



# PACIFIC CITIZEN

CELEBRATING  
**97**  
Years

Robert Vargas (left) and Edward James Olmos at the Japangeles store wearing custom jackets by Kuroyanagi  
PHOTO: HIROSHI KUROYANAGI

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JANM Gala  
Raises Millions.

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## FROM WALLS TO WEARABLES

Artist Robert Vargas Gives New Definition to the Term, 'Fresh Coat.'



# JACL National Convention to Bring Together Community Leaders, Advocates and Future Changemakers

The confab will feature timely discussions on civil rights, immigration, reparations, youth leadership, historic preservation and a special performance by Asian American band SLANT.

The JACL will welcome members, community leaders, advocates, educators, students and supporters from across the country to its 2026 National Convention, set for July 29-Aug. 2 at the Paris Las Vegas Hotel & Casino.

This year's theme, "Reigniting Our Purpose and Mission," will feature five days of dynamic programming exploring the most-pressing issues facing Japanese Americans, Asian Americans and broader communities committed to civil rights, democracy and social justice.

Among the convention's featured plenary sessions is "Preserving Incarceration Sites: Fifty Years of Healing (1976-2026)," which commemorates the 50th anniversary of President Gerald Ford's revocation of Executive Order 9066.

The session will examine decades of work to preserve and interpret Japanese American incarceration sites and discuss how these stories



can continue to educate and inspire future generations as the nation observes America's 250th anniversary.

Another major plenary, "Standing Against Xenophobia, Standing With Refugees and Migrants," will bring together experts in civil rights, immigration policy and community advocacy to discuss current challenges facing refugees, migrants and international students.

The panel will explore practical actions that individuals, chapters and organizations can take to support vulnerable communities and defend civil liberties.

The convention's workshop program will provide attendees with opportunities to engage in conversations spanning history, civic engagement, education, leadership development and community empowerment.

Highlighted sessions include:

- **"Echoes of Incarceration: How Camp Memories Shape Generations,"** exploring how the experiences of wartime incarceration continue to influence descendants and inspire community leadership and activism.

- **"Designing Youth Leadership: Insights for Community and Institutional Engagement,"** offering practical strategies for cultivating youth participation and building sustainable leadership pipelines within community organizations.
- **"Fighting for Our Stories: Educating the Next Generation,"** featuring a screening and discussion of the award-winning documentary "Making Waves: The Rise of Asian America" and examining current challenges facing ethnic studies education.
- **"The Nevada Nikkei: Reigniting Through WWII and Beyond,"** showcasing the history of Japanese Americans in Nevada and the role of the Las Vegas JACL chapter in strengthening the local Nikkei community.
- **"Reparations Impossible? Why We Should Care and How We Can Be Allies for Black Reparations,"** featuring na-

## HOW TO REACH US

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## LETTER to the EDITOR

Dear Editor,

It's with extremely high interest that I read the commentary by Ron Ikejiri regarding the future of the JACL (*May 15-June 5, 2026, Pacific Citizen*). As the president of the Greater Los Angeles JACL, we at the chapter level have not been informed of the full extent of the financial and membership challenges of the organization.

The National Board has a fiduciary duty to be transparent. We at the chapter level have not seen the audited financials for the JACL for over five years. Why? The National Board has not adopted a strategic plan, even though it is required by the Bylaws and Constitution to do so. Why not?

How many new members and what kinds of membership efforts are being conducted by the JACL vp of membership and our paid staff to increase membership? This kind of information would be helpful at the chapter level so that we can be informed and help increase membership.

Why are people criticizing the importance of the *Pacific Citizen* newspaper? It is the main communication tool of the organization and creates revenue.

Chapters are willing to work with JACL National's programs and initiatives. But, the lack of transparency hurts confidence in the organization. Let's work to restore faith in our JACL and its future.

Sincerely,

Mitchell Matsumura,  
President, Greater Los Angeles JACL

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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.



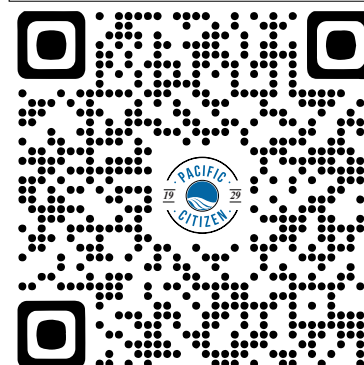
Editor Emeritus Harry Honda as drawn by Pete Hironaka

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## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# LET US NOT FORGET WHAT AMERICANS ARE CAPABLE OF

By Lilly Simmering,  
JACL Executive Director

This year is significant for the United States. Not only is the nation celebrating its 250th birthday, but it is also serving as one of the hosts of the world's largest sporting event — the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Over the weekend, I watched several matches, including the exciting Netherlands-Japan game in my hometown of Dallas, Texas. While the matches themselves were thrilling, what has truly captured my attention are the countless videos of foreign visitors experiencing the United States for the first time.

Beyond marveling at gallon-sized containers of pasta sauce at Walmart or trying In-N-Out Burger and Texas barbecue for the first time, many visitors highlight something Americans often lose sight of amid today's divisive political climate: the character of the American people.

If these visitors are to be believed, Americans are among the friendliest, kindest and most welcoming people in the world.

Their observations raise an important question: Why does it sometimes take outsiders to remind us of who we are and what we have?

Perhaps this is what generations of immigrants saw when they first arrived here — a country defined

not only by opportunity but also by the generosity and optimism of its people. If so, it is only natural that they hoped their children would be able to call this country home.

While the World Cup and America's 250th birthday make this a memorable year, another event has made it a consequential constitutional one: the Supreme Court's pending decision in *Trump v. Barbara*, concerning birthright citizenship.

The principles established in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* (1898) remained intact even during one of the darkest chapters in American history.

Although Japanese Americans were forcibly removed and incarcerated under Executive Order 9066, children born in the concentration camps were recognized as United States citizens under the Fourteenth Amendment. The government deprived families of their liberty, but it did not deny the citizenship of children born on American soil. That historical reality underscores the enduring strength of birthright citizenship even during periods of national fear and uncertainty.

It was this history that JACL brought before the Supreme Court in its amicus curiae brief. By pairing legal analysis with lived experience, the brief does more than argue the law — it illustrates its consequences. The descendants of those who

endured wartime incarceration understand that debates over citizenship are never merely academic; they determine who belongs, who is protected and who is recognized as fully American. In other words, basic human dignity and respect.

Regardless of political affiliation, most people would agree that decisions affecting children and their relationship to their home country deserve careful consideration. Children cannot advocate for themselves; that responsibility falls to adults, particularly those whose lived experiences can illuminate the real-world consequences of public policy.

The Supreme Court is expected to announce its decision before the end of June. As the World Cup has reminded us of the qualities that make Americans admired around the world, this decision may also reveal whether our resilience or our divisions will be on display to the many international visitors currently experiencing our country.

