



# PACIFIC CITIZEN

eryn kimura's  
"Redevelopment"  
PHOTO: EMILY MURASE



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JACL Holds  
Quarterly Board  
Meeting in SF.

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Advocates  
Demand an  
End to Child  
Detention.

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## SF JAPANTOWN ARTISTS THRIVE

Embracing their cultural heritage,  
impactful works are being created.



REIMAGINE EVERYTHING

PREPARING TO CARE FOR OUR LOVED ONES

By JR Fujita

Often come across friends who are starting to provide care for their loved ones — and it can be a big challenge when they are working and have children of their own.

A major health concern, a sudden loss of a loved one or perhaps it is simply the aging process when we discover caregiving becomes our new reality.

neighbors, someone from church or even our pets.

We just do it because we love our family, and we know they may not ask for assistance. Eighty percent of all long-term care in the U.S. is provided by unpaid family caregivers.

When the Covid-19 pandemic arrived, we found ourselves in a different position — providing care for those in our homes and those around us with a bigger priority to keep each other as safe as possible.

We discovered that caregiving responsibilities included running errands, medication and financial management, assisting with medical appointments, meal preparation or delivery, providing transportation, home and yard maintenance or helping with daily living duties and chores.

As the new normal goes forward, we are hopefully more prepared to shift and care for our loved ones. AARP offers a variety of free resources for working, family caregivers at www.aarp.org/work/caregiving-resources/.

AARP's Prepare to Care resource guides are free resources to help plan for future caregiving needs. The guides are available in several versions, including English, Chinese and Spanish.

Veterans/Service Members and their families and LGBTQ communities. They can be found online at www.aarp.org/preparetocare. You can also request a free printed copy by calling AARP at (877) 333-5885 and select option 1.

AARP also offers a free, live Prepare to Care Workshop — in person and online. To find and register for an upcoming Prepare to Care Workshop, please visit www.aarp.org/nearyou.

The free resources and workshops are valuable and helpful for all of us to become better caregivers — whenever that time will come. Being prepared and planning for our future is one way we can be ready for the caregiving journey that lies ahead.

JR Fujita is a Senior State & Community Engagement Specialist for AARP California and is based in Sacramento.

NAACP HONORS UTAH'S JANI IWAMOTO

The retired U.S. senator receives the Rosa Parks Award.

By Floyd Mori

The Martin Luther King Jr. Luncheon held in January by the Salt Lake Branch of the NAACP honored former Utah State Sen. Jani Iwamoto with its Rosa Parks Award, presented each year to an outstanding woman in the state.

Jeanetta Williams, president of the NAACP Salt Lake Branch, presented the award to Iwamoto, who then gave a moving talk sharing some of her own personal history as an American of Japanese heritage growing up in Salt Lake City.

Iwamoto was born and raised in Salt Lake County, Utah. She graduated from Highland High School and then earned a degree Magna Cum Laude from the University of Utah in mass communications. She then received a law degree from the University of California, Davis, and practiced law as a partner and litigator in Northern California before moving back to Utah.

She then became involved with politics in Utah and was appointed by then-Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. to serve on the Central Utah Water Conservancy District Board of Trustees

and the Court of Appeals Judicial Nominating Committee.

Iwamoto's first elected position was on the Salt Lake County Council, where she served as a council member from 2009-13.

She ran for the Utah State 4th District Senate seat in 2014, which she won. She served as a Utah State Senator until January 2023 after she chose not to run for re-election in 2022.

Iwamoto, the daughter of Nobuo and Yas Iwamoto, is married to Steve Fukumitsu, and they have two children, Nathan and Katie.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF FLOYD MORI

Retired U.S. Sen. Jani Iwamoto receives her NAACP award from NAACP Salt Lake City President Jeanetta Williams.

P.C.'S DAY OF REMEMBRANCE Coverage Coming March 10



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The P.C.'s mission is to 'educate on the past Japanese American experience and preserve, promote and help the current and future AAPI communities.'

\* Your donations will help build and preserve a cohesive library of the Pacific Citizen to educate future generations.\*

I'm glad to see the Pacific Citizen growing and evolving with its website, and especially LOVE the much easier-to-navigate digital archives. It's a treasure trove for JAs to learn about our community's history, and for scholars and journalists looking to connect the past with the present. Thanks for the improvements, P.C.!'

— Gil Asakawa



JACL MEMBERS

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## A MOTHER'S TAKE

### CIRCLE OF LIGHT

By Marsha Aizumi

Light must be a theme starting off this new year for me because once again, the image of light becomes something I am writing about. First, I would like to give you a little back story.

As director of educational programs at the charter school I retired from, the president hired me “to bring your heart to our company, infusing more heart into all we do.” I did not really understand what that meant, but along the way, I began to see how I could do that.

I would create moments that I hoped would stay with people and

allow them to bring greater openness, caring and acceptance to work. One of the “heart” pieces I created was an award called “Circle of Light.”

I believe it is one of the company’s highest honors because the nominations come from people you work with. One employee per year per region is nominated that is a light to the company and serves as a role model for others.

I had just come back from Washington, D.C., where I saw the signing of the Respect for Marriage Act at the White House. I was still filled with awe of the experience when I received a text from Aiden: “I got the Circle of Light Award!”

My heart just burst open with happiness for him. Later, he sent me videos that other employees had taken of the moment, and I could feel the emotion well up inside of me. Something I had created 20 years ago had come back to honor my son, who for so many years didn’t think that he was worthy of love and respect.

In Aiden’s nomination, co-workers said that Aiden was “the heart of his center and the heart of his region.” He embodies “compassion and resilience,” “goes all-in to exhibit school spirit” and is “the epitome of your favorite co-worker.”

For the longest time, Aiden hid his true self and lived in the shadows of doubt, fear and low self-esteem. I still get choked up when I read these words because for so long, he tried to be as invisible as possible.

This Circle of Light award affirmed that he could be an openly transgender individual, live authentically and openly and be loved and respected for all he is. He didn’t feel he had

to hide at work.

Part of the reason I write these articles is to find people in our JA/API community that are a light for others to follow as well. We often conceal from others, like Aiden did, areas that we believe are shameful, and yet these stories can give hope to others.

My article last month about Tad is one of these individuals, but also my stories about families with children who have faced mental health challenges, Down Syndrome, Autism, divorce or estrangement.

People have shared with me that reading stories such as these made them feel like there are others who have traveled a similar path and have emerged stronger and more confident in facing their challenges. These stories are a beacon of hope for others living in darkness and uncertainty.

A light is visible, but it can be soft or harsh, bright or dim. It can be scary to be a light that stands out and illuminates. Some people may want to blow out our light, but let

us be courageous, not letting our light be extinguished. Let us be a light that chases away fear, shame and sadness . . . a circle of light that brings people together, warms their hearts and makes them want to shine. I want to be that kind of light.

*Marsha Aizumi is an advocate for the LGBTQ+ community and author of the book “Two Spirits, One Heart: A Mother, Her Transgender Son and Their Journey to Love and Acceptance.”*



**Aiden (right), dressed for his holiday party, receives the 2022 Circle of Light award from his principal.**

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARSHA AIZUMI



## LEGAL-EASE: AN ATTORNEY'S PERSPECTIVE

### STOP CHEMICAL RESTRAINTS IN NURSING HOMES!

By Judd Matsunaga, Esq.

