



# Greater Los Angeles Chapter

## *Japanese American Citizens League*

Newsletter no. 449

March 2023

### **VIRTUAL MEETING/PROGRAM**

#### **Sunday, March 19, 2023**

**1:00 pm Program: What Does a TV Production Assistant Do?**

**Speaker: Nicole Suganuma, GLA JACL member**

#### **2:00 pm Business Meeting**



Nicole Suganuma

Going from a hopeful professor of anthropology to working in the film and television industry was never something Nicole considered realistic or possible. With no formal film training or network in the industry, she made the jump into the new career path without really knowing what adventures lay ahead. Currently, she works as a Production Assistant in the Assistant Directors department helping to manage cast and crew on set. Making the shift from academia into television production has been tough but rewarding and she hopes that by sharing her story, others will be encouraged in their own paths. Some of her past credits include *This Is Us*, *The Goldbergs*, *Star Trek: Picard*, *For All Mankind*, and the *Predator* prequel *Prey*.

**For a Zoom link** to the meeting/program and information, email Layne at [greaterlajacl@gmail.com](mailto:greaterlajacl@gmail.com)

#### **GLA JACL Scholarship Application**

The Greater Los Angeles Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League is seeking eligible candidates for its annual Hana Uno Shepard Memorial Scholarship of \$1,000. An applicant must be a graduating high school senior with a high achievement record, from a single-parent family, of Japanese descent, and a resident of Los Angeles or Orange County. The scholarship may be applied to any college, university, community college, fine arts, or vocational school.

The scholarship is given to financially assist students and to help applicants become acquainted with the mission and vision of JACL, a civil rights organization that strives to promote a world that honors diversity by respecting values of fairness, equality and social justice.

The Hana Uno Shepard Scholarship was established in 1992 as a memorial to Hana Shepard, a passionate GLA Chapter member for many years. Before passing in 1987, she was active in the redress movement for the unconstitutional incarceration of people of Japanese ancestry during World War II.

Applications can be found at high school counselors' offices or may be found on the GLA website at <https://www.glajacl.org/scholarship>. Applications can be submitted through a Google form on the website, emailed to [greaterlajacl@gmail.com](mailto:greaterlajacl@gmail.com), or postmarked on or before May 15, 2023. Any questions, please email Scholarship Chair Layne Sakamoto at [greaterlajacl@gmail.com](mailto:greaterlajacl@gmail.com).

**The Story of the Nisei Trojans** was a program held February 12 at Faith United Methodist Church, Torrance, CA with speakers Jon Kaji, a former president of the USC Asian Pacific Alumni Association and Glenn Osaki, Senior Advisor to the USC President. It was sponsored by Faith's Social Action Committee. Co-sponsored by GLA JACL. Included in this newsletter is USC NEWS article regarding the USC Nisei students during WWII.

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Long-time GLA member **Noe Yamabe** passed away February 14. He is survived by his wife, Mary. Included in this newsletter is an article on Noe that appeared in RAFU 11/15/22. Rest in Peace, Noe.

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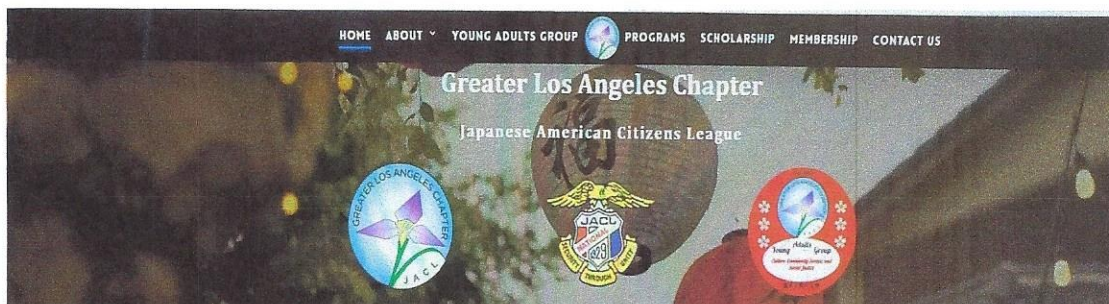
Kanji Sahara

GLA member **Kanji Sahara** represented Jerome War Relocation Center, Arkansas in the Camp Roll Call at the 2023 LA Day of Remembrance, February 18, Japanese American National Museum.

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**SAVE THE DATE**  
GLA JACL Scholarship and Chapter Fundraiser Dance  
with Asian Persuasion  
Saturday, July 29, 2023, 6 – 9 PM  
Gardena Valley Japanese Cultural Center

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GLA JACL website: [glajacl.org](http://glajacl.org)

In Programs on the GLA website, are the recordings of GLA programs, a valuable resource.

