to his own family members’ home, where a tree his grandparents planted still provides fruit to generations of family after their passings.

The Murata family has created a new tradition for everyone in the family, young and old, to come together to all pick kaki as a yearly event.

With appreciation, Okamura addresses Okeya and Murata at the end of the episode’s filming, saying,

“It makes me happy that you wanted to learn, wanted to participate, both of you, in something that brings me joy every year. It brings me hope that at least with me doing this tradition, I can pass that along. Whether you use that knowledge or not, I planted the seeds.”

Murata sums up his feelings in the episode by saying that being Japanese American is a feeling, not something we can quantify or have to prove in an obvious way.

“For us, as Japanese Americans, our Japanese American culture is no longer rooted in the language . . .

it’s rooted in these underlying values like giving each other kaki . . . that’s how we preserve our culture.

“Younger and younger generations,” Murata continued, “being less and less Japanese by blood, they’ll have this culture in them that isn’t just based on being able to speak [Japanese] or even having a Japanese name.”

Murata makes a point that as much as our community is changing and growing, it is not diluting — the next generation is still finding the importance in preserving and sharing our nuanced traditions.

Back in the day, many churches and organizations gathered recipes and made printed and bound cookbooks. Today, we are digitally archiving our culture through brilliant shows like “The Shokudo” and through social media.

The community can support “The Shokudo” and the amazing work its creators, Murata, Okeya and Uyeda, are doing through supporting the Grateful Crane Ensemble, who funds the series, or by attending the series’ next fundraiser event, which is currently in the works. (In 2024, “Showa Alley by the Shokudo” benefit was held at the Gardena Valley Japanese Cultural Institute, which featured a replica *yokocho*, very much like the alleyways in Japan that feature tiny eateries and giftshops.)

You can stay up-to-date with the “The Shokudo” series by following [@the_shokudo_series](#) on Instagram and [YouTube](#). You can also catch an in-person screening of the episode “On the Level With Rainbow Jello” at [Nikkei Movie Night at the Venice Japanese Community Center](#) on May 23. This event, co-presented by Murata, will give you a literal taste of “The Shokudo,” as refreshments will be made by Okeya. ■

The tedious process of making what most in the JA community know as rainbow or ribbon jello takes the viewer on a journey of creating the seven-layer dessert along with guest mother-and-daughter duo Dina and Regina Furumoto.

The Furumoto’s share a family favorite recipe from the Orange County Buddhist Church recipe book. Okeya and Murata decide to take the dessert a step further by challenging themselves to create a 15-layer rainbow jello tower, opting for a beer stein

as the container due to its height.

This episode is a great example of why the series is so popular, and why we should all be excited to see what more is in store in the future from these three multitalented individuals.

Blending comic relief of trying to out-do the original recipe, Okeya and Murata also get deep while talking about something many would see as such an insignificant dish. This JA staple, as random as it is to our community, is something comforting and nostalgic that many of us remember



A hot pot warms up noodles, just one of the many Japanese comfort foods featured on “The Shokudo” series show.

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'Flower Drum Song' Flourishes

The new production 'allows Asian Americans to reclaim this cherished story in a meaningful way.'

By Cindy Yee

The latest version of Tony winner David Henry Hwang's Broadway rewrite of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical "Flower Drum Song," directed by East West Players' Artistic Director Lily Tung Crystal, should have tweaked its title.

For those who know the 1961 movie, one definitely cannot compare the storyline because it would be comparing apples to oranges. However, for pure entertainment, this 2026 iteration is a must-watch performance with funny, clever jokes mixed in with the seriousness of racism that the majority of us have faced our entire lives, along with actual facts about Chinese American history that educate the masses in a light comedy and musical, cleverly woven into Hwang's second rewrite.

The production, currently playing at the Aratani Theatre in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo, is the "grand finale" for EWP's Diamond Legacy season and features Cooper Bennett, Kenton Chen, Emily Kuroda, Mark Oka,

Scott Keiji Takeda, Gedde Watanabe, Grace Yoo and Krista Marie Yu.