Did you know that 70 percent of people who reach the age of 65 will need long-term care at some point in life? Currently in the U.S., there are about 1.25 million people who live in nursing homes and 810,000 people who live in assisted living facilities. By 2050, it’s estimated that this number will more than triple, making the need for nursing homes more significant than ever (*source: www.zippia.com/advice/nursing-home-statistics, Dec. 19, 2022*).

If you have a loved one in a nursing home (or may be in one soon), it is important to know that not all nursing homes are the same. Some are better than others. In order to make sure your loved one gets the best of care, try to find the best facility that is convenient for you to visit often. Why? Studies have shown that nursing home residents who get visited regularly tend to get better care.

You would think that for all the money these facilities are charging, e.g., \$350 per day, your loved one would get the very best of care. Unfortunately, that’s often not the

case. Approximately 70 percent of all nursing homes are for-profit organizations. That means, it’s often not about your loved one’s best of care, it’s about money.

These for-profit nursing homes make more profit by cutting costs of operation. One of the easiest ways to cut costs is to cut staff. So, how does one caregiver cover the floor that used to have two caregivers? They put the residents to sleep by administering psychoactive drugs that are not intended or approved for their medical conditions. Rather, the drugs are often used to sedate and control them, a terrible substitute for the individualized care they need and deserve.

In addition, the nursing facility regulations provide a right against “chemical restraints,” which can be understood as a medication used to control a resident’s behavior. Specifically, a resident has a right to be free of “chemical restraints imposed for purposes of discipline or convenience, and not required to treat the resident’s medical symptoms.” When chemical restraints are employed, “the facility must use the least restrictive alternative for the least amount of time and document

ongoing re-evaluation of the need for restraints.”

In other words, psychoactive drugs should always be the last resort for treating symptoms of dementia, not the first option. Nursing homes should look first to treating underlying medical problems, relieving pain, improving the environment, personalizing care, engaging the resident in pleasurable activities and doing everything possible to make residents feel comfortable and at peace. This “least-medicating” approach is the key to better dementia care.

Here’s the problem: The increased use of psychoactive drugs in nursing homes has been accompanied by an epidemic disregard for the rights of residents to give or withhold their informed consent. Despite legal requirements, the informed consent of residents or their representatives is often ignored. If the resident is capable of granting or withholding consent, only the resident may do so.

Current initiatives to stop the increased use of psychoactive drugs in nursing homes are flawed because they ignore residents’ decision-making rights, assuming implicitly that facilities have unilateral discretion to administer medication. But nursing facility residents, like any other person, have “informed consent” rights.

If the resident lacks capacity to make a decision, then the resident’s representative may grant or refuse consent. A resident and legal representative can withdraw consent to use a psychoactive drug at any time. Here are some other advocacy tips when psychoactive drugs are proposed:

- You do not have to accept a doctor’s recommendation to use psychoactive drugs.
- Do not give consent if the doctor has not directly examined the resident to determine the need for the drug.
- Antipsychotic drugs can be deadly. Don’t consent to their use unless you are certain that all other care and treatment options have been exhausted.
- Insist that the doctor or nursing home provide written information on adverse consequences of the proposed drugs, including black box warnings.
- Carefully review and consider the written information before making a decision.
- Consider seeking a second opinion from a trusted physician or advocate if you have doubts about giving consent.

Also, periodically request a complete list of current medications from the nursing home and/or review the resident’s medication administration records kept by the facility, especially if unauthorized drug-giving is suspected. If you discover that psychoactive drugs are being used without consent, file a formal complaint.

Before instructing a nursing home to stop administering an unwanted psychoactive drug, seek information on withdrawal symptoms. Sudden termination of many psychoactive

drugs, especially antipsychotic drugs, can cause serious withdrawal symptoms. If such a drug is being stopped, the doctor should write an order to gradually discontinue it.

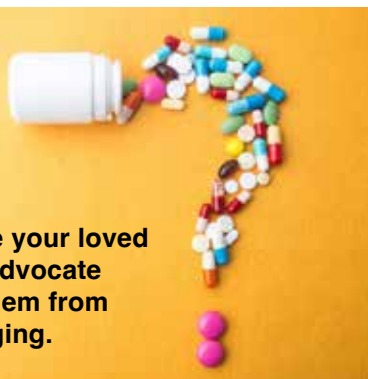
In February 2022, President Joe Biden announced a nursing facility reform initiative that included a proposal to “reinforce safeguards against unnecessary medications and treatments.” The federal government and nursing facilities should revise their policies so that 1) residents receive adequate written information regarding a proposed medication’s benefits and risks and 2) medication is administered only with a resident’s written consent.

In conclusion, the overuse of psychotropics has plagued nursing facilities for decades. Although there are efforts “pending” to reinforce safeguards already in place, you MUST be your loved one’s best advocate to protect them from illegal drugging.

Although Japanese people are known to not complain or “rock the boat,” it’s the squeaky wheel that gets the grease. When you visit, stop by the nurse’s station. Make sure they know you are there making sure they’re taking good care of your loved one.

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

**You must be your loved one’s best advocate to protect them from illegal drugging.**



# JACL NATIONAL BOARD MOVES FORWARD FOR 2023

Annual National Convention, documentary, HQ improvements loom.



David Inoue (left) gives his executive director's report as JACL National President Larry Oda listens intently.

PHOTOS: GEORGE TOSHIO JOHNSTON



Members of the JACL National Board and National Staff present at the organization's San Francisco headquarters on Feb. 4. Pictured (from left, front row) are Phillip Ozaki, Dominique Mashburn, Carol Kawamoto, Larry Oda, Carol Kawase and Sheldon Arakaki and (standing, from left) are Bridgette Watson, Bridget Keaveney, Ashley Bucher, Patty Wada, Matthew Weisbly, Claire Inouye, Seia Watanabe, KC Mukai, Michael Tanaka, Victor Kimura, Michael Asada, Eric Langowski, Ryan Yoshikawa, Lisa Olsen, Michael Nakamura, David Inoue and Cheyenne Cheng.



(From left) JACL's Dominique Mashburn, vp of 1000 Club and membership; Victor Kimura, secretary/treasurer; and Michael Asada, EDC governor

By P.C. Staff

**SAN FRANCISCO** — The rain and cold were not enough to stop the Feb. 4 meeting of the JACL National Board, which conducted its first quarterly business meeting of 2023.

National President Larry Oda ran the proceedings as his cabinet of officers, new appointees and JACL staffers provided updates regarding their respective areas of responsibility.

Oda began by announcing that during the monthly calls, Gary Nakamura of Houston, Texas, accepted the role of vp for planning and development, while John Saito Jr. of Los Angeles — who has served on the *Pacific Citizen* Editorial Board for several years — accepted the role of P.C. Editorial board chair. One position that still needs to be filled is that of national legal counsel.

Reporting first was JACL Executive Director David Inoue. He began on an upbeat note from before the previous year's end, recalling that a pair of funding initiatives — the Norman Y. Mineta Japanese American Confinement Education Act and the Japanese American World War II History Network Act — managed to get included in President Joe Biden's \$1.65 trillion omnibus bill signed on Dec. 29. "We were very happy about that," said Inoue, adding he was also "very happy to have now a third Japanese American serving in Congress in Jill Tokuda from Hawaii."

On the lighter side, Inoue also reported on attending the first-ever Lunar New Year reception at the residence of VP Kamala Harris on Jan. 31. Joining Inoue and representing the JACL National Board were Oda, VP for Public Affairs Seia Watanabe, VP for 1000 Club and Membership Dominique Mashburn and Eastern District Gov. Michael Asada. JACL staffers in attendance were Norman Y. Mineta Fellow Bridget Keaveney and Daniel K. Inouye Fellow Michael Tanaka.

