A massive Shohei Ohtani mural titled “L.A. Rising” was unveiled in Los Angeles’ Little Tokyo on March 27, a day before the Los Angeles Dodgers’ home opener at Dodger Stadium. Painted by acclaimed muralist Robert Vargas of Boyle Heights, Calif., the mural’s unveiling occurred just as news broke that Ohtani’s longtime interpreter, Ippei Mizuhara, had been accused of stealing millions of dollars from the MLB baseball star to cover huge gambling debts.
Days after a massive mural featuring the superstar is dedicated in Little Tokyo, his former interpreter faces federal charges.

By Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Federal authorities charged the longtime interpreter for Los Angeles Dodgers star Shohei Ohtani on April 11 with federal bank fraud, alleging that he stole more than $16 million from the Japanese sensation to cover gambling bets and debts.

Interpreter Ipeoi Mizuhara, a constant presence beside Ohtani in baseball stadiums across the country since 2018, abused the two-way player’s trust in him and exploited the language barrier to plunder a bank account that only he could access, prosecutors said.

U.S. Attorney Martin Estrada said Mizuhara was so intertwined in Ohtani’s life and career that he became the star’s “de facto manager.”

The role enabled him to withdraw money from the account — at times lying and impersonating Ohtani to bank employees — to finance his “insatiable appetite for illegal sports betting.”

The April 11 announcement, at a packed news conference in downtown Los Angeles, ended weeks of speculation about Mizuhara’s gambling debts.

In a message to his illegal bookmaker on March 20, the day the Los Angeles Times and ESPN broke the news of the investigation, he wrote: “Technically I did steal from him. It’s all over for me.”

Mizuhara faces up to 30 years in federal prison if he’s convicted of stealing $16 million from the account — at times knowingly paid any gambling debts.

Ohtani said he first became aware of Mizuhara’s gambling problem during a team meeting after the Dodgers’ March 20 win over the San Diego Padres in Seoul during MLB’s first game in South Korea. The L.A. Times and ESPN published their stories hours later.

Five days later, Ohtani told a Dodgers Stadium press conference that he never bets on sports or knowingly paid any gambling debts accumulated by his interpreter. He placed responsibility entirely on Mizuhara, and refuted the interpreter’s inconsistent accounts of whether Ohtani had paid off Mizuhara’s gambling debts.

“I am very saddened and shocked,” the Japanese star said through a translator. “It’s all over for me.”

Mizuhara made around 19,000 wagers between December 2021 and January 2024 — nearly 25 bets per day on average. The wagers ranged from roughly $10 to $160,000 per bet, averaging around $12,800. Estrada said investigators did not find any evidence Mizuhara had wagered on baseball.

While Mizuhara’s winning bets totaled over $142 million, which he deposited in his own bank account and not Ohtani’s, his losing bets were around $183 million — a net loss of nearly $41 million.

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**Buddhists Gather for Healing in Antioch**

California city was site of anti-Chinese immigrant violence in 1876.

*By Associated Press*

**ANTIQUO, CALIF.** — For one afternoon, on Antioch’s main street and tranquil riverbank, the fragrance of burning incense was paired with the sound of Buddhist and Tao chants. Their cumulative calming energy was meant to be a balm of sorts to soothe the racial and religious hate that cast a shadow on Antioch’s legacy.

Antioch’s dark past, specifically its horrific mistreatment of early Chinese immigrants, continues to haunt about 200 Buddhists to undertake a recent pilgrimage to the city of about 115,000, tucked deep in the delta that drains into the San Francisco Bay. Their goal was to supplant the negative with the positive by reconciling a dreadful past and anxiety-filled present — both time periods when Asian Americans nationwide have faced hate and discrimination — with the hope for a more egalitarian and harmonious future.

In the 1800s, thousands of Chinese immigrants came to the area during the gold rush to work in mines and build railroads and levees. Those who lived in Antioch were subject to sundown laws and used secret tunnels to commutte to and from work, according to local newspaper reports. Eventually, the city’s Chinatown, spanning a couple of city blocks — which also housed a Buddhist/Tao temple where new immigrants congregated — was burned down.

On March 16, the group of Buddhists gathered for the pilgrimage, an event they titled “May We Gather.” It was intentionally scheduled on the third anniversary of the Atlanta mass shooting when a white gunman targeted female employees at Asian American massage parlors because he saw them as “sources of temptation.” Six of the eight victims were women of Asian descent.

Duncan Ryuken Williams, a Soto Zen priest of Japanese descent and one of the event’s organizers, said the Atlanta killings bore eerie similarity to Antioch in 1876 when raging locals burned down the homes of Chinese women branded as sex workers. In 2021, Antioch became the first U.S. city to issue a public apology for the mistreatment of early Chinese immigrants during the gold rush.

Williams, who also is a religion professor at the University of Southern California, said event organizers desired not just a political reaction, but “a Buddhist response that draws on our teachings and practice,” which aims to honor ancestors and heal racial trauma, past and present.

So in Antioch’s El Campanil Theatre, a gathering of Buddhist monks and leaders from across the diaspora engaged in a process of “karmic healing.” They offered chants and prayers at the altar of the thousand-armed Guan Yin, the goddess of mercy and compassion. Four tablets rested at the altar bearing the names of victims of hate and violence.