Whatever the outcome, let us not forget what Americans are capable of. We have repeatedly demonstrated resilience in moments of uncertainty, strength in moments of challenge and compassion in moments of need. Those qualities are part of our national character, just as surely as our commitment to liberty and equal justice under the law.

At a time when the world is watching from packed World Cup stadiums to social media feeds viewed across the globe, we should strive to reflect the very best of ourselves. Not because visitors are watching, but because future generations of Americans will be watching, too.

*Lilly Simmering is the executive director of the JACL. She is based in the organization's Los Angeles office.*

tionally recognized attorney Don Tamaki and advocates working to build solidarity between Japanese American and Black reparations movements.

- **"The Next Chapter: Activating Nikkei Youth Toward Purpose and Action,"** a conversation focused on engaging younger generations and strengthening the future of Japanese American advocacy organizations.
- **"Our Rights, Our Voices: How the 14th Amendment Lives Through Us,"** connecting landmark Asian American legal history to contemporary debates over citizenship, constitutional rights and civic participation.
- **"Shukatsu: End-of-Life Planning,"** providing practical information and culturally relevant resources for advance care planning and dementia directives.
- **"CAUSE the Vote: Building**

**Creative Voter Engagement,"** highlighting innovative approaches that combine culture, storytelling and civic participation to increase voter engagement in Asian American communities.

- **"Newsprint to News Media: JA Newspapers and the History of the Pacific Citizen,"** celebrating the legacy of Japanese American journalism and the evolution of the *Pacific Citizen* into the digital age.

In addition to educational programming, attendees will enjoy networking events, National Council sessions, awards celebrations, youth programming and opportunities to connect with JACL members from across the country.

A special highlight of the convention will take place on Aug. 1, when attendees gather for a live performance by SLANT, the acclaimed Asian American rock band known

for its energetic stage presence, original music and commitment to amplifying Asian American voices through the arts. The evening concert will provide an exciting finale to a week of learning, advocacy and community-building.

"The 2026 National Convention is an opportunity to honor our history, confront today's challenges and invest in the next generation of leaders," said JACL Executive Director Lilly Simmering. "From preserving the stories of incarceration and advancing civil rights to strengthening youth engagement and celebrating Asian American creativity, this convention embodies JACL's mission and vision for the future."

*Registration information, hotel details and the complete convention schedule are available at [www.jacl.org/convention](http://www.jacl.org/convention).*

# SAN FERNANDO VALLEY FETES 2026 SCHOLARS

Community Center, JACL chapter honor college-bound youth, remember Kyoko Oda.

By P.C. Staff

The late — and beloved — Kyoko Nancy Oda was in everyone's thoughts May 16 at the San Fernando Valley Japanese American Community Center and San Fernando Valley JACL chapter's Scholarship Awards Luncheon, which took place at the center's Dr. Sanbo Sakaguchi Hall.

"If I start crying, don't mind me," said SFV JACL Chapter President May Wood in reference to Oda (*see June 5, 2026, Pacific Citizen, [tinyurl.com/9e9a3evy](http://tinyurl.com/9e9a3evy)*). Oda, who died the day before, had long served at the SFVJACC and was a member of the SFV JACL chapter.

Noting that 2026 marked the 72nd year since the SFVJACC and SFV JACL have been awarding scholarships, she thanked the scholarship committees, which included Kyoko Oda and her widower, Kay Oda. "They put their heart into reading each application."

Wood then introduced scholarship presenter Troy Kadonaga, a recent University of Southern California graduate who completed his degree in three years and was a scholarship recipient in 2023 and '24. "I'm beyond grateful for the opportunities that I received because of these scholarships, and like May said, I strongly encourage all of today's recipients to come back and stay involved in the community," he told the audience.

For 2026, the three recipients of the Dr. Sanbo Sakaguchi Scholarship for Academic Excellence were Evan Tamotsu Muranaka, Alexa Elizabeth Kogiku Nagasawa and Santiago Eduardo Garcia-Uriarte.

Muranaka, a senior at Chatsworth Charter High School and the valedictorian of his class, plans to attend USC and major in economics. Nagasawa, who was absent because she was competing in a CIF championship track meet, is a senior at Glendale High School and will be attending the University of Texas at Austin in the fall as a film major. Garcia-Uriarte, a senior from Grana-

da Hills Charter High School who attended SFV Japanese Language Institute for seven years, intends to major in nuclear engineering.

The Kay Kazuko Sakaguchi Scholarship for Visual & Performing Arts went to Declan Kento Hirota and Asuka Watanabe. Hirota, a senior at North Hollywood Senior High School, will attend Tongji University in Shanghai, People's Republic of China, to study architecture. Watanabe, a senior at Burbank High School, plans to become a nurse.

The Lily Sakaguchi Thibodeaux Scholarship for Leadership & Service went to Olivia Muratsu Ortega, Tenka Watanabe and Haruki Theodore Panjanon. Ortega, a senior at Louisville High School, also received the SFV JACL Freshman Scholarship, and she plans to major in elementary education.

Burbank High School senior Watanabe plans to study business, and Crescenta Valley High School senior Panjanon plans to double major in economics and Japanese at the University of California, Berkeley. Accepting the award on his behalf was his mother, Yasuko Panjanon.

The Daniel T. Nagasawa MD Scholarship for High School & College Athletes went to University of California, Irvine, student Michaela Okuyama, who is majoring in political science and psychology, and Oakwood School senior Jamie Alexandra Lac, whose plans are to attend New York University and major in sports management.

Serving as the event's mistress of ceremonies was JACL staffer Ariel Imamoto, national membership manager. The invocation was by Rev. James Iwata of Sunrise Japanese Foursquare Church.

The SFVJACC scholarships committee was comprised of Kay Oda, Kyoko Oda, Chisato Kanagi, Leslie Shirasawa and Jaymie Takeshita. The SFV JACL scholarships committee was comprised of Wood, Marcia Mahony, Barbara Okita, Kristen Fujitaki and Linda Tanaka.

Also present at the luncheon was SFVJACC Administrative Director Bing Lau.



Pictured (from left) are May Wood, Santiago Garcia-Uriarte, Declan Hirota, Evan Muranaka, Asuka Watanabe, Olivia Muratsu Ortega, Tenka Watanabe, Jamie Lac, Michaela Okuyama, Bing Lau and Ariel Imamoto. Not pictured are Haruki Panjanon and Alexa Nagasawa.

PHOTO: GEORGE TOSHIO JOHNSTON



# GLA Sends Off Six With Scholarships

Guest speaker Seia Watanabe urges recipients to remain committed to community.

By P.C. Staff

The Greater Los Angeles JACL chapter held its 2026 scholarship luncheon on June 7 in the meeting room of the Torrance Municipal Airport-Zamperini Field in Torrance, Calif., to recognize six former high school students headed to college.

Receiving awards from the chapter were Keerstin Baltazar, H. Miles Dodson, Elena Miyamoto, Ashley Mori, Hikaru Nakasone and River Vu.