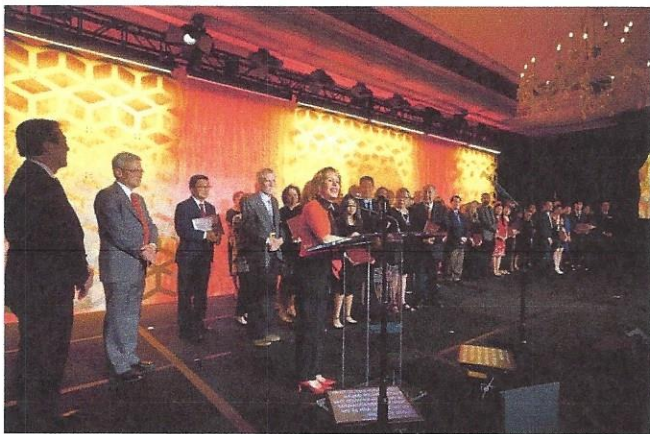
University

# Quest for honorary degrees ends as President Folt confers diplomas upon Nisei students

It's a historic act of atonement, as the university presents families from around the world diplomas in the names of Japanese American USC students who were forced into detention in 1942.



BY **Ron Mackovich-Rodriguez** APRIL 2, 2022



President Carol L. Folt speaks to recipients of the Nisei students' diplomas. (USC Photo/Steve Cohn)

**T**he three and four syllable surnames spoken Friday night share phonic characteristics: Ochiai, Kondo, Fujioka, Sasaki. They are the names of scholars forced to leave USC under dire circumstances, scholars who've since left this world.

At the **Asian Pacific Alumni Association** gala in Pasadena, USC President Carol L. Folt conferred honorary degrees upon 33 former USC students of the Nisei generation. The Nisei are those born in the U.S. to parents who immigrated from Japan.



Members of the Japanese ensemble drum group USC Kazan Taiko perform during Friday's event. (USC Photo/Steve Cohn)

When the U.S. entered World War II in December 1941, there were about 120 Nisei students at USC. By the following spring, there were virtually none. Along with their families and as many as 120,000 others, most had been forcibly relocated to detention facilities.

After the war, USC blocked Nisei students' access to transcripts, forcing some to restart their education at universities in the Midwest and eastern United States.

The university's actions then were a shocking injustice, Folt said.

"Being part of a great American university usually provides a path to the great American dream, and in

USC News

our case, a path to becoming part of the legendary Trojan Family,” she said. “But that dream was abruptly and painfully stopped for so many 80 years ago. Tonight, we are bringing some closure and perhaps healing.”

### Nisei students: a sense of resolution

USC’s Nisei students were granted honorary alumni status in 2008. Four years later, about 10 living Nisei students received honorary degrees; most Nisei students had passed away. University policy does not allow posthumous degrees for people who attended in decades past. Folt created an exception for Nisei students.

Along with her sister and mother, USC alumna Lauren Sodetani-Yoshida received a degree on behalf of her grandfather James Sasaki. She sent a note to Folt:

“Never have I felt a stronger sense of alumni pride than I do now. Although my grandfather passed away in 1994, I never lost hope. I cannot begin to tell you how much his honorary posthumous degree means to me. It has brought so much peace to a piece of my heart.”

Kristen Hayashi, a curator at the Japanese American National Museum in the Little Tokyo section of Los Angeles, watched as an honorary degree was conferred upon ancestor Henry Kondo.

Rather than remain incarcerated, Kondo enlisted in the Army. He joined the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team, which, known for its “Go for Broke” motto, became the most decorated unit of its size and length of service in U.S. military history. Almost all of the soldiers were Japanese Americans.

Kondo died in action in 1944 in France.

“Military service was his way of showing his loyalty, that he was American, a way of proving himself,” Hayashi said. “He was highly aware of the discrimination and racism and prejudice, and maybe he experienced it himself.”

Kondo is buried at Evergreen Cemetery in East Los Angeles, where a memorial commemorates him and other U.S. soldiers of Japanese ancestry who died in World War II.

### Dedicating a place for peace and remembrance

Earlier on Friday, the president dedicated the USC Tribute Rock Garden for Nisei Students at the University Park Campus.

The garden was designed by landscape architect Calvin Abe whose parents during WWII were sent to a detention center in Arizona. The garden’s paving stones, plantings and boulders evoke turmoil and signal resilience.