The Buddhists in attendance came from various countries and traditions — Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Thai, Tibetan, Indian and Sri Lankan. Holy chants rang out in multiple languages including Pali, the antiquated language closest to what the Buddha himself spoke.

Grace Song, an ordained minister and a department chair at the Won Institute of Graduate Studies in Warminster, Pa., said she had never been part of a peace-building event that celebrated diverse Buddhist traditions until now.

“I hope we get closer, build solidarity and support each other as we deepen our roots in this country,” she said.

Khenpo Paljor, a Tibetan lama from Des Moines, Iowa, offered prayers at the Birth Ringing event organized March 26 that Oakland, Calif.-born political neophyte Nicole Shanahan, 38, will be his vice-presidential running mate in his bid for the White House. Shanahan, whose mother emigrated from the U.S. to Guangzhou City, China, and whose father emigrated from Ireland, is an attorney and former spouse of Google Co-Founder Sergey Brin. So far, the only state in which Kennedy is on the ballot is Utah.

**Jury Finds Former L.A. Deputy Mayor Chan Guilty**

A jury in a federal corruption case on March 27 found former Los Angeles Deputy Mayor Raymond Chan, 67, guilty of 12 of 12 counts, including racketeering conspiracy and bribery. The focus of the case was on financial benefits from real estate developers. Chan was tapped by former Mayor Eric Garcetti to serve as deputy mayor over economic development. Sentencing is scheduled for June 10.

**UCLA School to Recognize Alumna Gee**

When the UCLA School of Law bestows its Alumni of the Year Awards on May 2, it will present its Distinguished Alumni in Public Service to Judge Dolly Gee, a 1974 graduate of the law school. In 2009, President Obama nominated her to a seat on the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California; Gee was inducted in 2010 and became chief judge on March 31. The law school will also present its Distinguished Alumni in Professional Achievement to William Kahane.

**Sacramento's Nakaoka Earns Eagle Rank**

Kianna Nakaoka, 17, recently earned its powerlifting club and has set several records in her division. Following his comments made at a March 25 townhall meeting in Dundee, Mich., Rep. Tim Walberg (R-Mich.) issued a statement to clarify news reports in which he invoked Japanese cities that were atom bombarded during World War II with regard to the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza. Responding to a question at the meeting about the U.S. spending money to construct a temporary floating pier from which to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza, Walberg, 72, said, “We shouldn’t be spending a dime on humanitarian aid. It should be like Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Get it over quick. The same should be in Ukraine. Defeat Putin quick.” In a statement issued by his office, Walberg said, “As a child who grew up in the Cold War Era, the last thing I’d advocate for would be the use of nuclear weapons.” Rather, he referenced the two Japanese cities to emphasize ending both conflicts as quickly as possible.

RFK Jr. Taps Shanahan as VP Running Mate

Independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. announced March 26 that Oakland, Calif.-born political neophyte Nicole Shanahan, 38, will be his vice-presidential running mate in his bid for the White House. Shanahan, whose mother emigrated from China, and whose father emigrated from Ireland, is an attorney and former spouse of Google Co-Founder Sergey Brin. So far, the only state in which Kennedy is on the ballot is Utah.

**Comment**

**Community/News Briefs**

**News Briefs**

Mich. Congressman Clarifies Nagasaki Comment

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**LTSC’s Shimada Retires**

After a 15-year stint at the Little Tokyo Service Center, Margaret Shimada retired at the end of March. She served as director of Service Programs. According to the LTSC, in that role she oversaw mental health programs, advocacy efforts, case management and domestic violence support, as well as helped to spearhead the creation of LTSC’s Homeless Services program, which is focused on outreach, direct services and housing navigation.

**United Methodist Church Issues Statement on Nakagawa**

The California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church issued a statement March 7 that it has begun a “formal complaint process” over the actions of Mark Nakagawa, a retired clergyman who also recently retired as a district superintendent. In the meantime, Nakagawa’s attorney has issued an apology on his behalf for drawing a graffito resembling a swastika on a Jewish neighbor’s groceries. Nakagawa, long active in Los Angeles-area Japanese American and UMC communities, was recorded on security video shot in the late evening of Dec. 5, 2023, using a marker to draw an image resembling a swastika, known in Japanese as a manji, on a box of seltzer water that had been among groceries delivered onto neighbor Leah Grossman’s doorstep of the condominium complex in which both she and Nakagawa reside. In video that was posted on YouTube as March 26, when Grossman, who was alerted by her video security system, confronts Nakagawa, he denies any involvement or knowledge about what had happened. Nakagawa later was reported as saying his intent was to teach Grossman that the symbol, which was inadverdently rendered as a swastika, stood for love. In its statement, the UMC said it “does not condone any form of hate or discrimination.”

**Terusaki New BCA National President**

Steven Terusaki of Albany, Calif., was installed as the president of Buddhist Churches of America in late February. He is the founder and CEO of SEIDO Consulting.

**Sacramento’s Nakaoka Earns Eagle Rank and Gold Award**

Kianna Nakaoka, 17, recently earned the rank of Eagle as a member of Scouts BSA Troop 569. Both troops are sponsored by the Buddhist Church of Sacramento. She is a senior at John F. Kennedy High School, where she co-founded its powerlifting club and has set several records in her division.