Chapter President Mitchell Matsumura introduced the event's speaker, National JACL VP of Public Affairs Seia Watanabe. "This lady here, she's not just involved in one organization, she's involved in multiple organizations," he said, noting her community involvement, past and present, including having served as the Pacific Southwest District's youth representative to JACL's National Youth/Student Council; as a board fellow at the Little Tokyo Service Center; representing the Japanese Restaurant Association of

America for Nisei Week in 2024 as first princess; serving as the social media coordinator for the Little Tokyo Community Council's Go Little Tokyo initiative; and as an organizer with the Manzanar Committee. "She's going to tell us about her experiences with JACL."

Watanabe began with a message to both chapter members and the scholarship recipients. "Scholarship programs like this do more than help students pay for school," she said. "They send a message that our community believes in its future, and that's something worth celebrating."

In another comment, aimed more at the youth, Watanabe began by giving a brief overview of JACL's history, then added her own take on the organization. "If someone asks me what the JACL really is, I give a much simpler answer. The JACL is people. It's people who care enough about their communities to show up. It's people who volunteer their evenings and their weekends because they believe that the future is worth investing in."

"And, it is people who understand



Greater Los Angeles JACL Chapter President Mitchell Matsumura

that the opportunities we enjoy today did not simply happen on their own," Watanabe continued. "The rights we have, the communities we belong to and the spaces that we occupy today exist because of previous generations that chose to organize, advocate and invest in those who came after them, and that investment is why we're gathered here today."

Watanabe also mentioned that the organization is holding its national convention ([jacl.org/2026-national-convention](http://jacl.org/2026-national-convention)) next month.

Following Watanabe's speech, Matsumura later introduced to the gathering two of the chapter's founding members from 1982, Louise Sakamoto and Miyako Kadogawa, and current scholarship chair Matthew Clingerman. He also acknowledged guests Ron Ikejiri, who served



Pictured (from left) are Matthew Clingerman (GLA scholarship chair), Seia Watanabe, River Vu, Elena Miyamoto, Ashley Mori, Keerstin Baltazar, Hikaru Nakasone, H. Miles Dodson and Mitchell Matsumura.

PHOTOS: GEORGE TOSHIO JOHNSTON

previously as JACL's Washington, D.C., representative and is a current candidate for JACL national president, and a reporter from *Pacific Citizen*.

Matsumura then called up each scholarship recipient to speak a bit about themselves.

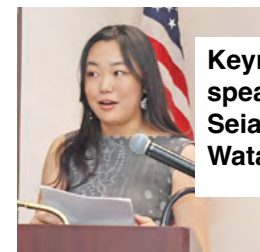
Baltazar noted that she had attended Palos Verdes Peninsula High School in Rolling Hills Estates, Calif., and will be attending the University of California, Santa Barbara, to major in pre-economics. Dodson, who had just graduated from Harvard-Westlake School in Studio City, Calif., said he was headed to Cleveland, Ohio, to attend Case Western Reserve University for "for neurology or premed" and also to play basketball.

Miyamoto said, "I'm probably

going to UC San Diego for cognitive sciences." Mori revealed that she will be moving to New York to attend Syracuse University to major in forensic science.

Nakasone said he would be attending the University of California, Riverside, to major in prebusiness, and Vu said he had just graduated from Marina High School in Huntington Beach, Calif., and was headed to the University of California, Berkeley, to study computer science.

The scholarship presentations were followed by a silent auction. ■



Keynote speaker Seia Watanabe

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# FLORIN JACL-SACRAMENTO VALLEY AWARDS SCHOLARSHIPS

The chapter recognizes five local high school seniors.

By Florin JACL-Sacramento Valley Chapter

The Florin JACL chapter announced the recipients of its 2026 scholarship awards at its annual Ice Cream Social on May 17. This year's winners are outstanding students attending Sacramento area high schools.

Each student applied through the JACL National Scholarship Award Program and was judged by the Florin JACL chapter on achievements in JACL involvement, academic and scholastic honors and extracurricular activities including leadership positions, community service, work history, Japanese cultural activities and a letter of recommendation. Each applicant also participated in a personal interview conducted by the Florin JACL chapter.

Following are this year's honorees:

- **EVAN FUJII-SISLER** is a graduate of Bradshaw Christian High School. During his high school years, he demonstrated a strong commitment to volunteerism, energetic passion for sports and extensive academic achievement.



As the president of the Buddhist Church of Florin's Young Buddhist Assn., he took on various mentorship and public speaking roles. He was a First-Team All-League shortstop, set a new record in the 400 freestyle swim relay and has been a Northern California Swim League Academic All-American. Finally, he has earned recognition as a California Scholarship Federation member and Sierra Nevada

USA Swim scholar-athlete. Next year, Fujii-Sisler will be playing on the University of Puget Sound baseball team.

- **HEATHER KOIKE** has shared her theatrical and musical talents through her roles in various productions while a student at C. K. McClatchy High School. She received the National Young Arts award for Theatre/Musical in 2025 and 2026 and the Lenaea High School Theatre Festival Respondents' Choice Award and Musical Theatre Gold Level in 2025. She



has also volunteered for the Asian Community Center Senior Services Ohana Walk and entertained for the Matsuyama-Sacramento Sister City Corp.'s 40th Anniversary celebration, as well as served as a youth ambassador at the 57th Annual Manzanar Pilgrimage with the Florin JACL. As the social media manager and student advocacy co-organizer for CKM Stands Up! a student-led initiative to educate and uplift students interested in social justice and community change, she has participated and spoken at two school walkouts protesting federal policies that are negatively affecting immigrants, the LGBTQ+ community and people of color. Koike is also the recipient of the Mark Merin Civil Rights Scholarship and Florin JACL's second recipient of the Ayad Al-Qazzaz Outreach Scholarship Endowment for her contributions in the area of diversity beyond the Japanese American community. She plans

to major in musical theater at the University of Hartford.

- **NATHAN LEE** is a graduate of Jesuit High School and intends to pursue a career in the emerging field of regenerative medicine.



During high school, he excelled academically and committed time to volunteer at nonprofit organizations helping those less fortunate. He also served on the elected student council, earned the highest Boy Scout rank of Eagle Scout and received the Fin Award on the varsity swim team. He is also the 2023 recipient of the Thomas Moore Award, which recognizes students who serve as a positive example for other students. Lee has served as the club president of the Asian Pacific Islander Club and president of the Sacramento Buddhist Church Jr. YBA. Lee plans to major in biology at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

- **WREN NISHIO** is a graduate of C. K. McClatchy High School and is dual-enrolled in community college. She is an accomplished pianist and is fluent in Japanese. She is also active in her communi-



ty and school programs, including Jan Ken Po Gakko, Sacramento Buddhist Church Jr YBA, Girl Scouts, Loaves and Fishes, Teens Create Dreams, Strive for Strength, No Kings Rally, Matsuyama Sister City and the Asian Community Center. Nishio has participated in Florin JACL political rallies and Day of Remembrance events with her family for a number of years, as well as annual events such as the Ice Cream Social and Nikkei Dogs. Currently, she is a 2026 Florin JACL youth ambassador for the Manzanar Pilgrimage. Nishio plans to attend the University of California, Los Angeles, and study mechanical engineering.