The performance of the character Mei-Li is brilliantly sung by Yoo, who has a voice like a singing sparrow. The choreographers also created clever and entertaining skits featuring Linda Low's character, performed by the lovely Yu, who was born in Oakland, Calif., and followed in the footsteps of her great-aunt, Dorothy Toy (real name Shigeko Takahashi).

In the years leading up to World War II, Toy and her husband, Tony Jew, were known as the Asian Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers-type duo Toy & Wing, performing at the Forbidden City nightclubs in the chop suey circuits in San Francisco and New York.

Yu's lead performance in "I Enjoy Being a Girl," complete with the show's talented chorus line portraying the three-mirror scene made famous by legendary actress Nancy Kwan, is beautifully executed and doubled across the entire Aratani stage along with young, gorgeous



The cast of East West Players' "Flower Drum Song" takes a bow after their performance at the Aratani Theatre in Little Tokyo. PHOTO: CINDY YEE

dancers who also performed the "Fan Tan Fannie" song and dance.

The show also features a new, never-heard-before song titled "My Best Love," which comes to life and is beautifully performed by veteran actor Watanabe. Hwang located this title in the Rodgers and Hammerstein archives and brought it to its debut in "FDS." It pays tribute to those who have endured a long marriage!

The entire stage, with the orchestra behind the set, is aesthetically beautiful. The pioneering talents

of Watanabe, along with Oka, who in his role as Wang has a hilarious song-and-dance scene in "I Am a Vagabond Sailor," and especially Kuroda, whose character was transformed from Madame Liang in the movie to a talent agent for Asian American entertainers, all shine.

Hwang cleverly pays tribute to Jadin Wong, a pioneering Chinese American entertainer and agent, who was often noted for her work in the 1940s and '50s entertainment circuit in the Forbidden City nightclubs of

San Francisco.

He remembers Wong as a brassy, brilliant ex-actress-turned-agent for "Oriental" talent and as the quintessential Broadway dame. For those of us who lived in the Los Angeles area during that time period and worked at Universal Studios in the movie industry, we remember talent agent Bessie Loo.

A very surprising and highly enjoyable part of the new musical features the LGBTQ community, performed by the extremely gifted Chen. Audience, watch out for some very surprising scenes and enjoyable skits!

To celebrate the 60th Anniversary of East West Players Theatre, and the first woman director at EWP, we must congratulate Crystal for her courage and fortitude in directing the latest production of the most-beloved Asian American musical of our time. Crystal is so diverse and multitalented that she was able to substitute for Kuroda during a performance my husband and I attended.

During intermission and after the show, there was much buzz, excitement and happiness among patrons who were highly motivated to obtain the DVD of the original 1961 movie from Universal Studios, including my 10-year-old granddaughter, having enjoyed

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The Japanese American Experience is JACL's acclaimed curriculum guide with a summary of the history of Japanese Americans, a chronology of important dates, a resource list, learning activities, and more, now available in an online format! We're also excited to bring our new video series alongside the website launch! Check them out today!

➤ this 2026 version of “FDS” immensely.

After all, the first Chinese American movie offering a small glimpse of our lives here in America has been lost for at least two generations of Asian Americans trying to live the American Dream.

In 2008, the Library of Congress placed “FDS” on the National Film Registry for its cultural and historical significance to American film.

As a member of the National Film Preservation Board that oversees selections for the registry, Arthur Dong wrote in his nomination for “FDS”: “This film has represented an unparalleled and unprecedented milestone for both the film industry and the Asian American community.”

For those that don’t know, Dong is an Oscar-nominated, triple Sundance Award-winning American filmmaker, author and curator whose body of work and documentary collection explores Asian American experiences and LGBTQ history.

