

# KOKORO

the heart and soul of our community  
san mateo chapter Japanese American citizens league feb 2010  
[www.sanmateojacl.org](http://www.sanmateojacl.org)  
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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) to [katemotoyama@sanbrunocable.com](mailto:katemotoyama@sanbrunocable.com)

## PRESENTATION OF PLANS FOR TOPAZ MUSEUM

Most Bay Area Japanese Americans interned during WWII were sent to Topaz, Utah. The Topaz Museum Board commissioned plans for a new Topaz Museum to California in January 2010. The meeting in the San Mateo area was held on Saturday, January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1:00 p.m. at beautiful Courtroom A, San Mateo County History Museum in Redwood City.

On a remarkably clear day in a week of stormy weather, over fifty people gathered at the museum at an event cosponsored by the San Mateo JACL and the Topaz Museum Board. The venue was generously donated by our community partner, the San Mateo County History Museum, whose Carmen Blair was there to greet everyone. Jane Beckwith and Susan Stefanoff flew in from Delta, Utah to make presentations and support the event. Several professors and college president of College of San Mateo were in attendance and Mas Hongo of AACP, along with Half Moon Bay Vice Mayor Naomi Patridge, former San Mateo JACL board member. Most important were those in attendance who had been in Topaz or who had family ties to Topaz.

Everyone had been invited to come and review the architectural designs done by Alan Kawasaki from the firm Shah Kawasaki in Oakland, with interpretive design completed by West Office Exhibition Design. Kawasaki's mother had lived on Block 7 of Topaz. Kawasaki explained some of the design principles which makes allusions to Katsura Garden, takes advantage of the site, and reinforces the interpretive intent of the exhibit.

Two other museums and Delta City had come together to build a museum complex in Delta, Utah. The Topaz Museum Board has been working steadily toward the goal of constructing a museum that would tell the story of Topaz and educate all visitors on the necessity of upholding civil rights even in the time of war. The Board now owns 626 acres of the Topaz site, which became a National Historic Landmark in 2007. Besides hosting several pilgrimages, members of the Board teach summer workshops for the

Utah State Office of Education. Typically over 400 school children visit the site each year with tours given by Board members. The Board is working with Brigham Young University and the Utah Arts Council to show the 30 pieces of art in the Topaz collection. Ten paintings by Mine' Okubo and four done by Chiura Obata are the highlights of the works.

At the end of the presentations, there was a reception catered by Takahashi Market, our long-time community partner, which donated mini cornflake cookies for dessert.

#### SCHOLARSHIPS FOR STUDENTS

The San Mateo Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League is pleased to announce their scholarship program for the 2009-2010 school year. Eligible high school seniors are invited to submit applications to the San Mateo JACL, 415 S. Claremont Street, San Mateo, CA 94401 by March 1, 2010. Winning applicants will be announced in early April, 2010. This year's recipients will be awarded their scholarships and honored at a special event hosted by our chapter.

#### **Eligibility Requirements:**

- Applicants must be seniors enrolled in a San Mateo County public or private high school.
- Applicants must be an active National JACL member at either an Individual or Student/Youth Level. (Parent membership will not meet this requirement.)
- Applicants will be partially judged on their involvement in the JA/Asian American community.
- Applicants must be planning to attend a college, university, trade school, business school or any other institution of higher learning within the United States.
- Applications for JACL membership and scholarship applications can be downloaded at [www.jacl.org/join.html](http://www.jacl.org/join.html) <<http://www.jacl.org/join.html>> .

#### GEORGE T. SAKOTO ORAL HISTORY

George Sakoto tells of the rescue of the Lost Battalion from the viewpoint of the self-described "cannon fodder:"

*Artillery shells stopped, counterattack, so Mas Ikeda had to jump out of his foxhole, go to F Company and regroup... Next thing you know, I ran out of ammunition, both clips were gone. One German wanted to come up, going to throw a grenade at me. So I took the pistol, I couldn't get the other clips out, so I got the pistol, and pow, pow, stopped him. Then no more troop movements, and so I got down in the hole and started filling my clips up. Pretty soon I'm looking uphill, Germans would be down*