— **PC Staff**
Rep. Mark Takano Installs Riverside JACL Officers, Board Members

By P.C. Staff

What’s rarer than 13-year-cycle and 17-year-cycle cicada broods emerging at the same time? How about having a member of the House of Representatives, who just happened to be attending your annual Riverside JACL installation as a guest, administer the oath of office to your chapter’s incoming officers and board.

Thanks to a scheduling conflict, that is exactly what happened on March 9 at the Riverside JACL chapter’s luncheon, held at the Cactus Cantina. With Pacific Southwest District Gov. Ryan Yoshikawa, who had been busy installing incoming JACL chapter officers and boards throughout Southern California, out of state for other JACL business, master of ceremonies Doug Urata “deputized” the Hon. Judge R. Glenn Yabuno, immediate past presiding judge of the California Superior Court of San Bernardino County. His topic: “A Sanssei’s Journey to the Bench.”

Raised in Fresno, Calif., Yabuno earned his undergraduate degree from California State University, Fresno, his J.D. from Santa Clara University School of Law and was admitted to the California State Bar in 1983. The next year, he joined the San Bernardino County District Attorney’s office. In 2010, he was appointed by then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to the bench with the Superior Court of San Bernardino County. His topic: “A Sansei’s Journey to the Bench.”

With that legal precedent in mind, it was fitting that Urata then introduced the afternoon’s speaker, the Hon. Judge R. Glenn Yabuno, immediate past presiding judge of the California Superior Court of San Bernardino County. His topic: “A Sanssei’s Journey to the Bench.”

In actuality, perhaps having a visiting dignitary administer the oath of office to incoming JACL chapter leaders may not be quite as rare as the joint appearance of two disparate cicada broods — but Takano was not in the least bugged by the task, swearing in Michiko Yoshikawa (president, scholarships), Beverly Inaba (vp), Dr. Clyde Wilson (treasurer), Helen Yoshikawa (recording secretary), Jennifer Betancourt (membership chair, youth adviser), Braeton Buckley (newsletter editor, youth adviser), Meiko Inaba (1000 Club), Taka Tanaka (civil liberties), Urata (PSWD delegate), Irene Ogata and Sara Morita (social media) and Akio Yoshikawa (member at large).

In her remarks as president for some 20 years, Yoshikawa thanked Emily Sarashina for serving as the chapter’s representative to the University of California Riverside’s Nikkei Student Union. She also thanked Helen Yoshikawa for her work with the chapter’s scholarship committee. In addition, Yoshikawa spoke about an upcoming event on May 1, when Highland Elementary School will be renamed Harada Elementary School, in honor of the Harada family and their successful legal battle over the right to own property at a time when California’s alien land law prevented noncitizens from doing so.

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Yabuno highlighted one of the most important cases he was associated with, namely a deadly train derailment in the Cajon Pass caused by a faulty brake line. Serving as an example of how the law can be used to prevent such disasters from happening in the future, it was mandated that trains be equipped with “end of train” devices that allow an engineer to activate the brakes not just from the front but also from the rear in case of a kink in the brake line.

Regarding the size of jurisdiction of the Superior Court of San Bernardino County, Yabuno said, “Whether you’re aware of it or not, San Bernardino is the largest county in the 48 states. It’s a little over 20,000 square miles. It stretches from L.A. to the far west to the Arizona and Nevada borders to the east. Our furthest courthouse, which is the Needles courthouse, is four hours from downtown San Bernardino. Barstow is about an hour and change. We also have a courthouse in the Joshua Tree.”

Regarding the changes he has witnessed in his career over the decades since moving from Fresno and initially joining the District Attorney’s office, Yabuno said, “I was the first Asian, let alone Japanese American, to work in the D.A.’s office. At that time, there was one Asian judge on the bench for the entire county. “In 2010, I was a third Asian judge in our county. So, you know, we’ve come a long way,” Yabuno continued. “Both Riverside and San Bernardino have a lot more representation from the Asian community, as well as other communities. Gov. (Gavin) Newsom and Gov. (Jerry) Brown were very in tune with making sure that the population was represented.”

Yabuno pivoted to another topic that is one of his enthusiasms: genealogy. For Japanese Americans interested in tracing their family trees in Japan, he highlighted the necessity of obtaining one’s koseki, or official family register, maintained by local municipal offices in Japan. He also emphasized the importance of getting personal histories from family members. “I would encourage all of you to go back and get that part of history for your family before it’s too late. . . . Talk to your grandparents and your parents and everybody else and get those names,” he said.

On a related topic, Yabuno discussed how Japanese Americans whose relatives were incarcerated by the federal government during World War II could get those family records as well.

“The National Archives has the War Relocation Authority records that you can access, and I just did that,” he said. “It’s amazing what you can find in those records that will be sent to you from the National Archives.”

(The editor’s note: Yabuno left photocopies of Chester Hashizume’s “Discovering Your Japanese American Roots” and “References for Discovering Your Japanese American Roots” for luncheon attendees. Copies of the PDF of Hashizume’s documents may be downloaded at tinyurl.com/hahd8j94 and tinyurl.com/pv66xfk9.)

With the installation and speech completed, it was raffle time, conducted by Helen Yoshikawa. Among the prizes were bags of oranges grown in the Inland Empire. Alas, because of pest control protocols that had nothing to do with cicadas, they weren’t allowed to be brought into Los Angeles County. L-R: Emily Sarashina, Glenn and Cathy Yabuno, Michiko Yoshikura, Doug Urata and Rep. Mark Takano.
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BRIDGING CONNECTIONS PART II: KAKEHASHI 2024

Nikkei from across the U.S. journey to Japan to develop and strengthen their connections to Japanese culture.

