

Expect 2016 to Bring Attention to the JA Community and the Role It Has Played in the Civil Rights Movement in America

By Toshi Abe, VP of Membership

Happy New Year everyone! Our best wishes to you and your family for a healthy and happy 2016.

As many of you know, 2015 was a year full of surprises and disruptions for many of us, and I'd like to address some of them in the space afforded me.

First of all, I want to apologize to our members for the ill-timed decision by the National Board to take our *Pacific Citizen* to an all-digital format. It was disruptive for our members, and we heard you, loud and clear.

For now, your newspaper will continue to be printed and mailed to every member who wants it that way. But the fact remains that our newspaper needs full funding in order to successfully continue on as a publication of the JACL.

In this coming year, the National Board and the National Council will have to decide how to find the funds to keep our award-winning newspaper a vital program of the JACL. One way you can help is to make sure you renew your membership and even consider becoming a premium member of JACL. Another way to help is to take out an ad in the *P.C.* to advertise your profession or business. And, if you have not yet given to either the JACL's annual fund drive or the *Pacific Citizen's* Spring Campaign, you can show your support by contributing to either campaign. *Domo Arigato.*

Last year also saw our community rise up in opposition to a planned auction of a collection of hundreds of artifacts from the incarceration camps of World War II. These items were originally collected by Allen H. Eaton, a well-known advocate of the Arts and Crafts movement in America.

As you know, the collection was slated to be auctioned off by the Rago Arts and Auction House this past April. The auction was canceled after the intervention of the Japanese American National Museum and one of their prominent board members, George Takei, as well as by the thousands of people, many of them JACLers, who signed the online petition and wrote to the auction house owners.

The Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation was also engaged and was prepared to file a lawsuit to halt the auction. Many of you also posted very heartfelt comments to the Facebook page created by the ad hoc committee Japanese American History Not for Sale.

The statistics from the Facebook page showed that our community's protest was heard and supported by people from around the world. At least 25,000 people, according to Facebook, heard and supported us in our opposition to the sale.

My wife and I were fortunate to be present at the Rago auction house on the evening that David Rago announced the cancelation of the sale. Shortly thereafter, the entire collection was obtained by JANM and is currently being catalogued and restored by their staff.

There is a great deal of interest in having these artifacts displayed, and a working group has been formed to work with JANM to help determine how best to proceed to accommodate requests to have items circulated for display in camp museums and other places.

The year also saw the Broadway premiere of "Allegiance" after its record-breaking run in 2012 at San Diego's Old Globe Theater. The musical play stars George Takei, Telly Leung and Lea Salonga and is based on Mr. Takei's experiences in camp.

The Masaoka family and JACL have protested the depiction of JACL and Mike Masaoka in the play, and so we went with some trepidation when we saw the show last November in New York.

The producers did make changes to the original production in deference to requests from JACL and others. Seeing the story of our community unfold onstage pulled me in, and it was an emotionally satisfying experience (*I highly recommend that you read Matthew Ormseth's "Lasting Loyalty" article in the Holiday issues of the P.C.*).

The musical just announced that its current run will end on Feb. 14, so if you have been planning to see it, time is running out.

Both the musical "Allegiance" and the cancelation of the Rago auction in 2015 brought added attention to the Japanese American community's story in the mainstream press, and with the current situation with the Syrian immigrants coming to the U.S. to live, I expect 2016 to bring even more attention to our community and the role it has played in the civil rights movement in this nation.