- **JASELLE UMEDA** is a C. K. McClatchy High School graduate who has earned honor roll recognition all four years with a 4.0 GPA. She is committed to community service, volunteering with the Asian Community Center for four years, including support for the Ohana Walk and volunteering at the Lunar New Year Celebration and Crab Feed in 2025. She also served the South Sacramento Interfaith Partnership Food Closet for four years



and volunteered at the Elk Grove Multicultural Festival. Umeda further supports cultural exchange as a two-year host (2022-23) in the Matsuyama-Sacramento Sisterhood Exchange Program. She is also active in civil rights and social justice, participating in the No Kings rally with fellow Florin JACL members. Umeda will attend the University of California, Santa Barbara, and study applied mathematics.



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Pictured (from left) are Robert Vargas, Hiroshi Kuroyanagi and Edward James Olmos.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF HIROSHI KUROYANAGI

Edward James Olmos (left) and Robert Vargas, donning new pieces from the clothing line, flank Sofia Vergara at the recently held Culture Makers event in June.



Pictured (from left) are Vargas, Jessica Alba and Edward James Olmos donning new fashion pieces at June's Culture Makers event.



Vargas at the naming of "Robert Vargas Square" in Boyle Heights at First and State streets in 2022

PHOTOS: ROBERT VARGAS INSTAGRAM @THEROBERTVARGAS



The Robert Vargas Library and Media Center at Mendez High School in Los Angeles



Robert Vargas (left) and Hiroshi Kuroyanagi in Tokyo

PHOTO: COURTESY OF HIROSHI KUROYANAGI



Vargas paints the 2025 completed mural "Generations," located in Sakata, Yamagata, Japan, which captures Sakata Maiko.

PHOTO: ROBERT VARGAS INSTAGRAM @THEROBERTVARGAS

## FROM WALLS TO WEARABLES

Artist Robert Vargas gives new definition to the term, 'Fresh Coat'

By Athena Mari Askliadis,  
P.C. Contributor

For artist and muralist Robert Vargas, a "fresh coat" has most often meant another layer of paint to transform blank walls into larger-than-life public masterpieces. Today, however, the Los Angeles creative, proudly born and raised in the Boyle Heights neighborhood, is giving the phrase "fresh coat" an entirely new meaning.

Vargas is preparing to step into fashion through a unique new line of kimono-inspired jackets. This new venture sets out to bridge cultures much like the murals he has created that have made him one of Southern California's most-recognizable artists.

This evolution is natural for an artist whose career has been built on storytelling, cultural pride and creating connections between communities.

Vargas, a sixth-generation Mexican American, has long been passionate about his pride for not only his own Latinx roots but also has been using art to express his respect and love for Japanese culture as well.

Whether painting towering tributes from civil rights icons like Dolores Huerta in Downtown L.A. to celebrating Los Angeles' biggest stars in sports through murals honoring Kobe Bryant, Shohei Ohtani and Fernando Valenzuela to name a few, Vargas has consistently used his work to celebrate diversity and unite people.

One of his latest and most-anticipated murals,

"Samurai of the Diamond," completed on the exterior of the DoubleTree by Hilton in Torrance, Calif., continues that mission. Unveiled on March 24, the massive work depicts three Japanese Dodgers pitchers — Shohei Ohtani, Roki Sasaki and Yoshinobu Yamamoto — and it stands as both a tribute to athletic excellence and a celebration of Japanese culture (see April 3-16, 2026, *Pacific Citizen*).

Ten days into production of the mural's creation, Vargas at the time described the project to the *Pacific Citizen* as one of his most technically challenging works to date. "This one was more detailed than other murals," he explained. "It was [also a] completely different vision."

Part of that challenge came from the building itself. Unlike many of his previous projects, the hotel wall featured an extremely corrugated and textured surface that required careful planning and execution. Yet, the mural's significance extended far beyond the technical obstacles presented with the project.

"All of the Dodgers murals are about bridging cultures, creating unity through sport and through the players we choose to paint," Vargas said. "If the Ohtani mural (located on the exterior wall of the Miyako Hotel in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo) was about the new face and new era of the team and league, this mural is about the greatness of Japanese players as a collective, coming here and contributing to this city and country."

For Vargas, placing the mural in Torrance carries special meaning. Home to one of the largest concentrations of Japanese American populations in North America, the city also shares friendship-city relationships with regions connected to both Ohtani and Yamamoto — Ōshū City in Iwate Prefecture (home to Vargas' 2025 mural "The Pride of Ōshū") and Bizen City in Okayama

Robert Vargas was honored with a Key to the City of Torrance plaque by city officials at the unveiling of "Samurai of the Diamond" on March 24.

PHOTO: ATHENA MARI ASKLIADIS





Prefecture, respectively. Vargas was honored by the City of Torrance with a key to the city plaque during the unveiling ceremony.

Vargas personally proposed the Torrance mural project to the hotel and city leadership, helping navigate municipal hurdles that reportedly required local ordinances to be updated before the mural could move forward. These roadblocks are something Vargas was all too familiar with as he had gone through something similar in Los Angeles back in 2013.

At that time, he was a huge proponent of supporting changes to Los Angeles Ordinance No. 182706, amending public art mural regulations so that he and other artists faced less restrictions, bringing forth more large-scale art pieces to the city.

But the red tape and challenges Vargas faces during planning each of his works only seem to fuel his passion and dedication to his projects. Not backing down and producing poignant public displays of artistic activism makes his work not just pretty to look at but also makes a statement about his strength and the strength of the people he depicts.

With “Samurai of the Diamond,” Vargas wanted to create a work that would resonate with local residents and be something visitors from Japan would also seek out and embrace. Just as his 150-foot “L.A. Rising” mural of Ohtani on the Miyako Hotel’s exterior has become a destination for international tourists, Vargas believes that this mural will continue strengthening cultural ties between Los Angeles and Japan. And it will undoubtedly attract more tourism and visitors to Torrance as well.

This project also served as a career milestone for fellow artist Matthew Garcia, who worked alongside Vargas on the mural. Garcia, a native of Pasadena, Calif., is a professional muralist known for his acrylic and enamel work. He had known Vargas as a friend for several years before joining him on “Samurai of the Diamond,” their first full project together. Having first heard about another mural unveiling through Instagram years prior, Garcia welcomed the opportunity to contribute to a work with such cultural significance.

In addition to his individual works that can be seen at [glossolalianarts.com](http://glossolalianarts.com), Garcia paints for a commercial mural company that specializes in large-scale projects, including skyscraper installations. Like Vargas, he sees public art as a vehicle for inspiring younger generations.