Inoue then provided an update on the Lava Ridge Wind Farm, a 400-unit wind turbine field on 73,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management adjacent to what was Idaho's Minidoka War Relocation Authority Center, one of the 10

WRA sites where ethnic Japanese, both U.S. citizens and legal resident aliens then-ineligible to become naturalized U.S. citizens, were incarcerated during WWII.

He noted that JACL is working with Friends of Minidoka, which has stated its opposition to the wind farm, with its multistory wind turbines that will be intrusively visible from the Minidoka National Historic Site.

"We're supporting [Friends of Minidoka] as much as possible, we are going to be asking for an extension," referring to the BLM's Draft Environmental Impact Statement, which has a public comment period that ends March 21. According to Inoue, the BLM has stated "this project is going to go forward no matter what."

Inoue also mentioned that JACL has met with Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii), the Senate's co-sponsor of the Teaching Asian Pacific American History Act, to see what can be done in a current political climate where there has been a push by some politicians at the local level to reduce or eliminate the teaching of ethnic studies classes in publicly funded schools. He also mentioned that JACL is still keeping vigilant regarding incidents of anti-Asian violence by working with other groups on the issue, even with two recent high-profile mass murders in which the perpetrators — and many of the victims — were Asians.

Along with other still-in-the-works legislative initiatives, Inoue noted that in preparation for the 2023 JACL National Convention, which will take place in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo, he noted that staff has been working with Carol Kawamoto, JACL vp of general operations, and representatives of the Pacific Southwest District, with a site visit having taken

place. Also, he noted that the JACL will hold its leadership conference with OCA April 29-May 2.

Regarding the Kakehashi program, Inoue said the 37 participants chosen from 127 applicants will be visiting Japan March 6-14 for the first time since the pandemic. As for the documentary about JACL, "League of Dreams," by filmmaker Lane Nishikawa, Inoue gave a progress report and said it might be completed by year's end.

Inoue also gave recognition to Fund Development Director Phillip Ozaki and Membership Manager Ashley Bucher for shepherd-

ing "a grant from the San Francisco Japantown Foundation to do some cosmetic refurbishment on the front of the building and the exterior," referring to "all that peeling paint" in front of the JACL National Headquarters building. (On a related note, Ozaki reported after the meeting that JACL received \$177,880 from the California Department of Emergency Services from its Nonprofit Security Grant Program, which will help pay for security video cameras, a fence upgrade and improved illumination.)

Next up was Kawamoto, who deferred to Youth and Programs Manager Cheyenne Cheng to pro-

vide an update on the still-developing plans for the JACL National Convention, which takes place at the DoubleTree by Hilton in Little Tokyo from July 19-23. Cheng reported on the different venues inside and outside the hotel — including the Japanese American National Museum and the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center — that are under consideration.

In VP for 1000 Club and Membership Dominique Mashburn's report, with regard to JACL's membership, she said, "Although there was a decrease, as you can see, at the end of year five, it was smaller compared to other years. And we do believe that if we did more activities, more targeted campaigns, we can be in the positive for this year. It's really encouraging. And I hope that really gives that extra oomph to everyone that we can really change the trend compared to past years. And we really are excited to see what we can accomplish."

Mashburn reported that 300

2023 JACL NATIONAL  
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➤ JACL memberships lapsed as of Dec. 31 — but that JACL “ended up receiving many large gifts at the end of 2022 between the last board meeting in November to end of the year, Dec.31, which accounted for nearly an additional \$100,000.”

Mashburn then asked Bucher to share the latest on the report of the Otoshidama (gift membership) Campaign. Bucher reported that the campaign raised \$9,458, which included 98 gifted members, 65 of whom were new, for a total of 112 “years gifted,” a figure from variable Otoshidama with an option to give one year, two years or three years.

There were also 14 new *Pacific Citizen* print edition subscribers and one Thousand Club Life membership, which brought in \$2,850. She reported that among the orders, 11 were via the mail. “Providing an option to mail in an Otoshidama was important for a lot of people,” Bucher said. “So, we’ll continue to do that.” She also reported that by the end of 2022 “we were at 56” Millennium Club Members.

Oda next called on Secretary/Treasurer Victor Kimura to give his report. Prefacing his report, he said, “I’m not going to talk about the finances. I’m going to talk about something called fund accounting.”

Kimura explained that in fund accounting, anytime an organization received a donation for a specific purpose, it was a “restricted donation,” meaning it needed to be isolated and kept in a separate fund that is “tracked all the way through to the very end.”

Kimura said he was interested in doing two-fund accounting that tracks all of the money that comes in, how it’s spent and what the balances are. The importance of this, he stressed, was so that if the “general unrestricted funds get to a certain low point, then we as an organization are then allowed to raid the Legacy Fund up to a certain extent in order to take that money and put it into unrestricted general funds. The problem is, I don’t think anybody can, at this point, tell what the actual balances in the Legacy Fund ... because it’s not listed separately. It’s just mushed in.”

Kimura said his goal as secretary/treasurer was, as he wrote in the Jan. 27, 2023, *Pacific Citizen*, a wish list that included a way to “immediately tell what the balances are for each of the various funds within JACL National.”

Providing the National Youth/Student Council report were Claire Inouye and KC Mukai, serving as alternates for, respectively, National Youth/Student Chair Mika Chan and National Youth/Student Council Representative Sheera Tamura.

Inouye reported 10 new youth members had joined within the month before the board meeting, thanks to events and presentations



JACL governors and officers listen to organizational updates and business matters.

sponsored by the NY/SC. She also noted that the NY/SC had been preparing for the then-upcoming Day of Remembrance by working on a social media project. Mukai, meantime, reported that April 14-16 would be the group’s retreat in Chicago. She also said NY/SC was planning a youth orientation and a pair of workshops for the JACL’s National Convention in July.

The *Pacific Citizen* Editorial Board report was given by Saito. (Also present via Zoom was Executive Editor Allison Haramoto.) Saito noted that the *P.C.* was able to “give over \$15,000 in chapter commissions” from the 2022 Holiday Issue. He also noted that the newspaper’s Little Tokyo office moved down one floor in Weller Court to a larger space it shares with the Pacific Southwest District and other Southern California-based JACL staff.

Saito also reported that Phase Two of the *P.C.*’s digital archiving project, a digital photo archive, was nearing completion. He also said the annual Spring Campaign raised \$27,375. “Those donations were up more than 60 percent from the previous year,” he said. “We take it as a sign that donors are returning following the uncertainty brought up by the pandemic.”

Additionally Saito said obituary tribute advertising raised almost \$7,000, the annual scholarship issue brought in more than \$3,600 in advertising revenue and that overall ad revenue was \$53,242.

He closed by saying, “If you have any advertising inquiries, contact Susan (Yokoyama), our business manager. And then if you have any story ideas, please go ahead and contact Allison or George (Johnston) or myself, and we’ll make sure to try and get some coverage for your chapters and districts.”

Next on the agenda, Oda gave the floor to CCDC’s Dale Ikeda regarding the Legacy Endowment Fund and an amendment to the constitution and bylaws (CBL) that would change the status quo by allowing the National Board to access up to 2 percent of the Legacy Fund balance by having the current National Board revisit a CBL amendment — Section 5.f. — that

had been approved by the previous National Board in 2022 that was to be presented to the National Council at the 2022 National Convention — but because it missed a filing deadline, it was not presented.