“Flower Drum Song” is now playing at the Aratani Theatre at the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center until May 31. For tickets, visit <https://www.eastwestplayers.org/flower> or <https://tinyurl.com/994aschc>.

JACL » continued from page 3

Intermountain, Central District Councils carried more than 80 percent of the geographical responsibility to advocate the public policymaking positions to their respective local, state and federal elected officials.

Because the JACL’s membership is heavily weighted toward the Western Coastal states, there is an image that the JACL represents the “liberal left coast,” from a Washington, D.C., perspective.

This image and perception must be changed. To truly become a national voice, the JACL should allocate more of its program funds toward these District Councils that have been ignored.

If the JACL wishes to grow its membership, then it can no longer ignore the importance of these vital District Councils. The JACL must have the balance and interaction of regional and local political viewpoints because as the powerful and venerable Tip O’Neill, former speaker of the house from Massachusetts once said, “All politics is local.”

So, has the time come for JACL to fade into history?

Not yet!

The unanimous consensus of the older Sansei that met was that we have a duty and obligation to the Issei and Nisei to continue to not only tell their story but also add to it by continuing their legacy through the national JACL organization.

In the late 1970s to early ’90s, Japanese Americans had a strong voice at the table of national political public policymaking.

During those two decades, Sen. Inouye, Sen. Matsunaga, Sen. Hayakawa, Congressional members Mink, Mineta, Matsui and Mike Masaoka, JACL’s longest-servicing Washington representative, used their respected positions and their personal relationships so that the Japanese American community could have a voice and seat at the public policymaking table. By the mid-2000s, the voice at the table of national political public policymaking became muted.

During this period, in the background, Frank Sato, former JACL national president and one of only two Japanese Americans to ever be confirmed by the U.S. Senate as a presidential appointee (inspector general of the Department of Transportation, appointed by Pres-

ident Jimmy Carter, and inspector general of the Veterans Administration, appointed by President Ronald Reagan), was able to provide the Japanese Americans a voice at the table during the redress years.

The other Japanese American to be confirmed twice by the U.S. Senate was Norman Y. Mineta (secretary of commerce by President Bill Clinton and secretary of transportation by President George W. Bush).

During a 40-year period, the JACL had a presence and access to the West Wing of the White House with Presidents Ford, Carter, Reagan and Bush 1, Clinton, Bush 2 and Obama.

Today, in 2026, it does not appear that we have a seat at the table.

We are dismissed or discounted because we lack a base on which political leaders believe can make a difference in how they make their decisions.

The challenge for the JACL delegates at the July National Convention is to commit to undertake programs and initiatives to regain a seat at the table of political decision-making at every level of government.

Going forward in 2026, the new member target of the JACL is not the Sansei. It is the children of the Sansei — the Yonsei, Gosei and Rokusei.

More recently, while watching a

Go For Broke interview with the late Yosh Nakamura, a 442nd RCT Nisei Veteran, with Torch Bearer Juli Yoshinaga (granddaughter of “The Horse’s Mouth,” the late George Yoshinaga), it became clear that Yonsei do have a desire and are curious of their grandparents’ Japanese American experience.

I know that in the future — *perhaps not today, not tomorrow, but there will be a day* — a Yonsei or Gosei will want to know more of the Issei, Nisei and Sansei experience, whether it be in war or peace.

The JACL, as the only national organization representing Americans of Japanese ancestry, must be there for them. Thus far, the JACL has been there for 97 years. Can we make it to 100?

The time has come to renew our commitment to rekindle the spirit that has always represented the JACL. Just like the Issei upon their arrival in America to a not-so-welcoming hostile environment, where they persevered and sacrificed “for the good of the children . . .” *Kodomo no tame ni.*

Enough talk. Let’s get to work . . . for the next 100 years.