Garcia believes murals can encourage youth to discover purpose and recognize their own potential, a philosophy that aligns closely with Vargas’ longstanding commitment to community engagement and the future.

That commitment has earned Vargas recognition beyond the art world.

In recent years, Los Angeles County and the City of Los Angeles have celebrated his contributions through official proclamations and the naming of Robert Vargas Square in Boyle Heights. Most recently, May 12 was designated “Robert Vargas Day” by the Los Angeles Unified School District in recognition of his impact on arts education and community pride. Mendez High School in Boyle Heights is also now home to the new Robert Vargas Library and Media Center, honoring his legacy of service and artistic achievement.

Speaking at the LAUSD dedication ceremony at Mendez High School just this month, Vargas reflected on the responsibility he feels while creating work depicted in his hometown.

“I’ve painted from Tokyo to Dubai, Paris to Melbourne, but when I create murals here at home in Los Angeles, I feel parental about the kind of messaging that I put out there,” he said. “I’ve always felt that an artist has the ability to shape the way a city’s history is written, and with each piece I am able to do just that.”

He also encouraged students to continue dreaming, creating and advocating for opportunities for self-expression through the arts.

That same spirit of cultural exchange is now extending

into clothing. Not a complete stranger to fashion, Vargas has attended local Fashion Week events and even hosted fashion/art events in the past. Also known for painting live art portraits, Vargas has even been known to take a brush to clothing and even skin, producing instant wearable art. But his newest passion will bring a line to the masses by producing high-quality pieces.

For months, Vargas has been quietly wearing prototypes of kimono-inspired jackets while traveling between Los Angeles and Japan.

His upcoming collection, expected to launch in late 2026 or early 2027, will feature upcycled vintage kimonos transformed into contemporary wearable pieces including happi-style coats, blazer-inspired silhouettes, hooded jackets and streetwear designs. The garments will be unisex and sold in both Japan and the U.S., first online, but hopefully eventually in retail stores as well.

Leading the production effort in Japan is Hiroshi Kuroyanagi, Vargas’ Japanese counterpart and business partner, who has spent years developing the concept through his brand, J Samurai.

Kuroyanagi, a native of Fukuoka in Japan’s Kyushu region, refers to himself as a typical “Kyushu danji” (九州男児) even though he has spent equal amounts of time in both the U.S. and Japan.

Kuroyanagi first met Vargas while watching a Dodgers game in Little Tokyo at a local eatery with his son. If his last name sounds familiar, it’s because his son is actually Roy Kuroyanagi, founder of the popular Little Tokyo-based brand Japangeles.

Roy made the introduction between his father and Vargas, which led to him sharing examples of his kimono remake jackets. Vargas, accompanied by actor and friend Edward James Olmos, was immediately impressed with the jackets and loved the designs.

One of the pieces presented that evening had actually been custom-made for actor Nicolas Cage, but Hiroshi Kuroyanagi later fulfilled his promise to create original jackets specifically for Vargas and Olmos. Those designs have since become staples that both men have worn in their public appearances at multiple high-profile cultural and entertainment events throughout Los Angeles.

For Hiroshi Kuroyanagi, the project represents more than fashion. “The kimono is one of the most iconic symbols of Japanese culture,” he said. “By transforming kimonos into jackets that are easier to wear casually and comfortably throughout the year, I hoped to create opportunities for people around the world to connect with Japanese culture.”

He believes that Vargas is uniquely suited to help share that vision. “Robert is the ideal person to represent that vision,” Kuroyanagi said. “He has already created numerous outstanding murals celebrating Japanese and Japanese American culture. He genuinely loves Japan and possesses a deep understanding of Japanese culture.”

Their partnership reflects a philosophy Vargas often speaks about: allyship. “Supporting each other is so important,” Vargas said. “If only one group is advocating for itself, that’s one thing. But when people from different backgrounds come together and support each other, the message becomes stronger.”

That belief can be seen in every chapter of Vargas’ career — from murals honoring Japanese baseball stars and civil rights icons to educational outreach and now fashion.

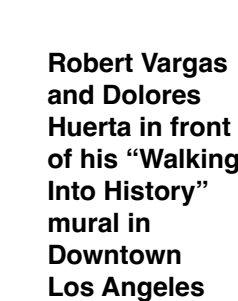
Whether wielding a paintbrush or reimagining centuries-old textiles into modern garments, Vargas remains focused on his mission. Although his canvas may be changing, the message remains unmistakably the same: building bridges, creating representation and pride and inspiring the next generation of creatives.

**Keep up with Robert Vargas on his Instagram at [@therobertvargas](https://www.instagram.com/therobertvargas) or visit [www.instagram.com/therobertvargas](http://www.instagram.com/therobertvargas). To learn more about Hiroshi Kuroyanagi’s J Samurai brand, visit <https://lj-samurai.com>.**



**Members of the Los Angeles Taiko Collective pose in front of Vargas’ “Samurai of the Diamond” mural at its unveiling ceremony on March 24.**

PHOTO: ATHENA MARI ASKLIPIADIS



**Robert Vargas and Dolores Huerta in front of his “Walking Into History” mural in Downtown Los Angeles**

PHOTOS: ROBERT VARGAS INSTAGRAM @THEROBERTVARGAS



**“Geisha Walking in a Dream” mural in DTLA 2017, inspired by Vargas’ trip to Kyoto.**



**Vargas’ “Together We Stand” Kobe Bryant mural is located in Culver City, Calif.**



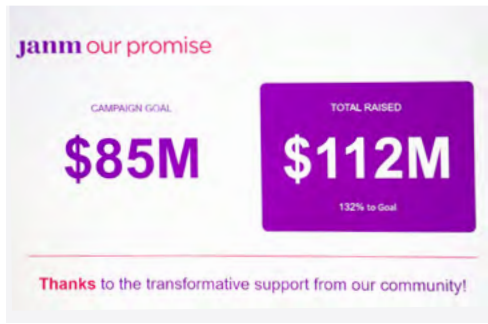


MS NOW's Rachel Maddow speaks to the audience via a recorded video to accept her Award of Excellence award.

PHOTOS: GEORGE TOSHIO JOHNSTON

# JANM GALA THROWS DOWN \$112 MIL GAUNTLET

Efforts to rollback gains, scrub history instead stoke fundraising goals.



A slide showing the total amount raised for JANM's "Our Promise" campaign

MS NOW producers Michael Yarvitz and Kelsey Desiderio accepted Maddow's award on her behalf.



By George Toshio Johnston,  
P.C. Senior Editor

**I**f an institution is created to preserve the lessons of constitutional failure, if an institution that is founded to do that cannot speak clearly in a moment when democracy is under strain, then it ceases to fulfill the purpose of which it is created."

With those words, said at the museum's May 30 JANM Gala & Online Auction, the theme for which was "Forging Inspiring Paths for Future Generations," Japanese American National Museum President and CEO Ann Burroughs encapsulated how JANM and its "Our Promise" initiative managed to reach and surpass the \$65 million fundraising goal — later increased to \$85 million — it had set for itself well in advance of Jan. 20, 2025.