To Ikeda, making the change would allow the JACL National Board to access the money in the Legacy Fund if necessary under special circumstances and time constraints that the JACL National Council — which only meets annually — would be unable to approve.

“I’ve seen organizations have money that they cannot access, and then they go downhill. And JACL has actually experienced that on occasion. We’ve had to lay off staff while we sat on millions of dollars in the Legacy Fund and were unable to spend it,” Ikeda said. “The question is, do we want to continue tying the hands of the organization from accessing the funds?”

The first sentence of Section 5.f., in reference to Board Authority, reads: “In any calendar year, the National Board may withdraw up to two percent (2 percent) of the Legacy Fund balance, which shall be in addition to any allocation included in the approved national budget, provided (a) that the National Board determines by a three-fourths majority vote of the Board that there is good cause due to extraordinary, unforeseen and exigent circumstances; (b) both the National JACL Reserve Fund have or will have no balance prior to any withdrawal from the Legacy Fund; and (c) that it is prudent to make

such additional withdrawal.”

The second sentence reads:

“Separately upon a majority vote, the National Council may reduce or temporarily suspend any and all expenditures from the Legacy Fund, including any chapter rebates and Legacy Fund grant distributions or awards, subject to any required by-law amendments”.

Ikeda was in favor of having the National Board to introduce a resolution reintroducing Section 5.f. on the National Council’s agenda for the 2023 Convention.

“I am of the view that even though you want to preserve the funds for the future, that you need a mechanism to maintain the organization in the short term, otherwise you’re going to end up shorting yourself,” he said.

Paul Uyehara of the Philadelphia JACL chapter was, however, opposed to such action. In attendance via Zoom, he said, “I’m not sure why it should be discussed at all at this point because that provision of the policy was removed at the convention, and it’s not part of the policy. And the reason it was removed was because it’s in conflict with the by-laws. It required the bylaws to be amended in order for it to be effective.”

On that, Ikeda disagreed. “It wasn’t removed at the last convention,” he said. “What was submitted to the National Council did not include 5.f. because the Constitution and Bylaws Committee said that the bylaw amendment that would have implemented 5.f. was not timely.”

Uyehara replied, “The management policy was adopted by the National Council, and I think it’s pretty dubious for the Board to essentially try to undo the adoption of a policy by changing it before the National Council considers it again.”

After further discussion, Ikeda said, “All right, I’m gonna make a motion and people either approve it up or down. I move that the board reaffirm its position in adopting section 5.f. as an amendment to the Legacy Fund Management Policy along with submitting a bylaw amendment, implementing the same as previously submitted and approved by the board. If there’s no second, that’s it, and I can go on my with my life.”

PNW Gov. Sheldon Arakaki seconded the motion and opened discussion on the topic. During the discussion, Uyehara said, “The proposal that was filed last year doesn’t match this language. So, it makes it even doubly wasteful and inappropriate to adopt a policy that not only violates the by-laws, but if the amendment is adopted, it’s going to still violate the bylaws.”

Hearing that, Ikeda said, “Well, once we have a national legal counsel, we can get a ruling on whether or not the two are in conflict.”

Oda, noting that “we have a motion on the table,” called the question. Getting verbal “ayes” and no opposition, he called for a roll call vote, and the motion failed.

Abstaining were Nakamura and the alternates for Chan and Tamura. Voting “yes” were Ikeda, Ryan Yoshikawa and Eric Langowski. Voting “no” were Kawamoto, Watanabe, Mashburn, Arakaki, Carol Kawase, Lisa Olsen, Michael Asada and Kimura for a total of eight.

Under new business, Oda brought up the need to find a new legal counsel and asked the board for prospects. He then expressed his desire to pass a resolution to form a Visioning Committee. Nakamura made the motion, Arakaki seconded. Facing no opposition, it was approved. After the next 2023 National Board meetings were set for May 6, in July at the National Convention and Nov. 4 and 5, the meeting was adjourned. ■

### 2018 - 2022 Membership Numbers



**Membership VP Dominique Mashburn is confident that with increased activities and more targeted campaigns, JACL membership numbers can be in positive figures for 2023 and beyond.**

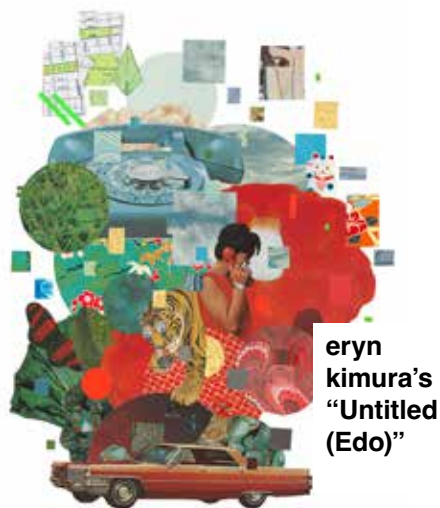


# NEXT-GENERATION JAPANTOWN ARTISTS THRIVE

Japanese American and Asian American artists, nourished by their cultural heritage, are producing impactful works of art in San Francisco.

By Emily Murase,  
Contributor

Despite troubling headlines involving war, senseless gun violence and anti-Asian hate across communities, art survives and thrives. There is a growing number of Japanese American and Asian American artists who, nourished by their cultural heritage, are producing impactful works of art that are being featured in and around San Francisco Japantown.



eryn kimura's  
"Untitled  
(Edo)"

## ERYN KIMURA

"Cultures interact with one another. New cultures emerge from interactions. This is true of me and my identity."

So says Eryn Kimura (pronouns she, them), a next-generation visual artist born and raised in San Francisco. She is fifth generation on both sides of her family. On her mother's side, Eryn descended from Chinese railroad workers. On her father's side, her ancestors traveled in Japan from Kumamoto to Kuauai in the Meiji Era.

A celebrated collage artist, Eryn describes her work as "cacophonous yet fractal visual symphonies . . . that recontextualize the Asian American body and experience in popular culture/memory, questioning narratives of power. Simultaneously, [I use] collage as play and alchemy, reimagining and archiving ancestral pasts and futures of the sucka free (San Francisco) and beyond."

Kimura explains that she was raised by San Francisco Japantown through youth basketball, taiko, obon festivals and the Tomodachi Daycamp program at the Japanese Community Youth Council.

eryn kimura's  
"Her English Was Unusually Good"



Portrait  
of Eryn  
kimura

PHOTO:  
KARIORVIK  
TINTYPES

As a child, she was drawn to art as play, but this changed dramatically in college. As an ethnic studies major at the University of California, Santa Barbara, during the Occupy

Movement, she came to understand art as a cultural narrative.

"What I discovered in college was that art is imagination in time and space," Kimura said. "What I learned from ethnic studies was that the first casualty of colonialism is imagination . . . the colonized were limited by the imaginations of people who determined what America was, and yet we are also 'imagineers.'"

Following graduation, Kimura lived in Kyoto for two years as part of the Japan Exchange and Teaching program. "It was a very special time for me. I was alone in Japan, the only English-speaking person at the school where I taught. I knew I was not Japanese. Yet, I felt so affirmed by the food, the environment, the way people thought about things. I was

eryn kimura's "Ancestors' Boogie" (2018)

PHOTOS: EMILY MURASE



in this liminal space, neither here nor there, neither Japanese nor American, flung in the grey, middle area. My experience of Japan aligned with my inner-knowing in the way that I move, think and practice such Japanese values as *omotenashi* (hospitality) and *mot-tainai* (avoiding waste).

"Art allows me to name the nameless, my collective experience," Kimura continued. "My art is a way of articulating and archiving my past and all the folks who made it to this time and space."