A vertical stone near the entrance is inscribed with a proverb in Japanese kanji, 石の上にも三年. It’s a Japanese proverb that translates to “Three years on a stone” — a metaphoric message of patience, meaning that sitting on a cold stone will eventually make it warm.

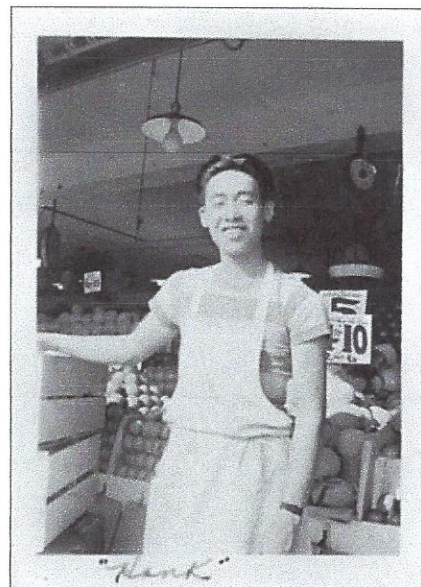
For 15 years Jonathan Kaji, former president of the USC Asian Pacific Alumni Association, waited on his stone.

“If I knew it meant three times five, I might have taken a step back,” he said, drawing laughter.

Kaji championed recognition for all USC Nisei students including his father. Bruce Kaji was a decorated World War II veteran who founded the Japanese American National Museum.

Speaking to the Nisei families assembled at the rock garden, Kaji conveyed a sense of conclusion.

“The Nisei stories help to inspire me and fuel me to not give up,” Kaji said. “The quest ends today.”



Henry Kondo was a USC pharmacy student when U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the detention of Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrants. (Photo/Courtesy of Kristen Hayashi)

## This Party Is All Shook Up: Obon Jivers Celebrate Founding Member's 90th Birthday



by Gwen Muranaka 11/16/2022 RAFU SHIMPO 11/15/22, page 2



From left: Michael Pacelli, Kenny Fukumoto, Neil Yamamoto, Noe Yamabe, Peter Inouye, Ed Kita, Henry Ako and Jerry Koyama.

*By GWEN MURANAKA, Rafu Senior Editor*

GARDENA — Noe Yamabe celebrated his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in true Elvis fashion at Cherrystones on Nov. 4.

Before the Elvises left the building, they gathered for a group photo.

Kenny Fukumoto, bassist for The Grassroots, provided entertainment, performing a number of Elvis favorites.

Noe's wife Mary shared the history of the Obon Jivers, who are a popular part of the Obon festival season. Besides dancing, Yamabe is a noted graphic designer, who created the iconic prints of the World War II concentration camps, seen at the Japanese American National Museum and other sites that tell the story of the Nikkei community.

Here is what Mary shared about the Obon Jivers:



Noe and Mary Yamabe

In the late 1990s, Noe wanted to dance in the Obon Festivals in our various communities with our friends. Noe came up with the idea of calling our group the Obon Jivers and he made T-shirts for all of us. The original guys in the group were himself, Noe Yamabe, Dave Saika, Stanley Kong and Tom Ishimine. In the fall of 2002, Dave Saika had gone to a Halloween costume party wearing a cool wig and the day after, he was showing his friends how he looked in the wig. Cool....very cool!

Then Noe got the idea..... “Hey! How about wearing a cool wig and dressing as Elvis at the Obon Festivals!” And thereafter they made history, appearing at all the Obon Festivals in the Greater L.A. communities! They were even invited to dance at the Las Vegas Obon Festival! Everyone loved them and they had quite a following through the years.

Besides dancing at Obons, they appeared at weddings, at the Japanese American National Museum Volunteers Christmas Celebration, at a formal ceremony of the Shinto [shrine], and they even were invited to a friend’s funeral who was an avid fan of Elvis! Through the years they brought smiles to many, many people.

And, through the years new Elvis’ were brought in. Michael Pacelli became Elvis No. 5, Henry Ako became Elvis No. 6, and Ed Kita became Elvis No.7. Several years ago we lost Stanley Kong, one of the original Elvises, and last July we lost another dear friend, Dave Saika.

But new Elvises continue to keep the heritage and fun going! Noe recently had his 90th birthday celebration at the Cherrystones restaurant and as the celebration had an Elvis theme, new Elvises were born! Kenny Fukumoto Elvis No. 8, Peter Inouye Elvis No. 9, Neill Yamamoto Elvis No. 10 and Jerry Koyama Elvis No. 11!

With that many Elvises in the room, Noe’s party was a blast!