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

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A NATIONAL GUIDE TO NOTABLE COMMUNITY EVENTS

CALENDAR

NATIONAL

JACL National Convention
Las Vegas, NV
July 29-Aug. 2
Paris Las Vegas Hotel & Casino
3655 S. Las Vega Blvd.
Join JACL at its 56th National Convention themed “Reigniting Our Purpose and Mission!” where the organization will gather to reinvigorate the spirit of advancing our community forward with renewed action and impact. Events include the Chapter Awards Luncheon, National Council and 2026 National Board Elections, Sayonara Gala, workshops, mixers and much more!
Info: Visit www.jacl.org/2026-national-convention.

Ireicho Tour to Former Confinement Sites & Other Places
National Stops:
July 4-5: Tule Lake, CA
Info: Visit <https://www.janm.org/exhibits/ireicho/venues>.

NCWNP

‘I Am an American’ Exhibit
San Francisco, CA
Thru Aug. 31
MIS Historic Learning Center at the Presidio of San Francisco
220 Halleck St.
Price: \$15; Free for Veterans, Children 12 and Under, NJAHS Members.
This new traveling exhibit tells the storied history of the Nisei soldiers who served during WWII and features artifacts, first-hand accounts and evocative images of their bravery and sacrifice.
Info: Visit nvnvets.org/exhibit.

Eden Bazaar
San Lorenzo, CA
June 6; Noon-7 p.m.
Eden Township Japanese Community Center
710 Elgin St.
Price: Free
The annual Eden Township Bazaar returns featuring delicious BBQ chicken teri bento, curry rice/udon, chicken salad, corn, shave ice, mochi and other popular deserts, plus bingo and many more games for the entire family to enjoy!
Info: Visit edenjapanesecc.org.

SF Japantown Pride Flag Raising & LGBTQ+ Potluck
San Francisco, CA
June 6; 2 p.m. and 4-6:30 p.m.
Torii Gate in Osaka Way
Issei Memorial Hall at The Center

1840 Sutter St.
Price: Free
Join Okaeri NorCal for the Japantown Rainbow Coalition’s Pride flag-raising ceremony and potluck to celebrate Pride Month!
Info: Visit bit.ly/norcal-pride-potluck.

Soy and Tofu Festival
San Francisco, CA
June 13; 11 a.m.-5 p.m.
The Event Center at St. Mary’s Cathedral
1111 Gough St.
Price: \$5 General Admission
This signature annual fundraiser of the Nichi Bei Foundation celebrates the joy of soy through food, art, live performances, soy education and the beloved Soy-ful Youth Art Contest.
Info: Visit <https://soyandtofufest.org/tickets/> to purchase in advance.

2026 Tule Lake Pilgrimage ‘Resistance & Solidarity’
Tulelake, CA
July 3-6
Tule Lake Segregation Center
Price: \$700 All-Inclusive Fee
Save the date for the Tule Lake Pilgrimage and reserve your spot now as space is limited. The four-day event includes charter bus transportation, lodging, meals and all activities.
Info: Registration now open. Limited spots. Visit <https://www.tulelake.org>.

PSW

‘Washoku: Nature and Culture in Japanese Cuisine’
Los Angeles, CA
May 22-Oct. 18
Japan House Los Angeles
Ovation Hollywood Complex
6801 Hollywood Blvd.
Price: Free
This exhibit invites visitors to explore the rich culinary heritage at the heart of Japan. Presented for the first time outside of Japan, it offers an in-depth look at the ingredients, evolution and inspirations behind this UNESCO-recognized cultural tradition.
Info: Visit japanhousela.com.

Master Series: Tea Whisk by Tango Tanimura
San Diego, CA
May 29; 1-2 p.m.
Japanese Friendship Garden
Inamori Pavilion
2215 Pan American Road E.
Price: JFGM Member \$50; Nonmember \$65
This experience includes a special pre-

sentation by Tango Tanimura, a 20th-generation artisan of traditional Takayama tea whisks (chasen), who will share the history, techniques and cultural significance of chasen-making, followed by a live demonstration.
Info: Visit <https://www.niwa.org/artisans>.