Eryn Kimura's works are featured in "MUNI Raised Me," a group show curated by, among others, Celi Tamayo-Lee at the SOMArts Cultural Center, 934 Brannan St., San Francisco, now through April 9.

Tomo Hirai's  
"Good Night"



## TOMO HIRAI

Another pioneering Nikkei artist is Tomo Hirai (pronouns she/her), a trans queer and plural Nisei who co-organized "We are LGBTQ Nikkei" with Lilith Benjamin, collections manager at the National Japanese American Historical Society.

The exhibit was a group show hosted at the NJAHS Peace Gallery to coincide with the inaugural Pride Flag Raising over Japantown organized by the Japantown Rainbow Coalition and the JAACL San Francisco chapter in May 2022.

Hirai was born in Walnut Creek in the East Bay, across the bridge from San Francisco, to Shin-Issei parents. Her father left Kyoto to work in Mexico, earning a business degree there before moving to California with a business partner. Her mother grew up in rural Osaka before immigrating to the United States to join her father.

"As a Shin-Nisei, I feel more Japanese than American a lot of time," said Hirai. "When I was growing up, I spoke Japanese at home and attended hoshuko (a weekend Japanese school based on instruction in Japan requiring

an advanced level of fluency)."

Hirai did not set out to become an artist. Her passion for art originated in a love of anime/manga. "I wasn't very good at drawing, so I decided to become an avid reader and consumer of anime/manga," she said.

That changed in 2018 when Hirai participated in "A Place of Her Own," a program of J-Sei, a multigenerational and multicultural organization informed by Nikkei values and culture based in the East Bay.

J-Sei Education Coordinator Jill Shiraki invited Hirai to join the initiative. "That's where I learned the art of assemblage, where everyday objects are combined into a three-dimensional display," Hirai said.

Her favorite piece is "Words Unheard" (2019). "This comes from a personal, raw place," she said. "My father is hard of hearing, and the work documents the interpersonal voice of what I've said to him that he didn't actually hear.

My father's limited hearing left me feeling like he was indifferent to me and my work."

The assemblage also features Hirai's writing on Japanese mulberry paper on a wooden frame and was selected for the "Hungry Ghosts" show at the Marin Museum of Contemporary Art in 2019.

Tomo Hirai at  
Marin  
MOCA

PHOTO:  
YOSHIKO  
HIRAI



Tomo Hirai's  
"Words Unheard"



**BRENDEN OSHIMA**

Graphic artist, illustrator and animator Brenden Oshima is founder of Kuma Ink Art & Apparel, which produces playful designs incorporating traditional and modern aspects of Japanese and Chinese pop culture.

“I grew up Japanese/Chinese American,” explained Oshima. “My maternal grandfather came from Guangzhou as a ‘paper son’ and settled in San Francisco Chinatown. (A “paper son” was sponsored by a father on paper only in order to skirt the draconian and anti-Asian Chinese Exclusion Act.) My father’s family worked in the El Cerrito nurseries.”

In fact, East Bay Nikkei flower growers were influential in shaping the market by introducing Asian lilies, azaleas, camellias and wisteria flowers from Japan to the U.S. market.

Oshima was immersed in Nikkei organizations and programs, including the Nihonmachi Little Friends Preschool and the Japanese Bilingual Bicultural Program at Clarendon Elementary School, which was started in 1973 by a group of Japanese American parents who successfully advocated for Japanese instruction in San Francisco public schools.

“Art was therapeutic for me,” said Oshima. “I was an only child, and my parents divorced. I had to spend a lot of time by myself. If there were pens and paper, I had something to do. Instead of doing my homework, I often focused on doodling. Because of my racial background, I didn’t fully fit in with either Japanese or Chinese American culture.”

Through the Japantown street lamp banner project organized by the Japantown Community Benefit District, Asian American artists like Oshima have had an opportunity to collaborate with other APIA artists, including Brandt Fuse, Derrick Higa and Nate Tan.

For his Japantown street light banner, Oshima features people. “During Covid, I started painting, especially faces,” he said. “For the banner, I wanted to expand my usual approach to depict the faces of people who built Japantown. I wanted to highlight the people who made history by focusing on facial features.”



**Brenden Oshima’s “Taiko Drummer Cable Car” banner**



**Brenden Oshima with his “Rabbit Daruma”**



**Brandt Fuse with his Sumofish T-shirt and banners in the background**

**BRANDT FUSE**

The genius behind the iconic Sumofish line of T-shirts is Brandt Fuse, a Yonsei who grew up in Hawaii. His grandparents immigrated to Hawaii from disparate lands in Japan: Okinawa, Hiroshima and Niigata, and his parents met in Honolulu where they settled and raised a family.

Fuse grew up drawing as a kid. When he approached graduation from Punahou High School, his counselors steered him to attend a big university with a strong art program, so he eventually majored in illustration at Washington University in St. Louis. He also spent a year in Osaka studying brush painting and woodblock printing.

During his summers back home in Hawaii, Fuse worked part-time at Cane Haul Road with Grant Kagimoto, who designed T-shirts that celebrated Hawaiian culture.

In 1998, Fuse moved to San Francisco and joined the Berkeley-based design studio of Kurt Osaki, a native of Hawaii. After a while, he decided to freelance.

An early job was to create a T-shirt for the champions of the adult basketball league hosted by the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California in San Francisco’s Japantown. “I created a sumo wrestler dunking a basketball,” said Fuse.

In his T-shirt designs, Fuse has a penchant for combining iconic Asian objects with animals, such as a rice cooker in the shape of a dog. When he put a sumo belt onto a blowfish, this became his most popular design and gave rise to Sumofish, his company’s unique name.

Originally, Fuse operated his business out of his garage and, in 2015, his wife, Joni, joined him full-time. Sumofish is now an anchor booth attraction at the Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival and the Nihonmachi Street Fair. Fuse regularly travels to community events and cultural festivals in Denver, Hawaii, Phoenix and Seattle to share his T-shirts.

On the street lamp banners designed for Japantown, Fuse explained: “I feature the hinotori (phoenix) to symbolize the rebirth of post-pandemic San Francisco Japantown. The tsuru (crane) symbolizes longevity. While rebirth and longevity are the two central themes, my designs are also fun. Note that the phoenix has in its grasp a bento box and a spam musubi.”

**DERRICK HIGA**

Raised nearby, fourth-generation Nikkei Derrick Higa originally studied to become a pediatrician at the University of California, Berkeley, reflecting societal and family expectations to become a professional such as a doctor or lawyer. His father’s family immigrated from Okinawa to farm flowers in Montebello, Calif., located near Los Angeles. His mother’s family immigrated to Hawaii and eventually settled in the East Bay. Higa’s Sansei parents worked as professionals at banks and other businesses in San Francisco Japantown.

However, Higa realized that premedical studies was not his passion. Instead, he changed course to pursue digital arts at Expression College in Emeryville, Calif., where many graduates go on to join Pixar Studios.

“While I loved the school, doing digital was not my thing,” he explained. “I wanted to use my hands, not the computer, to draw and paint.

“Growing up, art was something I turned to when I was bored,” Higa continued. “To be honest, my interest in art was discouraged. But in my late 20s, I found myself working at Starbucks, designing signboards. My journey as a dedicated

artist began when I was invited to paint a mural at a new restaurant.”

In 2018, local chef Wade Tamura was opening Poke to the Max in collaboration with Sam Choy, a James Beard Award-winning celebrity chef from Hawaii.