By P.C. Staff

In January, 71 Nikkei and three chaperones traveled from the U.S. to Japan to participate in Kakehashi 2024, where they visited numerous historical and educational sites, experienced traditional and cultural activities and participated in lectures and workshops with the goal of building a mutual understanding between the U.S. and Japan for future friendship and cooperation.

Divided into three groups, participants began their trip in Tokyo and then traveled on to Hiroshima and Okinawa, depending on their group destination assignment. This “once-in-a-lifetime dream trip” to Japan was made possible thanks to coordination by the JACL and the Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE) and supported by funding from the Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Following is Part II, personal trip reflections, from several of this year’s participants.

LAUREN IWAMIYA
Group B

“What makes you proud to be Japanese American?”

Kohei-san, one of our homestay hosts, asked this less than four hours into meeting us.

In our more-than-broken Japanese and their equally steadfast attempts at speaking English, that was what we were talking about.

At the time, I was so astounded by the depth of the question and the fact that this could be asked in a space with little shared language, that all I said was, “I don’t know,” as I sat in stunned silence.

Throughout my time in Japan on the JACL Kakehashi Program 2024 trip, my understanding of what it means to be Nikkei was reshaped and continuously challenged.

As a Gosei Japanese Chinese American, I came into the experience slightly hesitant. I know that Japanese people living in Japan often invalidate the identity of Nikkei because of our distance from our Japanese roots. I was excited to meet my cohort on Kakehashi, but I was also afraid that being in Japan would make me feel more nationless.

Instead, I was enveloped by mutual understanding about what it means to be Nikkei identifiably American.

Throughout my time in Japan on the JACL Kakehashi Program 2024 trip, my understanding of what it means to be Nikkei was reshaped and continuously challenged.

But what is it that connects us as Nikkei?

In Japanese American history, there are divisions within the Nikkei community that trace back to World War II and still stand today.

My family was incarcerated in Tule Lake. I hold a great sense of pride in my family for checking No and No on questions 27 and 28 of the loyalty questionnaire. But so many Nikkei identify with the pride in their families for serving in the 442nd and in the Military Intelligence Service.

This is a pivotal divide in how Japanese Americans label Nikkei identity. I believe that my Nikkei identity lies in the fact that I belong neither in America nor Japan. I will never be Japanese enough for Japan, and America can never have my unhidden loyalty because they unconstitutionally forced my family into incarceration camps.

On the other side, the Nikkei identity is proudly American because they proved their loyalty by laying their lives on the line for America despite their unjust treatment.

In spite of the chasm of how our families responded to WWII questions of American loyalty or how our families were not impacted by incarceration, everyone in my Kakehashi cohort connected under ganbatte and the struggle to negotiate our circumstances in the camps and in America. It is the struggle and pain, but also the celebration and deep pride for the perseverance of our ancestors.

At the closing of our homestay experience for Kakehashi, we performed the Bon Odori song “Ei Ja Nai Ka” for our homestay families. It means “Isn’t it good?” and celebrates the perseverance of our immigrant ancestors. “Ei Ja Nai Ka” represents where our pride in Japanese American identity lies. It is in a community that celebrates and honors our ancestors and their ganbatte spirit by embracing our heritage.

What makes us Nikkei — what makes us proud to be Nikkei — is ganbatte. And the people I met on Kakehashi helped me realize this.

KENNETH KITAHATA
Group B

Throughout the 2024 Kakehashi Project, I looked for connections between growing up Japanese American in Hawaii and our weeklong trip through Tokyo, Hiroshima and Suō-Oshima. For instance, a moment on the trip shared moments of familiarity when our homestay family prepared chawanmushi (steamed egg) or as we slept on tatami mats. I saw many Nikkei values passed down by my family, like humility and politeness, reflected by the local Japanese community throughout the trip. Even barely speaking Japanese and being thousands of miles from home, these similar values made Japan feel so familiar.

As a young professional on the Kakehashi Project, I thought about how Japanese values like collectivism often feel at odds with working in corporate America where individual performance, speaking up and comfort with conflict are rewarded. I’ve always had a quieter style at work and never related to stereotypes of executives as fiery and charismatic. One time after getting questioned by a director of executives as fiery and charismatic. One time after getting questioned by a director on my team after presenting, I remember thinking I just had thin skin for criticism. But, I continued working up authentically, especially working at an impact investor trying to reimagine capitalism.

These ideas around my Nikkei values continued to pop into my head as the trip to Japan approached and Kakehashi held an orientation on Japanese etiquette. We were introduced to Japanese culture through traditional tea ceremony values like Wā (harmony) and Kei (respect). Even if we didn’t speak Japanese, we could show respect by removing our shoes indoors or limiting noise while riding the train.

These values of harmony and respect reminded me of my own family, so I made it a point to ask my Kakehashi friends what Japanese sayings they grew up hearing. In Suō-Oshima during our homestay, I learned of the saying, Deru kai wa utareru or “the nail that sticks out gets hammered down.” Something clicked for me hearing this Japanese proverb on conformity; I realized that my tendency toward respect and conflict aversion might be shaped by the country my great-grandparents emigrated from over a century ago.