Hana Effron and Travis Atreo Live Concert
Gardena, CA
May 30; 5:30-8 p.m.
Gardena Valley Japanese Cultural Institute Main Hall
1964 W. 162nd St.
Price: Adult \$35; Student \$25; Youth \$30
Greater Los Angeles JACL and Intercollegiate Nikkei Council present this live concert plus appetizers all to support the Greater Los Angeles JACL and Intercollegiate Nikkei Council Youth Programs.
Info: For tickets, visit <https://tinyurl.com/39xvxe86>.

‘Darkness and Humanity: The Complete Akira Kurosawa’
Los Angeles, CA
Thru May 30
Academy Museum of Motion Pictures
6067 Wilshire Blvd.
Price: Museum Admission
Presented entirely on 35mm film, this series of 28 screenings covers the director’s key contributions to the jidai-geki samurai genre, as well as his contemporary gendai-geki dramas.
Info: Visit <https://www.academyilmuseum.org/>.

Greater LA JACL Scholarship and Chapter Fundraiser Luncheon
Torrance, CA
June 7; 12:30-3:30 p.m.
Torrance Municipal Airport — Zamperini Field
3301 Airport Dr.
Price: \$45 Adult Before June 1; \$50 Adult After June 1
This year’s guest speaker is JACL National VP of Public Affairs Seia Watanabe, who is currently PSW vice governor. The event will also award its 2026 scholarship recipients. Please RSVP.
Info: For tickets, visit <https://www.glajacl.org/>. To RSVP, email greaterlajacl@gmail.com.

Genki Living Workshops: Walking
Palos Verdes Peninsula, CA
June 13; 9 a.m.-Noon
South Coast Botanic Garden
26300 Crenshaw Blvd.
Price: \$20; Registration Closes May 29.
One of Keiro’s most popular workshops

is back. Register now, as spots are filling for this afternoon of a staff-led walking tour that includes a guided warmup activity, lunch and refreshments and an opportunity drawing amid the beauty of the botanical garden.
Info: Visit <https://give.keiro.org/event/genki-living-workshops-walking-2026/e763274>.

PNW

‘Minidoka on Our Minds’ Exhibit
Portland, OR
Thru June 14
Japanese American Museum of Oregon
411 N.W. Flanders St.
Price: Museum Admission
This exhibit celebrates 25 years of preservation at the site where many Nikkei from Oregon and Washington were incarcerated during WWII. Artwork by survivors, descendants and Japanese American youth explore the park’s history.
Info: Visit <https://jamo.org/minidoka/>.

‘The Yasui Family: An American Story’ Exhibit
Portland, OR
Thru Sept. 6
The Oregon Historical Society
1200 S.W. Park Ave.
Through photographs, personal journals, documents and objects, this exhibition explores how the Yasui family reflects the complexity of the American story.
Info: Visit ohs.org.

MDC

Yuri & Malcolm’s Revolutionary Birthday Bash!
Chicago, IL
May 23; 11 a.m.-1 p.m.
Restored Bookshop
4613 NN. Kedzie
Price: Free
This children’s event, hosted by JACL Chicago, Nikkei Uprising and Restored Bookshop, celebrates the birthdays of Yuri Kochiyama and Malcolm X. The first 25 children to attend will receive a copy of the book “The Bridges Yuri Built: How Yuri Kochiyama Marched Across Movements.”
Info: To RSVP, visit <https://bit.ly/YuriMalcolmRevolutionaryBday>.

Summer Obon Festival
St. Paul, MN
Aug. 16
Como Park
1199 Parkway Pkwy.
Price: Free
Save the date for this annual festival will feature booths, food, Japanese dancing, martial arts and taiko demonstrations, as well as a Japanese lantern lighting ceremony at the Conservatory Pond.

Info: Visit tcjacl.org to help volunteer.