That was, of course, the day when a new administration — bent on ratcheting back hard-won civil rights, overturning parts of the Constitution it opposes and scrubbing from view histories that need to be remembered and repaired in order to become a more perfect union — took the reins of political power.

"At JANM, we've preserved history because memory is power," Burroughs added. "It's the power to decide whose stories are told, who tells them, whose histories are remembered, and ultimately, it's the power to share the future."

It is a mission that, of course, needs funds to

execute. Thanks to a committed community and an array of Signature, Diamond, Emerald, Platinum and Gold sponsors, plus help from deep-pocketed philanthropist MacKenzie Scott (\$10 million in 2021, \$20 million in 2025), the mission rocketed past the reset goal of \$85 million.

A slide projected for the throng gathered at the JW Marriott in downtown Los Angeles said it all: "Our Promise" had raised \$112 million. And that was before the more than \$1.3 million raised that evening, which honored actress and activist Tamlyn Tomita with a Lifetime Achievement Award and MS NOW TV journalist Rachel Maddow with an Award of Excellence for hosting and producing the podcast "Rachel Maddow Presents Burn Order" (see April 17, 2026, *Pacific Citizen*, [tinyurl.com/483t4ktk](https://tinyurl.com/483t4ktk)).

Reprising his role as master of ceremonies was KTLA news anchor Frank Buckley, who amused the audience with the long-running roust-athon between himself and local TV news rival David Ono, news anchor at KABC, who was on hand to present Tomita with her award.

"I actually have a great respect for David, and I love my fellow JA David Ono. Not as much as David Ono loves David Ono," Buckley said, garnering laughs from the audience.

"Frank and I are dear friends. This whole rivalry thing — we just love to make sport out of it," Ono said before

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Ken Inouye and Tamlyn Tomita tout JANM's Bid for Education. Tomita also received a Lifetime Achievement Award during the evening's festivities.



KABC TV news anchor David Ono

introducing Tomita. "As you know, there is no rivalry because a rivalry is two people who actually are close competitors, and there is no competition here."

Waxing serious, Ono said of Tomita: "Since I met her, she took me under her wing," referring to the bond Tomita and he developed after he began to work for KABC in the 1990s and the two started co-hosting community events. "And I was just young and new in Los Angeles. And she helped me understand this community."

In a heartfelt address, Tomita, who had just returned from Salt Lake City for a performance of Ono's "Defining Courage" (see Nov. 4, 2022, *Pacific Citizen*, [tinyurl.com/53nyx29t](https://www.pacificcitizen.com/53nyx29t)), said, "I've been crying all day ever since I boarded the plane from Salt Lake because I didn't know what to say except to thank every single one of you here."

Maddow, who was "literally on the other side of the world" and unable to attend in person, spoke to the audience via a recorded video. She called the experience of working on "Burn Order" one of the "most humbling and moving experiences of my professional life."

Accepting the award for on her behalf were MS Now colleagues Michael Yartz and Kelsey Desiderio, who also produced "Burn Order." Yartz also name-checked MS Now senior producer Jen Mulreany Donovan.

"We say never again, and we mean it because we know what happened thanks to you. We know its damage and its chaos and the scars it has left for generations," Maddow said in the video. "By knowing that history, we know we also have a responsibility to make sure that those who come after us know it, too."

On video also with live piano accompaniment by Benet Braun following dinner was an in memoriam segment that recognized those in the JANM and Japanese American communities who died since last year's gala: *Pacific Citizen* columnist Marsha Aizumi, Virgene Kyoko Doyle, Bill Fukushima, Ina Goodwin Tateuchi, Professor Art Hansen, Masako Kato, Barbara Reiko Mikami Keimi, Andie Kimura, Lou Kitashima, Yoichi Komiyama, June

Kurusu, Leland Kurisu, Tom Matano, Nancy Matsui, Ken Mochizuki, Robert Nakamura, Yosh Nakamura, Mary Kageyama Nomura, Kyoko Oda, Sadako Sogioka, George Sugimoto, Norman Sugimoto, Lilli Tanaka, Helen Tsuyuki, Agnes Uchida, Florence Uchida, Tim Uragami, Douglas Urata, Robert Davies Volk, Mary Yamasaki and Henry Yasuda.

Following dinner, Tomita returned to the stage with fellow JANM Governors Jennifer Hirano and Ken Inouye to spotlight and raise funds for JANM's Bid for Education program, which was created in 2000 by the late Sen. Daniel Inouye. Tomita told the audience the goal for the evening had been to reach \$250,000, and that the total had actually reached \$378,623 — and with the \$47,115 raised from the auction, Bid for Education had raised \$425,738.

The evening's entertainment was a musical performance by vocalist Davis Gaines, most famous for performing the title role in "The Phantom of the Opera" more than 2,000 times. Jazz Crosswinds also provided music for the event.

To watch a recording of the 2026 JANM Gala & Online Auction, go to [tinyurl.com/yz7h8kmz](https://tinyurl.com/yz7h8kmz).



JANM President and CEO Ann Burroughs



JANM Board of Trustees Chair Bill Fujioka

## JANM Welcomes the Future

Takei energizes an Interactive StoryFile digital avatar project.

It's the stuff of science fiction: transcending death by uploading one's consciousness, memories and life-experiences tethered to this limited corporeal existence into an unlimited, eternal and digital incarnation.

Although that scenario is likely still decades away should it ever really happen, the next-best thing available with today's technology is a digital avatar derived from hours of recordings made with a living human subject that gives a simulacrum of interactivity.

It was only fitting that actor George Takei, who played an iconic character in one of science fiction's most-beloved and most-influential properties became one of five Japanese Americans to have a digital avatar made in his name, image and likeness that will, barring a hard-drive crash or other such high-tech mishap, "live long and prosper" well beyond the bounds of human mortality.

The real George Takei — as far as we know — was on hand at the Japanese American National Museum's Democracy Forum venue in Little Tokyo on March 19 for a press preview as the latest example of the museum's Interactive StoryFile program.

"This is a thrilling morning for me, certainly, but for all of us," Takei said. "I am very excited of the idea of going from here in the Democracy Forum of the Japanese American National Museum, from here to eternity."

JANM's Interactive StoryFile project, an initiative led by Cole Kawana of the nonprofit Japanese American Stories, goes back to 2019, when World War II and 100th Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team veteran Lawson Sakai became the first of five Japanese Americans to get the "Tron" treatment.

The largest public display of this technology came in 2023 at JANM's 2023 gala (see June 2, 2023, *Pacific Citizen*, [tinyurl.com/5ekjwkb](https://www.pacificcitizen.com/5ekjwkb)). It was at that event when June Yasuno Aochi Berk and Kawana showed off her digital avatar.

Along with Berk and Takei, in person on March 19 was Takashi Hoshizaki. The fifth subject, Mary Murakami, was not present to provide real-life answers to real-life



The larger-than-life digital avatar of George Takei looms over the actual George Takei.