Hearing my homestay family tell me about Japanese origin of my values of respect and humility growing up as a fourth-generation Japanese American.

It will continue being a learning journey to balance these values of collectivism and individualism by recognizing the influence of both Japan and America in my life. The Kakehashi Project has given me the wisdom of perspective in discerning between Nikkei and Japanese culture, and it simultaneously helped me discover that my strength to show up authentically is rooted in my diverse cultural values.
YURI MAMIYA

Group A

Standing on the sparkling beaches of Okinawa, I gazed in amazement at the expanse of soft, ivory sand. It was speckled with branching coral skeletons and intricate sea shells. But these wonders were obscured by garbage.

I picked up another chunk of seaweed-strewn Styrofoam and stuffed it into our overflowing bag of trash. Piece by piece, we slowly revealed the beauty buried beneath during the beach cleanup with Natural Blue for the 2024 Kakehashi Project.

Twelve million tonnes of plastic is dumped into the ocean every year. The United States and Japan rank No. 1 and 2 in terms of per-capita plastic-packaging waste emissions. Our nations have a collective responsibility to improve our waste management system, create innovative solutions to replace plastic and restore respect for the environment.

I was inspired to learn that Natural Blue is driving environmental stewardship by leading beach cleanups and educational lessons on global pollution for divers and visitors in Okinawa. They encourage us to care for our land and oceans by fostering a love for nature and opportunities to care for it.

We have much to learn from Okinawan communities on teaching environmental stewardship to young people. During my homestay at Yomitan Village for the 2024 Kakehashi Project, I had the remarkable opportunity to learn about and participate in sustainable farming practices alongside elementary school students.

On an early, humid morning, we learned how local farmers built greenbelts to prevent agricultural runoff. Their interactive demonstration modeled how rainfall washed nutrient-rich fertilizers into the ocean, where they led to eutrophication and death of marine life.

I was incredibly grateful for the support of the Kakehashi Project staff, who helped expand upon the farmers’ explanations in English and answered my curious questions about the creation of greenbelts. Who knew that the beautiful hibiscus flowers lining the roads blocked farm soil from polluting the surrounding lands? Or that the vetiver plant that was also a base note for Chanel No. 5 perfume could hold down nutrients and fertilizers during heavy rains? I was touched to see local children help plant vetiver greenbelts along the farms with such enthusiasm, a testament to the intimate relationship between Okinawans and their environment.

It is imperative that we foster U.S.-Japan collaborations between students, innovators and government leaders to promote environmental stewardship. My insightful discussions with the students at the University of Ryukyu for the 2024 Kakehashi Project opened my eyes to the diverse perspectives and experiences they contribute to the global conversation on sustainability.

We are eager to increase the impact of innovative solutions pioneered by Japanese companies, such as the development of plastic alternatives. Kaneka Biotechnology Research Labs is creating marine biodegradable plastic plant pellets, and Nippon Paper Industries is coating their paper products with a biodegradable resin to replace plastic barrier films.

I look forward to working with Japanese and Japanese American young people to promote these innovative solutions around the world. Together, we can create a sustainable and beautiful future.

NAOMI SUZUKI

Group A

Despite having both a first and last Japanese name, I have always felt anything but. Born to a Korean immigrant mother and a fourth-generation Japanese American father, I grew up eating kim, rather than nori, and trek instead of mochi. The few Japanese words I did know were mostly Hawaiian slang, which is where my grandpa is from. See? I don’t even call my grandpa Oji-chan.

Because of this, when people would ask if I was Japanese, I would always respond, “I’m only half.” Only, as if I was implying that something is missing or that I am not fully Japanese American. In my head, saying I was Japanese felt like a lie.

When I started at UCLA, I joined the Nikkei Student Union and Kyodo Taiko to connect more with my JA side. Though I have learned about Japanese American culture through the community I found at school, I still felt out of place at times. Most of my new Japanese friends had grown up in the JA community and had many shared experiences I couldn’t relate to.

Before Kakehashi, I had never met another Gosei before, but when I made it to Japan, I found that so many of my peers were just like me. Many of us grew up with bits and pieces of Japanese culture but felt like we weren’t “Japanese enough.” Getting to experience Japan with young Japanese Americans who shared my experience is a huge part of what made this trip so special.

For a part of my Kakehashi experience, I visited Okinawa. While there, I participated in a homestay with three other girls from my cohort, and this ended up being a transformative experience for all of us. I felt deeply immersed in Okinawan culture and got to see all the nuance and complexity of their society.

We learned how to play the sanshin, their famous purple sweet potato (beni ino) and learned some of the local dialect from Oji and Oba (our homestay parents). Despite Oji and Oba speaking almost no English, I found that we were still able to connect and create meaningful experiences. By the end of our stay, I felt like I was visiting my grandparents.

At one point during our trip, we visited a small farm with a bunch of Okinawan families where we learned about the importance of practicing environmentally conscious farming methods. We learned how fertilizer from the farms on the island will drain into the ocean, killing the surrounding coral.

In order to protect the surrounding reefs, Okinawan farmers implement a greenbelt where they plant certain plants around their farms to filter out the fertilizer as the water drains. Watching this community learn about how to protect their land and the surrounding oceans was incredibly powerful. In America, we place extreme value on individualism, but for many Asian American kids, we grow up instilled with values of community and family. Despite not speaking Japanese or going to Obon as a kid, I discovered that I resonate with other fundamental values represented in Japanese culture.