“This was my first commission. I was a bit nervous painting in front of other people. Many didn’t know I had any artistic skills,” said Higa.

But the mural commission changed the trajectory of his life. More recently, Higa was commissioned to design a large interior mural for a Japantown business, completed in March 2021.

He incorporated the traditional Japanese pattern of seigaiha, “blue sea and waves,” as a backdrop for the San Francisco skyline spanning from the Bay Bridge to the Golden Gate Bridge and featuring Japantown, Coit Tower and the Transamerica Pyramid.

Higa’s street lamp banner features a family of daruma with the Peace Pagoda in the background and a playful maneki neko in front of vivid cherry blossoms.

“It was fun to get free reign to design the banner,” he said. “I wanted to include a daruma family in front of the iconic



**Derrick Higa holds his “San Francisco Cityscape”**

Peace Pagoda and, of course, the maneki neko welcomes visitors to Japantown.”

**Derrick Higa’s “Neko Daruma” banner**

» See ARTISTS on page 12

Rep. Judy Chu of California's 28th District (*second from left*) meets with (*from left*) TFS Co-Chairs Mike Ishii, Satsuki Ina and Julie Abo.

PHOTOS: TSURU FOR SOLIDARITY



Rep. Mark Takano of California's 39th District (*center*) meets with (*from left*) TFS members Julie Abo, Mike Ishii, Kyoko Oda, Kay Oda and JACL Fellow Michael Tanaka.



The TFS delegation with Rep. Mark Takano staffer Mieko Kuramoto (*center*)



Kyoko and Kay Oda, born in Tule Lake and Poston, respectively, traveled from California to Washington, D.C., to call for the end of child detention.



Family Detention Committee Co-Chair Stan Shikuma (*left*) and TFS Co-Chair Mike Ishii outside Congress

## ADVOCACY IN ACTION

An intergenerational delegation travels to Washington, D.C., demanding an end to child detention.

By Tsuru for Solidarity

Tsuru for Solidarity, a Japanese American movement of social justice advocates, partnered with the national Japanese American Citizens League and sent an intergenerational delegation to Washington, D.C., from Feb. 5-9.

The delegation was hosted in D.C. by Human Rights Watch and met with Congressional members and representatives of the administration to engage in advocacy meetings with a goal to end detention of immigrant children.

TFS formed in 2019 in response to the Zero Tolerance Policy when immigrant children were being separated from their families and put in detention. It was successful in leading direct actions at Fort Sill in Oklahoma, where plans were being formed to incarcerate 1,600 unaccompanied migrant children. TFS subsequently co-founded a national coalition to oppose child detention in 2021, leading direct actions, digital public education campaigns and advocacy efforts at state and national levels.

Citing the legacy of Japanese American mass incarceration and separation of families in U.S. concentration camps during World War II, TFS delegation members in Washington, D.C., communicated

their opposition to the continued policy of holding unaccompanied migrant children in large detention sites referred to as Emergency Intake or Influx Sites (EIS) run by the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

Emergency Intake Sites, or EIS, were created under the Biden administration as a "temporary emergency" response to the rise in numbers of children presenting at the southern U.S. border.

The administration promised that these sites would be used only for rapid processing and reunification of children with vetted sponsors. Instead, these sites, which remain outside of regulations and the parameters of the Flores Settlement, have become normalized and their contracts extended, in some cases up to five years, with contract renewal options.

Operated by private contractors, these sites have been criticized by advocates for being warehouse prisons for children. In 2021 under the Biden administration, at least 12 of these facilities opened across the country, detaining thousands of children who, in many cases, languished in detention for an average of 3.5 months.

A number of Japanese American WWII mass incarceration sites, including Pomona Fairplex in California and Fort Bliss, Texas, were both proposed and

repurposed to detain children.

Other former sites of Japanese American mass incarceration were considered for opening sites, including Jerome and Rowher in Arkansas, and Fort Sill in Oklahoma was proposed and contracted as a site to detain children, but the plans were ultimately abandoned after protest by Japanese American survivors who led a multicultural coalition of Black, Indigenous, Latinx and Asian communities to call for its closure.

Satsuki Ina, Kyoko Oda and Kay Oda, who were all born in U.S. concentration camps during WWII, were central to the delegation. As child survivors of incarceration, they shared their stories to advocate for the children currently detained in EIS.

Their stories and the impact that incarceration had on their families brought into sharp relief the long-term potential impacts of EIS on the children currently incarcerated and their families for generations.

Kay Oda related that he was born inside Poston WRA camp. He traveled with his wife, Kyoko, from Los Angeles so that she could join the delegation to D.C. Kyoko is recovering from chemotherapy.

Kay shared in meetings with members of Congress about "the mother he never knew," highlighting the long-term impact of incarceration on his mother. He spoke of her carefree spirit and warmth in the memories of his older siblings and how during his childhood after

the camps she was withdrawn and anxious, wanting to return home as soon as arriving at any new location.

He spoke to legislators of how she would carry bags with all of her belongings, including her birth certificate and the deed to their house, everywhere they went. He also emphasized the long-term trauma of incarceration his mother experienced and how the children incarcerated now will face major impacts on them and their families throughout their lives.

Kyoko Oda was born inside the Tule Lake Segregation Center. In 2022, she edited and released "Tule Lake Stockade Diary" by her father, a revered Judo Sensei, who was arrested and tortured inside the Tule Lake Stockade for leading a hunger strike. She is the president of the Tuna Canyon Detention Station Coalition that established the historic cultural monument in Los Angeles County.

"We were deeply moved to fight for the children and their families to shut the detention camps down," said Kyoko Oda. "It was important to remind our representatives in Congress about the intergenerational trauma that we felt so that the children of today's mass refugee detention camps can be treated humanely."

"We need unified congressional leadership that will demand oversight at the border, training of staff and elimination of intake sites," she continued. "The current



(*From left*) JACL Fellow Bridget Keaveney, TFS members Stan Shikuma, Satsuki Ina and Becca Asaki pose outside Congressman Jill Tokuda's office.





The TFS delegation celebration dinner



Tule Lake survivor Kyoko Oda (left) and TFS Education/Advocacy Committee Co-Chair Katharine Hirata pose together in between meetings.

➤ funds must be reappropriated to take care of the mental, physical health and education of the refugee kids. Obviously, there is a lot of work to do.”

In her meeting with Sen. Mazie Hirono’s (D-Hawaii) staff, Kyoko explained that she had traveled to speak to Sen. Hirono in spite of stage IV cancer because she had spent her entire adult life committed to protecting children as a teacher, principal and now advocate for migrant children.

Said Satsuki Ina of her participation in the delegation: “I was born behind barbed wire — I know what it is to be incarcerated as a child. When I see migrant children incarcerated today, I see myself. I see the same trauma in their eyes that I still work through today.”

Ina, one of the co-founders of TFS, traveled from Northern California to speak to Japanese American members of Congress. In 2016, she spoke with mothers and their children in the Karnes Family Residential Center while embedded in a religious delegation brought in by the ACLU. She relayed this experience in meetings with members of Congress and noted that the children exhibited clear signs of trauma.

Ina recalled how the children inside did not play with toys provided but clung to their mothers, and many were wetting the bed. One girl she interviewed was having nightmares of being chased by dogs and wasn’t sleeping. Her mother relayed that when they approached the border for refuge, Customs and Border Patrol handcuffed the mother and let their dogs chase the little girl while her mother watched.

