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THE HEART AND SOUL OF OUR COMMUNITY
SAN MATEO CHAPTER JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE APRIL 2008
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INQUIRIES: MARY JO KUBOTA-ARCAESE, 650.593.7358

SAN MATEO JACL IS DEDICATED TO PROMOTING THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE JAPANESE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE AND TO PROTECTING AND ADVANCING THE HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS OF OUR MULTI-ETHNIC SOCIETY THROUGH EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS.

Articles must be submitted before the first Friday (one month prior to publication) and in electronic format [Microsoft WORD, New York font] to katemotoyama@sanbrunocable.com

MEDICARE PROBLEMS? SOME CONTACTS FOR YOU.

Should any JACL members report problems with Medicare due to language barriers, please contact Patty Wada with National JACL. Also, note the additional information on enrollment in Medicare below from Naomi Lim, JACL's Daniel K. Inouye Fellow, who works out of the DC Office. If any of JACL's senior members are having problems or have questions, there is a number/website listed and Naomi can be of assistance as well; her information follows this article.

Also, California Part D Language Access Coalition, a group that does advocacy work on language access issues related to Medicare Part D (which is the prescription drug program of Medicare), is looking to compile and present client stories from throughout California about Medicare Part D and language access issues. The group hopes to back up claims about the need for greater language access for Limited English Proficient (LEP) clients in California.

Medicare's general enrollment was open until the end of March. General enrollment is for those senior citizens who did not sign up for Medicare Part B (outpatient expenses - e.g. doctor visits) when they first became eligible. During this period, seniors can also apply for Medicare Savings Programs, which are for low-income people and helps pay for Medicare Part A (inpatient - e.g. hospital expenses). If members have questions about either general enrollment or Medicare Savings Programs, they can call **(800) 434-0222**. For members that are web-savvy, there's a link <http://www.calmedicare.org/counseling/index.html> where they can locate the Medicare Counseling office nearest them.

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QUILT HONORS NISEI VETERANS AND RECOGNIZES INTERNMENT EXPERIENCE

The 8th grade students at Sunnyside and Tecumseh Middle Schools in Lafayette, Indiana are undertaking an awesome and inspiring project, a 19 x 41 ft quilt honoring the Japanese American soldiers who fought in World War II. This project is under the tutorship of their teacher, Mrs. Leila Meyerratken. In addition to memorabilia, including dog tags of Nisei veterans, and two poems written by 8th Graders, there will be over 20,000 names of Nisei soldiers, from the 100th Battalion, the famed 442nd Infantry Regiment, the 522nd Artillery Battalion, 1399th Engineer Construction Battalion, and MIS (Military Intelligence Service). There will be 120,000 tassels representing the number of Japanese and Japanese Americans incarcerated in Relocation Camps. The quilt dimension of 19x 41 feet was chosen to

represent the year 1941, the year Pearl Harbor was bombed. Like the "Go For Broke" Memorial in Los Angeles, this quilt will be a tribute to the Japanese Americans who volunteered to fight for their country to prove that they were loyal Americans despite the incarceration of their family members in Relocation Centers. The 8th graders are hoping that this quilt will be seen by others in the United States to teach them how Japanese American soldiers rose above the indignities they suffered by making sacrifices in the field of battle. The students strongly feel that this WWII history of the Japanese Americans soldiers, which is not covered in history books, should be told.

How did this project start? What made the students, who have not even met a Japanese American veteran, undertake such an awesome project, requiring countless after school hours of work on the quilt?

The students just wanted to tell the story of the Japanese American soldiers of World War II on the quilt, because they had become emotionally involved with the sacrifices made by Japanese Americans in proving their loyalty to the United States. It took a tremendous amount of research on the part of the students to come up with the details that are being included in the quilt project.

This is what teacher Leila Meyerratken wrote about the quilt:

"My 8th grade students are working to create a tapestry called the One Hundred Twenty Thousand Tassel Tapestry. It is made up of 12 panels that together measure 19 by 41 ft for the year 1941 when Pearl Harbor was bombed. It is a tribute to the Japanese American veterans and is made in part from clothes worn by these heroes.

It is a multi-media tapestry that includes many things including poems, art, maps and memorabilia. All is the work and words of my 8th graders. The first panel begins with a poem that occupies the entire panel. The third one represents 1942 and has a photo of FDR. Next to it there is a U.S. flag superimposed on a Japanese flag. The stripes look like barbed wires and the piece is in shape of an eye. The eyebrow is the name of FDR. It represents an AJA looking at his destiny after Executive Order 9066 was issued. The eye is looking down to show loss of dignity and is also looking at the map of the US showing concentration camps, children in these camps and other illustrations of injustice. The American flag is larger than the Japanese flag to show that the people were more American than Japanese.

The quilt has the story and each part is expressed in many different ways. For example, the rescue of the Lost Battalion by the 442nd was illustrated by using orange silk fabric cut in the shape of lanterns. There are 211 lanterns and on each, there are 4 names of AJA veterans, the ones who were sacrificed to the rescue mission. My students adopted this from Japan, when it celebrates Peace Day by writing on the lanterns the names of the Hiroshima victims. These lanterns float on a river that extends to several panels. They wrote 4 names on each panel to show the ratio of 4 to 1. Four casualties to save one soldier from the 36th Infantry Division.

For the year 1959 Hawaii becomes the 50th State. My students believe that this was the result of the work of AJA veterans. They drew 5 large palm trees in memory of 5 concentration camps established in Hawaii. Each trunk bears the name of one AJA veteran who died in the rescue mission. They chose one soldier from each of the islands that had a concentration camp and named him honorary of that island. Two were medics to make sure all were included.