Okinawa is largely known for the American military base that takes up a big portion of their land, and before visiting, I thought the base was unwelcome and should be removed. But, after speaking to Oji and other Okinawans, I realized it has become a fundamental part of many of their lives. Having been there for so long, it provides many jobs for the Okinawan people, and without it, their economy would crumble.

One of the foods I ate at my homestay was a fusion dish called taco rice. It’s basically taco ingredients: tomatoes, lettuce, ground beef, cheese and hot sauce, but over rice instead of in a taco shell. It’s a popular dish in Okinawa and is representative of the huge influence of American culture on Okinawan people.

People still have mixed feelings about the base, including myself, but ultimately, it has become intertwined into Okinawan lives and culture. I realized the relationship between the U.S. and Japan is extremely multifaceted, but that’s why it is so important to make efforts to create connections and a shared community across our cultures. How else can we maintain strong connections without understanding each other’s experiences?

My Kakehashi journey instilled in me a profound pride in my Japanese heritage and fostered meaningful connections with my fellow participants. I will always be grateful for the endless “conbini” runs, long walks in Shibuya at night or doing a farewell Okinawan dance with our homestay families.

Now, when people ask me if I’m Japanese, I no longer feel the reflexive “only half.” To be JA is to be a part of a diverse community where we each have our own definition of what it means to be Japanese American. I may be half-Japanese, but I am wholly Japanese American.
NPS Welcomes Amache Site as National Historic Site

Official designation for Colorado site will help prevent erasure of history.

By Gil Asakawa, P.C. Contributor

(Editors note: Nearly two years after President Joe Biden signed the Amache National Historic Site Act, which designated the Amache site as part of the National Park System, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland on Feb. 15 formally established the Granada War Relocation Authority Center, aka Camp Amache, as the Amache National Historic Site. Amache, which during World War II incarcerated 7,318 ethnic Japanese, most of whom were U.S. citizens near the town of Granada, Colo., was one of the 10 American concentration camps operated by the federal government’s War Relocation Authority.

In a statement, Haaland said, “As a nation, we must face the wrongs of our past in order to build a more just and equitable future. The Interior Department has the tremendous honor of stewarding America’s public lands and natural and cultural resources to tell a complete and honest story of our nation’s history. Today’s establishment of the Amache National Historic Site will help preserve and honor this important and painful chapter in our nation’s story for future generations.”

The following article elaborates on the path to this status and provides background about Japanese American pilgrimages to the site and how the local Colorado community has embraced its role in preserving the site for historical purposes.)

"No, no, no, not even close," he insisted. "You know, I thought, 'Oh, no.' I mean, I'll be honest with you. When I started this thing, I didn't think we'd have a brand-new museum. Yeah. I'm getting ready to order thousands of dollars of brand-new display cases and stuff. I didn't ever believe this ever, ever. No, never.

The Amache Preservation Society opened a tiny, crowded museum in an old house a block from the school some years back to display artifacts and photos donated by survivors, as well as models of the camp created by the students. In 2019, a bank donated its building across the street from the school as a newer, bigger museum.

The NPS and the APS have diligently funded all their volunteer work and equipment for maintaining Amache and the museum through donations from the community including JA and non-JA, civic organizations, grants from preservation organizations. That needs to continue even after the NPS sets up the site because the museum is not part of the National Historic Site, and the NPS doesn’t display artifacts (it stores artifacts at a site in Arizona). So, Hopper will continue to maintain the museum site separate from the nearby national park.

The students have had one steadfast partner for the long run, the Denver Central Optimists Club, whose core members were Japanese American incarceration survivors dedicated to preserving the history of their experience. Derek Okubo, who served as the executive director of the City of Denver’s Agency for Human Rights and Community Partnerships (the modern iteration of the agency that legendary Nisei attorney Min Yasui ran for decades), is the son of Hank Okubo, who as a child was incarcerated at Amache.

Hank Okubo was one of the founders of the Denver Central Optimists Club in 1983, which organized each year’s pilgrimages, worked to clean and preserve the camp and raised money to erect a stone memorial at the camp’s cemetery to all the incarcerees and the men who left Amache to join the U.S. military.

Once Hopper got involved with Amache, he met and worked with the Optimists Club and coordinated the cleanup, preservation of the site and reconstructions of a guard tower, a water tower and, most recently, an entire barrack, as well as the restoration of a rec center building that had been used for decades by the town of Granada as a storage shed for equipment in a town park.

One of the keys to Amache being named a national park has been the support from the community, both in Granada itself but also in Denver and across the country. All the individuals, organizations and institutions that have worked to preserve the camp show that the site is deserving of its designation, says Tracy Coppola of the National Parks Conservation Assn., a nonpartisan nonprofit that worked with the NPS to
KANSHA PROJECT SET FOR JUNE

The transformative program from JACL Chicago will hold its Culmination Event on June 29.

By Ayako Tischler, MDC Youth Representative

The Kansha Project is a transformative program from JACL Chicago that provides young Japanese Americans, ages 18-25, in the Midwest with the opportunity to learn about our community’s history, develop unique insights about our community’s legacy and allow participants to explore their identity with other Japanese American young adults.