When reflecting upon these stories and her own experience as a child, Ina added, “This is what motivates me to call for an end to child detention in all its forms. When I was inside Karnes, at least those children had their mothers. These children inside EIS have nobody to protect them. As the Japanese American community, we must be the allies we didn’t have 80 years

ago when we disappeared from our schools, our farms and our neighborhoods. That is why we came to Washington to call upon our Japanese American representatives to help us end child detention for good.”

TFS members spoke to Congressional members about the four whistleblowers who came forth in 2021 from the Fort Bliss EIS with allegations of sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect. The reports also alleged rotten food, lack of hygiene or medical attention and children in highly distressed states of anxiety, some under suicide watch.

They also spoke of a report issued in September 2022 by the Young Center and National Immigrant Justice Center, “Punishing Trauma: Incident Reporting and Immigrant Children in Government Custody,” detailing a widespread Office of Refugee Resettlement policy of using Significant Incident Reports filed by care workers inside EIS facilities as justification for punishing children.

The report documented that when children exhibited signs of trauma, they were singled out and given punishment, including longer stays in detention and delays of reunification with families or sponsors.

Currently, three contracted Emergency Intake Sites remain open at Fort Bliss and Pecos in Texas, and a new third site coming online in Greensboro, N.C. In May 2022,

Fort Bliss and Pecos were granted new five-year contracts with options for five-year renewals. In December 2022, ORR issued an official Request for Proposals signaling its intention to open a fourth EIS in the U.S.

Tsuru for Solidarity sent members from its Advocacy and Child/Family Detention committees to meet with Sen. Hirono and Reps. Doris Matsui, Mark Takano and Jill Tokuda, requesting them to join in unified opposition to the continuation of Emergency Intake Sites with a specific demand of closing existing EIS and stopping the expansion and normalization of EIS.

The delegation additionally met with representatives from the White House Initiative on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders to push the administration to close current EIS sites and stop plans for further expansion.

Katharine Hirata, co-chair of the TFS Advocacy Committee and one of the leaders of the TFS delegation, reflected upon the work of her committee, noting that President Joe Biden campaigned against the atrocities of the Zero Tolerance Policy and child and family detention, but since taking office has expanded the system of child detention. “We have seen a shocking normalization and expansion of child detention sites often in the same desecrated sites where

Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans were incarcerated during WWII,” said Hirata. “This is all part of an intersectional repetition of history targeting communities of color with forced removals, mass incarceration, family separation and gross abuses of children.”

Co-founder of Tsuru for Solidarity and national staffer Mike Ishii challenged members of Congress and Biden Administration representatives, saying, “If a childcare facility in your neighborhood was reported by four whistleblowers for sexual abuse, physical harms to children and the children were being punished for exhibiting their trauma, wouldn’t you demand it be closed? These EIS are warehouse prisons for children, and terrible crimes are being committed against them. Why are we tolerating this?”


At each meeting, the delegation presented cranes folded by TFS members across the country. Said Becca Asaki, Tsuru for Solidarity community organizer, of this important part of the meetings: “Sharing the cranes with members of Congress and the administration demonstrated that thousands of Japanese Americans who survived the concentration camps during WWII and their descendants from across the country are standing with us in those meetings. We told them that TFS members folded an intention into each crane

to end child detention and to hang the cranes in their office as a daily reminder of the commitment our community has to this fight.”

Because of our history, Japanese Americans are deeply aware of the long-term impacts of incarcerating children not only on those incarcerated and their descendants but also on the society who enacts these harms. Child detention must end now so that we can begin the moral repair of our nation and ensure that the promise of our highest aspirations are realized for all. ■



Child concentration camp survivors Kyoko Oda (left) and Satsuki Ina prepare for Congressional meetings.



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# ALBERT OKURA DEAD at 71

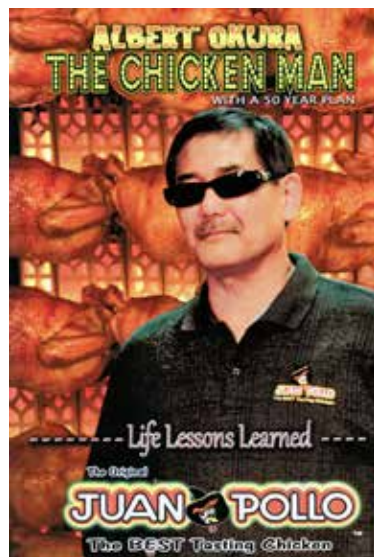
The entrepreneur founded Juan Pollo restaurant.

By P.C. Staff

‘My destiny in life is to sell more chicken than anyone in the world.’

That affirmation by restaurateur Albert Ryo Okura from his book “Albert Okura The Chicken Man: With a 50 Year Plan” may not have simply been his goal — it may have actually summed up his life’s purpose.

Okura, whose youthful obsession for all things fast-food



Okura’s book was a combination memoir, guide for entrepreneurs and promotional item.

— burgers, tacos and, of course, chicken — inspired him to cross the road from restaurant employee to restaurant entrepreneur and found the Juan Pollo restaurant chain, died Jan. 27 in Ontario, Calif. He was 71. (See related article, “The Man Who Would Be Chicken King,” in the June 1, 2018, Pacific Citizen.)

The Juan Pollo restaurant chain would expand to 25 restaurants, most located in Southern California’s Riverside and San Bernardino counties, with a much smaller number in Los Angeles and Orange counties.

Born and raised in the Los Angeles suburb of Wilmington, Calif., Okura was the second-born child of Chiyoko and Tsuyoshi Okura, who raised him and three siblings, older brother Robert and younger sisters Amy and Susan.

In his aforementioned memoir/marketing tool, copies of which he sometimes gave away for free, Okura recalled how, growing up in the 1950s and ’60s, his love of fast food grew in lockstep with the postwar growth of the many then-young chains such as McDonald’s, Burger King, Taco Bell, A&W, Der Wienerschnitzel, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Foster’s Freeze and In-N-Out. “I loved all

these new restaurants,” he wrote in his book. “What a great time for someone like me.”

Although Okura would later work and train at Burger King and Del Taco, and eventually, with his brother-in-law Armando Parra, focus on perfecting a recipe and method for cooking the rotisserie chickens that would become the foundation of the Juan Pollo restaurant chain he founded in 1984, it was McDonald’s that would, according to his book, “have a huge affect [sic] on my life.”

For example, the San Bernardino, Calif., headquarters for Juan Pollo is also the site of the original McDonald’s restaurant, which Okura in 1998 bought when it was in foreclosure — and turned it into an admission-free (and unauthorized) museum dedicated to McDonald’s history and memorabilia. It was a tribute to the chain and Ray Kroc, the man who bought out the original McDonald brothers and grew it into one of the world’s greatest food (and real estate) empires.

It remains an endeavor that the McDonald’s corporation wishes would quietly go away, but its existence and popularity was a point of pride for Okura, who never let a marketing opportu-



Albert Okura proudly displays Juan Pollo’s rotisserie chicken and sides in this 2018 photo taken at one of his restaurants in San Bernardino, Calif.

PHOTO: GEORGE TOSHIO JOHNSTON

nity, no matter how wacky, go unexploited. On the topic of real estate, another example of his innate marketing genius was his purchase of the town of Amboy, Calif., a mostly forgotten outpost along the historic Route 66.

Not only was it inspired by a mentor who lamented not buying an actual town when he had the opportunity, the purchase, like that of the original McDonald’s restaurant, garnered free news coverage that also put the Juan Pollo chain into the spotlight.