PHOTOS: GEORGE TOSHIO JOHNSTON



The digital June Berk looks on as the real June Berk shows off a copy of her favorite newspaper.

questions about the significance of the project and the prospect of going digital.

"This opportunity that we were given by Cole Kawana is really, for me, an overwhelming opportunity to keep on keeping on beyond today in this form," said Takei.

The five interactive StoryFile displays will be included at JANM after the in-progress renovations are completed early next year.

To see how this StoryFile technology works and interact with the digital avatars of Berk, Hoshizaki, Murakami, Sakai, who died in 2020, and Takei, visit [project-heirloom.com/storyfiles](https://project-heirloom.com/storyfiles).

— G. T. J.



JANM President and CEO Ann Burroughs stands in front of George Takei's digital avatar.



Pictured (from left) are Takashi Hoshizaki, June Yasuno Aochi Berk, George Takei, Cole Kawana, Ann Burroughs, Bill Fujioka, Dana Heatherton and Carolyn Hoover.



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 and mixers.  
**Info: Visit [www.jacl.org/2026-national-convention](http://www.jacl.org/2026-national-convention).**

**Ireicho Tour to Former Confinement Sites & Other Places**  
National Stops:  
July 4-5: Tule Lake, CA  
Oct. 10-11: St. Paul, MN  
**Info: Visit <https://www.janm.org/exhibits/ireicho/venues>.**

INTL.

**Nikkei Garden Market 2026**  
Burnaby, BC  
July 4; 11 a.m.-4 p.m.  
Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre  
6688 Southoaks Crescent  
Price: Free  
The museum will transform itself into a beautiful Japanese summer market featuring local community artisans, delicious Japanese street food, a tanabata wishing station, interactive kids activities and much more!  
**Info: Visit [centre.nikkeiplace.org](http://centre.nikkeiplace.org).**

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](http://nvnvets.org/exhibit).**

**San Jose Obon**  
San Jose, CA

July 11, Noon-10 p.m.; July 12, Noon-9 p.m.  
**San Jose Buddhist Church Betsuin**  
640 N. Fifth St.  
Price: Free  
This family event, one of the largest Obon gatherings, honors family, community and is a time of reflection and gratitude. Come enjoy delicious food, dancing, cultural exhibits and crafts and games for all.  
**Info: Visit [sjbetsuin.org](http://sjbetsuin.org).**

**‘America’s Last Concentration Camp: Crystal City’**  
Emeryville, CA  
Thru July 22  
J-Sei Gallery  
1285 66th St.  
Price: Free  
This traveling exhibit, presented by the Crystal City Pilgrimage Committee, features interpretive panels depicting stories of the families who were incarcerated at Crystal City during WWII.  
This exhibit is open during gallery hours, Mon., Tues., Thurs., Fri. 2-5 p.m. or by appointment.  
**Info: Visit [j-sei.org](http://j-sei.org).**

**Summer Sake Fundraiser 2026**  
San Jose, CA  
Aug. 15; 4-6 p.m.  
Japanese American Museum of San Jose  
535 N. Fifth St.  
Price: Tickets \$135 Early Bird  
Now in its sixth year, this event celebrates the historical significance of sake and will feature a local winery and brewery as well as shochu in addition to culinary offerings while raising money for museum operations.  
**Info: Visit <http://jamsj.org>.**

PSW

**GVJCI 76th Annual Matsuri Fundraiser**  
Gardena, CA  
June 27; 10 a.m.-7 p.m.  
Gardena Valley Japanese Cultural Institute  
1964 W. 162nd St.  
Price: Free  
This South Bay tradition is the GVJCI’s largest fundraiser and all are welcome to enjoy food, games, raffle, beer garden, crafts, entertainment and much more!  
**Info: Visit <https://www.jci-gardena.org>.**

**Film Screening of ‘Nobuko Miyamoto: A Song in Movement’**  
San Marino, CA  
June 28; 3-4:30 p.m.  
Huntington Library  
1151 Oxford Road

**Price: Museum Entry Fee**  
Join JANM at this special screening of Todashi Nakamura’s film, which chronicles the life of L.A.-born artist, dancer, singer, author and activist Nobuko Miyamoto.  
**Info: For tickets, visit <https://www.huntington.org/event/land-community-festival>.**

**Sake in the Park: The ‘Tokubetsu’ Edition**  
Los Angeles, CA  
July 24; 7-10 p.m.  
Gloria Molina Grand Park DTLA  
200 N. Grand Ave.  
Price: Tickets \$250 With Code EAR-LYBIRD by June 30; \$300 After  
This curated dinner menu will feature expert sake pairings by Mutual Trading, tray-passed premium sake tastings, lively music and entertainment, raffle and an all-you-can-eat-and-drink experience to benefit the Little Tokyo Service Center.  
**Info: Visit [ltsc.org](http://ltsc.org).**

**Natsumatsuri Family Festival**  
Los Angeles, CA  
Aug. 15; 11 a.m.-3 p.m.  
The Terasaki Budokan  
249 S. Los Angeles St.  
Price: Free  
This festival, presented by JANM to celebrate the summer season, will feature cultural performances, crafts and activities for families and kids of all ages.  
**Info: Visit [www.janm.org/OnTheGo](http://www.janm.org/OnTheGo).**

**‘Washoku: Nature and Culture in Japanese Cuisine’**  
Los Angeles, CA  
Thru 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](http://japanhousela.com).**

PNW

**Fuji to Hood**  
Portland, OR  
July 18; 11 a.m.  
831 S.E. Salmon St.  
Price: Tickets Available for Purchase  
This festival partners 25 breweries and cidermakers from Oregon with 25 from Japan, as well as features Japanese artists and vendors, entertainment, food and cultural performances.

**Info: Visit <https://www.merctickets.com> for tickets.**

**‘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](http://ohs.org).**

MDC

**Summer Obon Festival**  
St. Paul, MN  
Aug. 16  
Como Park  
1199 Midway 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](http://tcjacl.org) to help volunteer.**

IDC

**Wine Dinner Fundraiser**  
Salt Lake City, UT  
June 20  
Salt Lake Buddhist Temple  
211 W. 100 S  
Price: \$80 Plus Suggested Tip  
This special fundraiser dinner features a five-course meal with wine pairings. Funds raised benefit the temple’s youth group. It is customary for attendees to tip either \$10 or \$15, which is given to guest chefs who volunteer their time for this event.  
**Info: To register, visit <https://www.slbuddhist.org/new-products-1/wine-dinner-seating>.**

**Amache Community Open House**  
Granada, CO  
July 4  
Amache National Historic Site  
Price: Free  
All are welcome to attend and learn about the history of Amache and the Japanese American incarceration and two archaeologists study it. This event includes tours of the site and activities at the Amache Museum.  
**Info: To attend, fill out an RSVP form at <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSciJ89lwOo2wPOsvQdx-QsA6NDV9GZY85lzs1yHIMFXag5D-QEg/viewform?pli=1>.**