*below. But they went around me while I was down in the hole, I didn't see 'em, and they started climbing that hill, they started taking the hill back. "Oh, my god," I started hollering at the guys, "watch out for the machine guns, they're taking the hill back." And Tanimachi, for some reason he got up and says, "Where?" and he got shot. So I crawled over to his hole and picked him up, "Why did you stand up?" And he's gurgling and he's trying to say something, blood is coming out of his... and he just, then he just went limp. Then he went, body went limp on me and then I knew he died. And I cried, hugged him, and, "God, why?" Laid him down and looked at all the blood in my hands and I said, "You son of a bitch." Picked up, threw the pack off, picked up the tommy gun and I got out of the hole and I zig-zagged back up, run this way and I'd run that way. I shot two or three guys, and then pretty soon the guys with white handkerchiefs were waving them, group of 'em coming out, and I made sure that nobody behind 'em had a gun, otherwise I would have had to shoot him. So the rest of the troop came up and took the hill.*

The soldier who had so much trouble ascending hills explains, "If I was in my right mind, I don't think I would have done that. I'd have stayed in my hole and shoot, but then to go up and charge the hill was something else that I, I wasn't quite in my right sense of mind. But I was just mad, crying, I was crying." For his actions, Joe was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, hastily pinned on before he flew home to recuperate from a battle wound. In the six days of brutal combat, over 200 Japanese American soldiers were killed or wounded to save as many Texans. Some have questioned the relative value placed on Japanese American versus Caucasian lives. Joe himself uses the term "cannon fodder." In 2000, Joe Sakato and nineteen other Nisei soldiers (most posthumously) had their decorations upgraded to the Medal of Honor.

To recover from the war trauma, Joe traveled and opened up about his experiences: "If I had to stay home and think about the war, you know... I have to talk about it. If I had to keep it in here, I think I would go crazy. That's why I thought in my mind I'd rather talk about it, so I'd get it out of my mind." Even now, Joe has occasional nightmares about combat. He has made a point of speaking, to any audience who cares to listen, about what the Nisei soldiers went through while their families remained in detention camps. Joe Sakato is a modest man. On receiving the Medal of Honor, he declared, "I'm no hero, but I wear it for the guys that didn't come back." Joe concludes with a laugh, "After ninety days of battle, all I had was nine months in hospitals, basic training, and a total of eighteen months, total service. That's why I'm just still a recruit, I'm still a private. I'm going to stay a private."

EXCERPT ON IDENTITY BY GARRETT HONGO'S *VOLCANO*, PUBLISHED 1996

Garrett Hongo is a poet and novelist who grew up estranged from his past. He was born in Hawai'i but raised in Los Angeles after the age of six, a fourth-generation Japanese

American. For Hongo, “knowing” meant returning to Volcano, the tiny town where he was born. Volcano is a rain forest on the slopes of the Kilauea Volcano where his grandfather had run a family store. At the end of the novel, Hongo comes to this realization:

I have decided that chronic dispirited is the result of being *blocked* from who you are, from *knowing* who you are. It separates you from feeling, fosters the modern kind of detachment that not only separates you from woe, which you may have a knowledge of and experience with, but from joy as well, which you may not know. If you have been part of something hard to accept, if you feel socially stigmatized or psychologically haunted by an aberrational past, then a certain kind of detachment may protect you. This is the solution the Nisei generation came up with. They *detached* themselves from a previous, immigrant identity; they *detached* themselves from a defiled history; they *detached* themselves from white Americans; and they *detached* themselves from their children, the Sansei who would grow up middle-class, with a better command of English, with no internal shame about their identities, about the dishonor of the relocation. It was thus with my family. My father *detached* himself from whatever shame he might have felt for his upbringing and the people he sprang from, from those who abandoned him. He lived a life of serene, self-enclosed detachment, so much so that, without the evidence of his bookish trinkets, without my witnessing those few and almost anomalous events of his reflective and pleasurable indulgences, it would have been impossible to figure out what he cared for.

And I grew up *detached* too—from a family history, from a feeling of a kind of *personal* and a kind of *tribal* stake in the world. I came from no culture, from no history, growing up with the barest minimum of a family story. My father kept me out of it. What I learned, others told me. My mother’s people were plantation workers who left the fields after one generation. My Kubota grandfather was sent back to Hiroshima for a good Japanese education so that, when he came back to Hawai’i, he could attain the position of storekeeper and not have to work the fields. The karma of indenture was thus broken. My mother and her sisters then grew up and left the plantation town, left Hawai’i and left history behind. . . .