For Okura, it was all about the chicken — make that “the best tasting chicken,” a phrase he trademarked — that would become his focus from age 32,



Posters for Okura’s celebration of life, held on Feb. 11 in the City of Industry, Calif.

PHOTO: PHYLLIS HAYASHIBARA

when he founded his first Juan Pollo, also in Ontario, Calif.

Okura was predeceased by his parents. He is survived by his wife, Sella; sons, Kyle and Aaron, and daughter, Chloe; siblings, Robert Okura, Amy (Ray) Pong and Susan (Andy) Hoffman; and a niece and a nephew. ■

# ASIAN AMERICAN JOURNALISTS YEE, HAGIHARA DIE

Both were associated with the *Los Angeles Times*.

By P.C. Staff

A pair of journalists associated with the *Los Angeles Times* — Gregory Yee, who had been actively employed there, and Randy Hagihara, who was retired, have died. Yee, 33, died Jan. 4 in Los Angeles. Hagihara, 72, died Jan. 7 in Huntington Beach, Calif.

The Los Angeles Chapter of the Asian American Journalists Assn. issued a statement that said, “Greg was a friend to many at the *Times* and beyond. He was taken much too soon, and his young age betrays the impact he had in his newsrooms.”

A University of California, Irvine graduate, Yee served as editor-in-chief of the student newspaper. He joined the *Times* in 2021, working on the paper’s Fast Break desk. Prior to that, he was a working journalist in New Mexico, Long Beach, Calif., and South Carolina.

According to the Los Angeles *Times*, Yee’s survivors attributed his death to complications from a respiratory issue. He is survived

by his father, Andrew, his mother, Mirta, and sisters Halina Yee and Emma Yee.

The AAJA and the *L.A. Times* are planning to begin a scholarship in Yee’s honor that will focus on skills development and training opportunities.

Hagihara, who began his stint at the *Times* in 1990, would spend more than 20 years at the paper before retiring in 2011. During his time at the paper, he was the senior editor of recruitment and in charge of what was then known as Metpro, its minority-recruitment program.

Said AAJA Board President Nicole Dungca: “Without leaders like Randy paving the way for younger generations of AAPI journalists, AAJA and so many of its members would not be where we are today. While he will be dearly missed for his empathy, eagle-eyed edits and quick wit, his legacy lives on in the journalists who have learned from Randy himself to pay it forward.”

Regarding Hagihara’s tenure running Metpro at the *Times*, his colleague, Craig Matsuda, told the *Pacific Citizen*: “He employed an unerring eye, reading — really studying — the jobs materials submitted to him. He did not care what schools candidates attended, nor what the size or prestige of their recent employers. He pushed to advance careers of notably inclusive candidates, women and men, Black, brown, white, of Asian descent, regardless of sexual orientation. He loved discovering folks overlooked by others — and he did, for decades.”

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Hagihara graduated from Roosevelt High School in Boyle Heights before serving in the Air Force for four years. His entrée into a career in journalism came by way of working with Sacramento, Calif.-based investigative journalist K. W. Lee.

According to Matsuda, “Randy Hagihara put together a remarkable life and career, which is best

understood by looking at its three professional parts.” The first part saw Hagihara join Lee and his fellow *Sacramento Union* staffer Steve Chanecka on Lee’s ahead-of-the-curve startup newspaper, *Koreatown Weekly*, the nation’s first English-language weekly.

Based in L.A.’s Koreatown, it aimed to cover the growing Korean American community (see *Pacific Citizen*, June 15, 2018). The enterprise lasted five years. At a 2018 event reuniting the paper’s staff, Hagihara recalled

details like trapping mice at the *Koreatown Weekly*’s office. “To me, working with Lee and Chanecka was the most fun I ever had in journalism, and I was lucky enough to realize it at the time,” Hagihara said.

According to Matsuda, the second part of Hagihara’s career began after *Koreatown Weekly* folded. “Hagihara then worked for traditional newspapers, many

» See JOURNALISTS on page 12

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**ARTISTS » continued from page 7**

**NATE TAN**

Nate Tan of Nate1 Design is a pioneer Asian American artist who started in graffiti art in the 1980s as a teenager. By 1987, he co-founded the West Coast chapter of the Master Piece Creators Crew, influential graffiti artists featured in the definitive "History of American Graffiti" and the documentary "Piece by Piece." Today, his vivid banner of the Peace Pagoda flies over the main streets of San Francisco Japantown.

Escaping a repressive regime, Tan's family immigrated from Myanmar to England, where he was born. His family then moved to San Francisco when he was a young child. Thoroughly a "California kid" by high school, Tan became immersed in hip-hop culture.

Tan studied industrial arts with an emphasis on visual communications and extensive coursework in Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University and began a career in graphic design.

In 2004, he started the NewSkool clothing line for infants and toddlers, which has since expanded to include men's and women's clothing and accessories.

"NewSkool has been featured in TV and newspaper stories and items are being sold in Japan, England, and Ireland. I started the line just after the birth of my son, and now both my kids are involved in the family business," he said.



**Nate Tan with his "Blue Peace Plaza"**

In 2010, Tan created a curriculum to teach "The History of Graffiti" at the San Francisco-based First Amendment Gallery. Word about this unusual course spread quickly and, starting with Facebook, technology companies began to recruit Tan to teach offsite workshops on hip-hop culture.

"I was invited to show techies neighborhood murals and tags on buildings and on the ground and explain their significance," he said. "My art is reflective of my surroundings. Inclusion is very important to me. I focus on understanding and accepting other cultures. I want to reflect that through my art."

In Tan's street lamp banner design, the Peace Pagoda, bathed in blue, stands majestically in front of a tower of the Golden Gate Bridge and the San Francisco skyline amid falling cherry blossoms.

*Brenden Oshima, Brandt Fuse, Derrick Higa and Nate Tan are featured artists at the Heart of Japantown Pop-up Shop, which is selling their T-shirts, stickers, cards and artwork on the ground floor of the Kinokuniya Building in San Francisco Japantown through April.*



**Heart of Japantown storefront**

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of them small and community-focused. He rose through the ranks after reporting and shooting pictures to become a respected, demanding and straight-shooting editor," according to Matsuda. "He was the city editor of the *Times*' large staff in Orange County during a time of ferocious news competition there. As the newspaper noted, 'During his time in Orange County, Hagihara played a key role in coverage of the county's municipal bankruptcy and other major stories.'"

It was Hagihara's third act in journalism that may have been the most impactful. "His most-recognized legacy, though, may be his prescient, relentless finding of rising talents — and in giving them generous, at times gruff, often humorous, and always wise counsel and support."

According to Matsuda, Hagihara's efforts not only helped to "make the newsroom more diverse and inclusive," but also the people he mentored "became news executives, star reporters, foreign and national correspondents, authors and, as well, accomplished filmmakers, federal law enforcement agents and

more." Hagihara used his talents after retirement as a volunteer for the Friends of the Huntington Beach Public Library, serving for three years as its newsletter editor.

According to his surviving stepson, Sean Kawata, Hagihara's death came after a battle with esophageal cancer. He decided to stop further treatment following surgery and chemotherapy. He was predeceased by Janet, his wife of more than 40 years, and stepson Ian Kawata.

The Los Angeles AAJA chapter is planning to honor Hagihara's "legacy of mentorship" and will announce details imminently. ■



**Randy Hagihara (right), shares memories of working with (from left) Steve Chanecka and K. W. Lee at a June 2018 fundraising dinner in Los Angeles for the K. W. Lee Center for Leadership.**

PHOTO: GEORGE TOSHIO JOHNSTON

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