**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](http://heartmountain.org).**

EDC

**7th Annual Day of Affirmation**  
Washington, D.C.  
July 18; 9 a.m.  
National WWII Memorial  
1750 Independence Ave. SW  
Price: Free  
This ceremony commemorates the 80th anniversary of the Day of Affirmation, honoring the historic legacy of President Truman’s 1946 address of the service, patriotism and sacrifice of JA veterans. The keynote speech will be given by Clifford Truman Daniel, President Truman’s grandson.  
**Info: Visit <https://java-us.org/>.**

**Seabrook 81st Obon**  
Bridgeton, NJ  
July 18  
Seabrook Buddhist Temple  
9 Northville Road  
Price: Free  
Come celebrate Japanese culture, community and tradition! Enjoy Bon Odori dancing, taiko drumming, delicious food and family-friendly fun. A free souvenir booklet will be given to every attendee.  
**Info: Visit [sbtnj.org](http://sbtnj.org).**

**‘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 Japanese American war sacrifice home to Florida, exploring the historic Yamato colony.  
**Info: Visit [morikami.org](http://morikami.org).**

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# In MEMORIAM

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

**Bray, Kazuko Nakata, 98,** Las Vegas, Jan. 11.

**Cutlip, Yukiko, 95,** Centerville, OH, June 6.

**Edwards, Miharū Okano, 72,** San Diego, CA, June 8.



**Fujimoto, Susan, 73,** Pleasant Hill, CA, June 4.

**Galletta, Takako, 66,** Huber Heights, OH, May 21.



**Higashi, Hazel, 95,** Woodland Hills, CA, Aug. 25, 2025.



**Inouye, Edith Misao, 88,** Honolulu, HI, March 16.



**Kawasaki, Charles 'Charlie' Mitsuo, 92,** Pearl City, HI, Jan. 1.

**Kishiyama, Dale Akira, 59,** Pleasant Hill, CA, June 4.

**Kobayashi, Chiyoko 'Chiyo,' 100,** Lompoc, CA, April 3.

**Lum, Marlene Mitsuko, 86,** Los Angeles, CA, March 23.



**Masuda Jr., Dan Thomas, 46,** San Jose, CA, March 20.

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



**Nagasawa, Joe, 89,** Sacramento, CA, Dec. 20, 2025.

**Najima, Irene Miyoko, 98,** Honolulu, HI, March 15.

**Nakagiri, Daniel Akira, 77,** Los Angeles, CA, April 25.

**Nakamura, Alice (Smulligan), 78,** Ann Arbor, MI, April 2.



**Osato, Reiko Nakashima, 95,** Vancouver, WA, Nov. 19, 2025.

**Oyenoki, Lily, 83,** Santa Ana, CA, March 29.



**Pirie, Hideko, 81,** Alexandria, VA, Feb. 13.

**Rampenthal, Hiroko, 89,** Santa Maria, CA, May 19.

**Setoguchi, Toshie, 88,** Torrance, CA, March 31.

**Sugihara, Shawanna Perkins, 86,** Layton, UT, March 2

**Tanabe, Ann T., 94,** Chicago, IL, June 18.



**Takamatsu, Shohei, 94,** Dallas, TX, April 26.

**Tanaka, Carol Hanako, 92,** La Palma, CA, March 27.

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



**Watanabe, Emi, 97,** Sacramento, CA, Dec. 27, 2025.



**Yada, Carolyn Chitoye, 80,** Sacramento, CA, Nov. 27, 2025.

**Yamauchi, Thomas Shinji, 83,** Peoria, AZ, May 30.

## News Briefs

### Judge Orders Restoration of Sites That 'Disparage' Targeted by EO 14253

In support of plaintiffs opposed to rewriting the "Nation's history with a white-out pen," U.S. District Judge Angel Kelley issued a preliminary injunction against Executive Order 14253, signed March 27, 2025, by President Donald Trump that called for the removal of elements that "inappropriately disparage Americans past or living" at federal museums, parks and landmarks. Kelly's order was a result of a lawsuit filed to counteract National Park Service policies that forced staff to, according to the *Associated Press*, "remove or censor dozens of exhibits that share factually accurate and relevant U.S. history and scientific knowledge, including about slavery and climate change." Furthermore, the judge ordered the Trump administration to provide a weekly status report on progress made with regard to the restoration of the sites altered as a result of the executive order. Organizations that filed the lawsuit included the National Parks Conservation Assn. and the Association of National Park Rangers.

### Torrance, Calif.: Chen, Kaji, Muratsuchi Appear to Be Out in South Bay

According to the *Daily Breeze*, results from the June 2 primary election show that three Asian American politicians based in Los Angeles's South Bay — Torrance, Calif. Mayor George Chen, Torrance City Councilmember Jon Kaji and Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi — have lost their bids for re-election (in the cases of Chen and Kaji) and in the case of the termed-out California assemblymember, his bid to become the state's superintendent of public instruction. Chen's rival, Councilmember Sharon Kalani, leads Chen with 51.36 percent of the votes vs. his 48.64 percent. Kaji's opponent in the race for the First City Council District seat, Planning Commission Chair David Kartsonis, had 60.85 percent of the vote vs. Kaji's 39.15 percent. In the race to see who will face-off on the ballot for November's general election in the public instruction superintendent race, Republican Sonja Shaw, president of the Board of Education for Chino Valley Unified in San Bernardino County leads in the vote tally, followed by Democrat Richard Barrera, who heads the board of San Diego Unified School District. In a Facebook post, Muratsuchi thanked "everyone who supported me and my campaign . . ."

### Matsushita Honored for 57 Years at Japanese American National Library

Japanese American Religious Federation Housing Inc. gave its Pioneer and Preserving Leadership Award to Karl Kaoru Matsushita for his 57 years of service as the director of the San Francisco-based Japanese American National Library, which preserves and collects Japanese and Asian American publications, photographs and other historical artifacts. Over the decades, Matsushita's efforts included collecting and compiling several Japanese American community newspapers, including *Pacific Citizen*, *Nichi Bei Times*, *Hokubei Mainichi*, *Nikkei West*, *Rafu Shimpo*, *Kashu Mainichi Shinbun*, *Shinichi Bei*, *Japanese American Courier*, *New York Nichi Bei*, *Chicago Shimpo*, *Rocky Mountain Jiho*, *Utah Nippo* and more.

### Duly Noted: AAJA to Honor Ann Curry With Visibility Award at Convention

The Asian American Journalists Assn. also announced that the TV journalist will be the keynote speaker. It takes place June 24-28 in Minneapolis. ♪ Keiro President and CEO Beverly Ito has announced she will retire at the end of 2026. ♪ The Little Tokyo Service Center has announced that Takao Suzuki will become its sole executive director this fall. ♪ Garrett Oyama, a first-year Ph.D. student at the UCLA Department of Communication, was awarded a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship.

— P.C. Staff

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