IDC

AAPI Culture Fest 2026
Denver, CO
May 22; 5-10 p.m.
Civic Center Park
101 14th Ave.
Price: Free
This event celebrates Denver’s AAPI community and Mile High JACL will be there to host its Mochitsuki event, along with other vendors showcasing food, drinks, entertainment and art.
Info: <https://www.colorado-filipinos.org/event-details/civic-center-night-market-x-aapi-culture-fest>.

2026 Heart Mountain Pilgrimage
Powell, WY
July 23-25
Heart Mountain Interpretive Center
1539 Road 19
Price: Registration Prices Vary and ends June 30.
This year’s event explores “What It Means to Be American: Voices From Heart Mountain” and centers on the voices and experiences of Heart Mountain survivors and descendants. A live performance of “Defining Courage” will also be featured.
Info: Visit heartmountain.org.

EDC

‘Courage and Compassion: Our Shared Story of the Japanese American World War II Experience’
Delray Beach, FL
Thru Aug. 30
Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens
4000 Morikami Park Road
Price: Museum Admission
This exhibit brings the national story of the Japanese American war sacrifice home to Florida, exploring the legacy of the historic Yamato colony and its residents.
Info: For more information, visit morikami.org. ■

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In MEMORIAM

(Note: Boldfaced names in the PDF version of this are active hyperlinks.)

Abe, Alice, 97, San Juan Capistrano, CA, May 1.



Aoki, Yoshio, 76, Ogden, UT, Feb. 15.



Araki, Sachiko, 102, Selma, CA, Nov. 30, 2025.

Bungo, Glenn Yoshiro, 91, Los Angeles, CA, Jan. 7.

Emi, Roderick, 75, Bullhead City, AZ, Dec. 9, 2025.

Endow, Gary Koji, 81, North Hills, CA, Feb. 24.

Enright, Hiroko, 92, Kensington, MD, Feb. 24.

Fujio, Wallace, 99, Honolulu, HI, Nov. 4, 2025.



Ishimoto, Emiko, 96, Sacramento, CA, Jan. 8.



Iwamoto, Margaret Miwako, 80, Honolulu, HI, Nov. 7, 2025.



Kawakami, Donald David, 79, Elk Grove, CA, July 19, 2025.



Kawasaki, Tomoe, 93, Alhambra, CA, Dec. 5, 2025.



Kido, Emi, 100, Boise, ID, Sept. 8, 2025.

Lubbe, Sumiko Yonamine, 92, Daly City, CA, Feb. 1.

Masushige, Natsuko, 96, Los Angeles, CA, March 24.



Matoba, Kazuo, 85, Elmhurst, IL, Dec. 29, 2025.

Matsumoto, Ronald, 92, Spokane, WA, Jan. 18.

Matsune, Joan Hiro, 88, Stockton, CA, March 15.

Nagatoishi, Terri, 79, Modesto, CA, March 10.

Nakagiri, Daniel, 77, Los Angeles, CA, March 21.

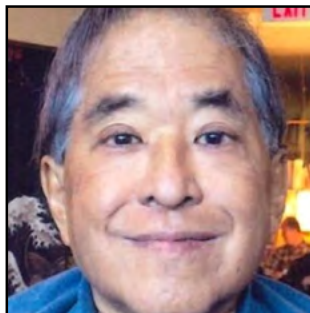
Nakanishi, Kyoko, 87, Monterey Park, CA, March 23.



Nakamura, Naomie, 89, Torrance, CA, April 16.



Nanto, Masako Kawakami, 84, Clifton, VA, Sept. 23, 2025.



Ogawa, David L., 71, Gurnee, IL, April 9.

Shizume, Teruko 'Terri,' 97, Charlotte, NC, Feb. 15.

Sugai, Kikue 'Kik' (Ikuma), 99, Los Gatos, CA, Feb. 24.

Takeuchi, Takashi Ben, 100, Culver City, CA, March 24.

Uyeda, Charles, 97, Sunnyvale, CA, March 27.