Participants engage in an in-depth examination of the World War II confinement site experience through an immersive educational trip to Los Angeles’ historic Little Tokyo neighborhood and Manzanar National Historic Site. Through workshops with local experts and community activists, historical tours and group reflections, participants work to interpret and promote the stories, lessons and legacy of the Japanese American confinement site experience.

Upon returning from the trip, participants share reflections on their experience and present creative and heartfelt projects summarizing the site experience.

This article was made possible by the Harry K. Honda Memorial Journalism Fund, which was established by JACL Redress Strategist Grant Ujifusa.

In the memo (please mail checks to JACL Chicago at 5415 N. Clark St., Chicago, IL 60640 with “Kansha Project” in the memo). Online donations can be made at https://donorbox.org/2023-kansha-project.

Thank You for Your JACL Membership!

We’re grateful to have some of the most engaged and committed members around! Because of your loyal support, we have more premium membership upgrades and generous additional gifts than ever. We’re also appreciative for those who renew year after year (some for 50 years or more!) and for our increase in new members. Your dedication is essential to our ongoing mission for social justice, education, and community!

Thank you! – JACL Membership Department
CALENDAR

NATIONAL

Irei – A National Monument for the WWII Japanese American Incarceration
Los Angeles, CA
JANM
100 N. Central Ave.

This exhibit features stories from 24 incarcerated Japanese Americans who were forcibly incarcerated during World War II. Visitors can now view the book and leave a special haiku (stamp/seal) for each person in the monument as a way to honor those incarcerated. The project’s online archive is now searchable alphabetically or by camp.
Info: Visit ireizo.com for more information and janm.org.

PSW

MY LOST FREEDOM: A JAPANESE AMERICAN WORLD WAR II STORY
Los Angeles, CA
JANM
100 N. Central Ave.

Price: Free

This recurring art exhibition partnered with Eric Nakamura, founder of Giant Robot, highlights creative works celebrating the ethos of Giant Robot, a staple of Asian American alternative pop culture and an influential brand encompassing pop art, skateboarding, comic book, graphic arts and vinyl toy culture.

NCWNP

Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival
Fresno, CA
April 20-21
San Francisco Japantown Sutter Street
Price: Free

All are welcome to join in the festivities as the city celebrates Japanese and Japanese American culture. There will be food, entertainment, exhibits, and much more to enjoy!

Japanese Heritage Night With the San Francisco Giants
San Francisco, CA
May 7: 7:15 p.m.
Oracle Park

Price: $55 Wads

This recurring event gives fans of the Giants the chance to see the team play with themed food, drinks, and entertainment. Admission includes a themed jersey.

PNW

Genji Mihara: An Issei Pioneer
Seattle, WA
Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Washington
1414 S. Weller St.
An Issei pioneer, JCCW’s feature exhibition on the life of Issei leader Genji Mihara (1890-1983) is part of a larger biographical project on Mihara, who immigrated to Seattle in 1907. Features include original photos and artifacts donated by Mihara’s family, historical research, and quotes from oral history interviews, including one from Mihara himself in the 1970s.

MDC

Japanese American Veterans Memorial Program
Minneapolis, MN
May 16; 10-11 a.m.
Fort Snelling National Cemetery
7601 34th Ave. S

Save the date for this important event that will honor more than 100 local Japanese American veterans. Volunteers are needed for various tasks in preparation for the event.
Info: For more information, email chiratadulas@tcjadal.org.

ECD

Japan Festival
Boston, MA
April 27-28; 11 a.m.-5 p.m.
Boston Common
16 Charles St.
Price: Free

After three years, the festival finally returns with Japanese food, music, performances, vendors and much more.

IDC

Topaz Art Pilgrimage
Salt Lake City, UT
May 2-4
Salt Lake City, UT

Price: $80 to attend the May 4 gathering; some additional optional fees available.
Info: To RSVP, visit https://www.topazmuseum.org/pilgrimage.

Second Asian Street Food and Music Festival
Cambridge, MA
May 5; 11 a.m.-6 p.m.
Harvard Square
Church Street
Price: Free

This festival offers live performances, crafts curated by international vendors and delicious street food. This event is presented by the Harvard Square Philippine American Alliance.

Sake in the Park
San Francisco, CA
April 12-25, 2024
San Francisco, CA
San Francisco Giants
Oracle Park

Price: Starting at $32 for JCCCNC Members

Oracle Park, the biggest venue in the event’s 16-year history. This event is a fundraiser for JCCCNC and will include an inclusive ticket with Sake in the Park is almost here. This year’s celebration will take place in Grand Park and will include an inclusive ticket with unlimited food and drink. Early bird tickets go on sale June 1.

Japanese American Senior Center of Washington
Seattle, WA
Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Washington
1414 S. Weller St.
An Issei pioneer, JCCW’s feature exhibition on the life of Issei leader Genji Mihara (1890-1983) is part of a larger biographical project on Mihara, who immigrated to Seattle in 1907. Features include original photos and artifacts donated by Mihara’s family, historical research and quotes from oral history interviews, including one from Mihara himself in the 1970s.

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Tribute to get transferred to Misawa Air Station to go back to Japan to get married about three years, taking a leave of absence from the military. He stayed in Korea for a time and then went to Okinawa, Japan, and eventually ended up at Santa Anita Racetrack, where the family of five had a stall to live in. He lived there from April 1942 to September of 1942, when his mom and siblings were sent to the Rohwer Relocation Camp in Arkansas.