The last panel represents the year 2000. It shows photos of the 23 AJA veterans who were recipients of the Medal of Honor. The images were transferred on T-shirts sent by AJA veterans, and shows logos of various groups such as the 100th, 442nd, 522nd, etc. The quilt comes with a metal rod that can be put together in many ways. For example it can take up a corner to occupy two walls.

This quilt is a tribute to the AJA veterans and their contribution to America. It is also meant to promote social justice by teaching others in simple ways what these veterans did and how they overcame racism. One student said it is also a warning to those like FDR, that if they turn their back on the U.S. Constitution again, they will end up being exposed by 8th graders."

Mrs. Leila Meyerratken also wrote on May 21 that "the major task left is the iron-on of the 489 pages onto the quilt (containing over 20,000 names of AJA veterans who served during WWII), sew the backing and border on all panels and finish sewing the lanterns. All the origami cranes were sewn. They finished counting the tassels, all 120,000 of them; that needs to be added to the three sides. We still have no display place for the quilt. Hope there will be a few takers."

A letter of appreciation and support from AJA organizations and individual, young and old, veterans and non-veterans would be highly appreciated by the young students, which in effect would be telling the students "thank you for thinking of us." Such letters should be sent to:

Mrs. Leila Meyerratken

1126 Montgomery Street

West Lafayette, Indiana 47906

WWII VETS GRADUATE AT LAST

An article, "WWII vets graduate at last" by Suzanne Roig in the February 25, 2008 edition of the *Honolulu Advertiser*, focused on four Farrington High School diplomas that were awarded 65 years after the recipients were to have graduated.

A former boxer, a retired letter carrier, a lawyer, and an electrician took their rightful place among the 435 men and women of the class of 1943. "I feel so proud of my dad," said Jeff Kam, son of Ronald Kam, the retired machinist/electrician who never actually graduated from Farrington High School because he had to stop school after the attack on Pearl Harbor and was needed on the naval base. "It's about time that he is recognized."

In addition to Kam, there were three men who were members of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. They are: Robert Katayama, Tsuneshi Maruo, and Alfred Y. Arakaki.

WWII INTERNMENT CAMP IN HONOULIULI, HONOLULU

Honouliuli Internment Camp was a World War II facility, one of five used by military authorities in the Hawaiian Islands during WWII to intern about 1,440 U.S. citizens of Japanese, German, and Italian descent as well as nationals from those countries, reported a story, "WWII internment camp revisited and remembered," by Mike Gordon, in the March 3, 2008 edition of the *Honolulu Advertiser*. Gordon writes, "Their only crime was that they looked like the enemy."

Honouliuli opened on March 1, 1943. It was built to house several thousand people but, at most, only 320 were there at one time. The internees called it "jigoku dani" or "hell valley" because of the intense heat trapped in the gulch in which it was located.

"A lot of people in Hawai'i don't know about this internment camp," said Yutaka Inokuchi, an 83-year-old retiree from Aiea who went to Honouliuli to see what was left. His father had been interned there. "The people who were interned, they refused to talk about it."

Todd Takahashi, a 34-year-old high school teacher choked up when he recalled the aunt who was once interned at Honouliuli, "This is my first time here. It's hard to describe. It's not awe. It's not shame. Looking at how desolate it was, it must have been really hard on her. There is a sense of sadness."

The pilgrimage to Honouliuli was coordinated by the Japanese Cultural Center and the Japanese American Citizens League, reported Robert Shikina in "Internees are 'not so nostalgic,'" in the *Star Bulletin*. This story reports that Masamizu Kitajima, 75, was 8 years old when his father, a Japanese priest, was detained. He was told by his mother that he would be responsible for his family. His family, living on Kauai, relied on anonymous donations from the neighbors for food.

Eventually, Kitajima's family went to the mainland. He says, "My dad was very bitter. He wanted to go back to Japan."

In conjunction with the pilgrimage to mark the 65th anniversary of Honouliuli, a JCCH exhibit, "Dark Clouds over Paradise: The Hawaii Internees Story," will be on display at JCCH from March 1-April 11. In *Metro Honolulu People*, author Gail Honda expressed how Japanese Americans unjustly interned during WWII went on to live their lives with pride and honor. "There's a Japanese saying that says, 'Strength and success grow out of adversity.'" She concludes, "That's reflected a lot of Japanese American interns who made the best of their situations and went on to live productive lives."

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TUSKEGEE AIRMEN AND JAPANESE AMERICAN VETERANS

World War II veterans Lawson Sakai and Brian Shiroyama often gather with their group, one of the most-decorated units in World War II, to tell stories. Recently, I.a. chung in "Tuskegee airman, Japanese-American veterans to connect," in the February 16, 2008 edition of *The Mercury News*, writes that Leon "Woodie" Spears was invited by the group to talk about being a Tuskegee airman and former POW.

The 442nd Regimental Combat Team consisted of Japanese American soldiers who enlisted from the internment camps to prove their patriotism. The Tuskegee Airmen, the nation's first black combat pilots, were flying above the 442nd, who were battling on the ground in Northern Italy. Initially, as the Army's units which were segregated by race, black organizations pressured the Army, which began a test program in Tuskegee, Alabama. Even though the "N-word" was thrown at Spears, he earned his wings and proved himself. Said Spears, "It's been my privilege to speak. And when I'm gone, it's all over."



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