Vandecar, Esther Elaine, 85, Battle Creek, MI, April 2.

Yamamoto, Fujiyoshi Fuji, 89, and Yamamoto, Chieko, 84, Monterey Park, CA, Jan. 20 and Jan. 30. ■

News Briefs

DoJ Charges Arcadia, Calif. Mayor Eileen Wang of Being Illegal PRC Agent

The Sichuan, China-born naturalized U.S. citizen, 58, who also resigned as the San Gabriel Valley municipality's mayor on June 11 — the same day the Justice Department charged her with "acting as an illegal agent of the People's Republic of China" by acting "at the direction and control of PRC government officials" — pleaded guilty to the felony count and faces a maximum federal prison sentence of 10 years. In her plea agreement, Wang admitted to working with Yaoning "Mike" Sun — her former fiancé who is currently serving a four-year federal prison sentence for acting as a covert agent of the PRC — on a website that purported to provide news for the local Chinese American community but was a pro-PRC propaganda vehicle. Wang also was in communication with John Chen, who is currently serving a 20-month federal prison sentence, described as a "high-level member of the PRC intelligence apparatus." In a related story of the PRC's attempts to use and infiltrate American politics, the *New York Times* reported that a NYC Chinese American community leader, Lu Jianwang, had also been convicted of "illegally working as a foreign agent."

Shannon Lee, Assemblymember Kick Off Drive for Annual Bruce Lee Day

Already known as Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, May could in the coming years have an additional day of recognition if a California politician and the daughter of the legendary martial arts movie maven get their wish — AB 2455 — to come true. At a May 13 news conference held in the main atrium of the San Francisco Public Library, Assemblymember Matt Haney (D-San Francisco) and Shannon Lee joined forces to introduce the proposal that would designate May 17 as Bruce Lee Day in California. The date was chosen to mark the day at age 18 when Lee returned from Hong Kong, where he grew up, to city of his birth, San Francisco. Were it enacted, Bruce Lee Day would become California's first day of recognition honoring a Chinese American. Lee died July 20, 1973, just before the opening of the hit motion picture "Enter the Dragon." In a related story, the United States Postal Service debuted a Bruce Lee forever stamp in February (see Feb. 20, 2025 *Pacific Citizen*, tinyurl.com/4ab5usxu). To view a video of the ceremony, visit tinyurl.com/mysad5ce.

Little Tokyo Service Center Taps Noelle Ito as Deputy Executive Director

According to the LTSC's news release, Ito will provide strategic leadership for the organization's development, communications and external relations functions. Prior to rejoining LTSC, where she began working for Asians for Miracle Marrow Matches when it was an LTSC program, she served as the senior board services lead at the Kaiser Permanente Bernard J. Tyson School of Medicine. Ito earned her BA in Human Services from George Washington University and her MBA in nonprofit management from American Jewish University.

Duly Noted: Eatery Suehiro Confirms Return to Little Tokyo After '23 Move

Although not new, since it had been referred to publicly as a future tenant at the First Street North development in Little Tokyo, Little Tokyo Service Center announced that Suehiro Cafe will be returning to Little Tokyo at an undetermined date. It moved in 2023. ¶ The JA Community Foundation announced the 10 recipients of its Spring 2026 grants. They are: the Ann Arbor Summer Festival, enTaiko, Little Tokyo Community Council, Makoto Taiko, Nichi Bei Foundation, Oregon Historical Society, Oakland Museum of California, OCO Club's Helping Farms Feed Families, Riverside Museum Associates and Sonoma County Matsuri Festival. See tinyurl.com/5wenbyc3 for details.

— P.C. Staff

PLACE A TRIBUTE

'In Memoriam' is a free listing that appears on a limited, space-available basis. Tributes honor your loved ones with text and photos and appear in a timely manner at the rate of \$25/column inch.

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jacl.org/2026-national-convention



Paris Hotel, Las Vegas, NV