After the war was over, he was reunited with his father, and the family went to Tule Lake, Calif. His father wanted to return to Japan, but the family did not. But when he left first, she decided to keep the family together and returned to Japan in February of 1948.

As a U.S. citizen, Tom went to work for the Army working in the mess hall stock room. He eventually got a job at the PX (post exchange) as a pricing and editing clerk. This move changed his life. He found his life’s work and met Helen, who was to become his wife.

In 1952, he was drafted for the military in the United States, but instead of heading back to the States, he went with some friends and joined the Air Force at the recruiting office in Tokyo. He did basic training there and was assigned to work for the PX and the Air Force clothing store.

He was released from active duty on Nov. 20, 1957. Asking about continuing to work for the PX, he was offered the job of store manager at the PX in Korea. As a civilian, he was now working for AAFES (Army Air Force Exchange Service). He stayed in Korea for about three years, taking a leave to go back to Japan to get married to Helen on Oct. 10, 1959.

In October 1960, he managed to get transferred to Misawa Air Base, where Helen was working. He was merchandise manager of the BX. This was the first time he worked in a couple that got to live together. Their only child, Natalie, was born on Aug. 16, 1961, and they enjoyed their lives there.

However, he received his first transfer to the United States in 1965 to Fort Monmouth, N.J., with a promotion to retail operations manager. Additional promotions moved him to March Air Force Base in California and Fort Ord in Monterey, Calif. With lots of family in Los Angeles, this was an ideal posting, but after a few years, he was on the move again. This time with a promotion to general manager of the Puerto Rico Exchange, which was headquartered at Ramey AFB. Two years were spent in this beautiful location, until the base was closed and he was transferred to Fort Buchanan in San Juan.

An additional two years were spent working hard, going to occasional concerts, such as Diana Ross and Tom Jones at the high-end hotels in San Juan.

His new promotion moved him to a big one and began the general manager of the Blue Ridge Exchange and stationed in Fayetteville, N.C. He was offered a transfer after three years to Okinawa Japan, but decided to pass it up so that Natalie could graduate high school with her friends. However, as soon as she graduated, the family was sent off to Panama for another big assignment. In 1979, Tom received the Extraordinary Achievement Award (the first of three times he received the honor) and was requested to go to Panama. The Panama Canal treaty was going into effect in October 1979, and there were some big projects that had to be completed prior to the international event. All of the Panama Canal Zone facilities had to be returned to Panama, and new facilities set up for the Americans stationed there. Tom was known to his superiors as a calm, smart and effective manager who could deal with complicated situations. So, he was the perfect one to oversee this huge transition.

After retirement, Tom enjoyed golfing and traveling and spending time with friends and family. He also became quietly involved in the Nisei community, contributing to many institutions that meant a lot to him, such as the Japanese American National Museum, Pacific Citizen newspaper, the JACL and the Okinawa Association of America.

Interviewed once by the P.C., Tom stated, “To me, the Pacific Citizen is the ‘eyes and ears’ of the Nisei community and other readers. It gives our community what it needs in terms of informing us what is important in our daily lives and also the many contributors that express interesting personal opinions and experiences that have a bearing in the lives of us all. I implore you to consider supporting the Japanese American Citizens League and the Pacific Citizen as part of your legacy.”

Supporting these and other organizations, Tom supported family and friends was really what Tom was all about. After losing his beautiful wife, Helen, in 2012, he traveled with his daughter Natalie and her fiancé, Ray, to Las Vegas, Hawaii and Japan. In 2017, he moved into Nikkei Senior Gardens assisted living in Arleta, Calif., where he continued to make friends and affect lives. He was incredibly kind and very generous and will be remembered and mourned by many. He requests that in lieu of flowers, any donations be made to Nikkei Senior Gardens.
AARP’s Livability Index

By Scott Tanaka

Last month, I had the opportunity to attend the American Society on Aging’s 2024 Conference in San Francisco. It was my first time attending the conference in person, and it was great connecting with colleagues and friends that I haven’t seen since before the pandemic. Throughout the conference, I staffed the AARP booth and shared with attendees about AARP’s Livability Index. I thought this would be a good time to share this helpful resource that my colleagues in AARP’s Public Policy Institute developed.

The AARP Livability Index platform is a groundbreaking, web-based tool that scores every neighborhood and community in the United States for the services and amenities that affect people’s lives the most. Using more than 50 national data sources, the AARP Livability Index platform provides the clearest picture yet of how well a community meets the current and future needs of people of all ages, regardless of income, physical ability or ethnicity. The AARP Livability Index website measures 61 indicators spread across seven categories of livability: housing, neighborhood, transportation, environment, health, engagement and opportunity.

The AARP Livability Index tool measures 61 indicators across seven categories of livability: housing, neighborhood, transportation, environment, health, engagement and opportunity. Within each of these categories, there are several metrics that are calculated into the overall livability score.

For example, under housing, we look at housing accessibility. One way we measure accessibility is the percentage of housing units with zero-step entrances. We know that most Americans want to stay in their homes as they age. Many will host guests or have older family members with restricted mobility. It’s desirable to have a home that’s both accessible and aesthetically pleasing. To learn more about the other indicators and how Livability scores are determined, visit https://livabilityindex.aarp.org/methods-sources.

Scott Tanaka is a member of the JACL, Washington, D.C., chapter and is a policy, research and international affairs adviser at AARP.