But what happens, I think, is that the next generation begins to *miss* something without knowing quite what it is. We *fear* something. Without the larger family, without root in time and place, without the oracle bones of ancestry, we rage.

ANNOUNCING 2010 MIN YASUI ORATORICAL COMPETITION
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The procedures and guidelines for the 2010 JACL Minoru Yasui Oratorical Competition are being distributed to JACL district council governors and chapter presidents to attract participants for the competition that will culminate at the national convention in Chicago. JACL chapters asked to identify high school students, age 16 years or older, or full time undergraduate college students who will compete at a JACL district council

competition with the winner advancing to the finals at the national convention, which will be held on July 2.

The Minoru Yasui Oratorical Competition has been a highlight of the national convention where each of the district council finalists present their 3-5 minute presentation in front of an audience of convention delegates and attendees. The topic of this year's competition is "Our 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama, inspired and motivated a nation with a simple word, 'change.' As our nation still faces economic turmoil, wars abroad, as well as damaged health care and immigration systems, 'change' has never been more welcome. What can the Asian Pacific American community and the JACL do to inspire and create change to meet the needs of America's current socio-political landscape?" JACL district councils are asked to submit the name of their finalist to the national JACL by May 15, 2010.

The oratorical competition is named in memory of Yasui, an attorney and civil rights activist. Prior to the internment, Yasui tested the constitutionality of the curfew orders imposed against Japanese Americans. During the 1980s, Yasui served as an articulate voice for the JACL's successful campaign for Redress. The oratorical competition was established to encourage and reinforce verbal communication skills among young JACL members. Finalists will be given roundtrip airfare to Chicago, two nights lodging and attendance at the Youth Luncheon where the winner will be announced.

#### CHANGE IN MEDICAIRE DRUG PRESCRIPTION PLAN

Effective on January 1, 2010, the Social Security Administration teamed up with Chubby Checker to announce a new "twist" in the law that makes it easier to save on your prescription drug costs. The new law changes in the Medicare drug prescription plan may qualify you to enroll in a program called Extra Help. Extra Help is designed to assist individuals with prescription drug costs in Medicare Part D. Below are some key points about Extra Help from the Social Security Administration:

You must reside in one of the 50 states or the District of Columbia. Your resources must be limited to \$12,510 for an individual or \$25,010 for a married couple living together. Resources include such things as bank accounts, stocks, and bonds. We do not count your house and car as resources; and Your annual income must be limited to \$16,245 for an individual or \$21,855 for a married couple living together. Even if your annual income is higher, you still may be able to get some help. Some examples where your income may be higher are if you or your spouse:

- Support other family members who live with you;
- Have earnings from work; or
- Live in Alaska or Hawaii.

Beginning January 1, 2010, when determining your eligibility for Extra Help:  
We will no longer count as a resource any life insurance policy; and

We will no longer count as income the help you receive regularly from someone else to pay your household expenses-food, mortgage, rent, heating fuel or gas, electricity, water, and property taxes.



**JAACL**  
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**Japanese American Citizens League**  
415 Claremont San Mateo CA 94401

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## **Come to the Kimochi Town Hall**

**On Sunday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, the San Mateo Chapter of the JACL is hosting an event for the community to come to hear and ask questions about Kimochi's plans to offer some of their programs to the residents of the Peninsula.**

**Anna Sawamura, Program Director for Kimochi, will discuss Kimochi's plans and ask the attendees which of those programs and services would be most utilized and needed here on the Peninsula.**

**Kimochi, founded in 1971, is a non-profit organization dedicated to the well being of Seniors in the San Francisco Bay Area. Continuing the Japanese tradition of care and support for Seniors, today Kimochi is focusing and developing services to meet the emerging needs of Sansei Baby Boomers and their families.**

**The Town Hall event will be at 1:00 PM at the Social Hall of the San Mateo Buddhist Temple. Light refreshments will be served.**

**For more information and to reserve your space please call Ms. Sawamura at 415-931-2294 or email her at [asawamura@kimochi-inc.org](mailto:asawamura@kimochi-inc.org).**