

KOKORO

THE HEART AND SOUL OF OUR COMMUNITY
SAN MATEO CHAPTER JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE MAR 2006
WWW.SANMATEOJACL.ORG
INQUIRIES: KATE MOTOYAMA 650.574.6676

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 MULTIETHNIC SOCIETY THROUGH EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS.

Articles must be submitted before the third Friday in electronic format [Microsoft WORD, New York font] to katemotoyama@sanbrunocable.com.

DAY OF REMEMBRANCE LESSON IS ONE OF UNITY

San Mateo JACL's Day of Remembrance observance focused on using the lessons of the past to recommit to ensuring a better future for all. Held on the traditional date of February 19th, the event took place at College of San Mateo's Theater.

Julian Antram opened the evening with a performance of Hiroshi Kashiwagi's poem, "A Meeting at Tule Lake." Walking onto a bare stage with a suitcase—meant to represent the two suitcases in which each evacuee had to carry all possessions—Julian put real feeling into the lines: "Tule Lake—that/ was a name I dared not mention/ spoken warily, always with/hesitation, never voluntarily." Scott Tsuchitani's film, based on Kashiwagi's poem, was an interplay of lines of verse with the candid words of Japanese Americans who had been sent to camp. Though some remembrances were descriptive, even humorous, there was an undertone of sadness, resignation, or anger at the country that had stolen their constitutional rights. One interviewee mentioned a suitcase that he saw whenever he went into his garage, a suitcase that had not been opened for over forty years. On opening the suitcase, he discovered a diary he had kept while incarcerated—something he had blocked out for many years. Another interviewee said that he had buried his diary when leaving Tule Lake because he wanted to put that part of his life behind him.

Mas Yamasaki, one of the subjects in the film, spoke about growing up as a twelve-year-old in camp. He felt that his parents had shielded him from the truth and enabled him to be a kid—albeit behind barbed wire. He felt that the camps had a profound and lasting impact on the structure of the Japanese American family. Imam Tahir Anwar spoke about friends in the Japanese American community who had always stood beside Muslims since September 11th. The Imam was born in the U.K. but raised in the United States since the age of five. After September 11th, relatives in the U.K., urged the Imam to leave for England; however, he stays because he considers this country as his home. The Imam speaks five languages, but he mentioned that he speaks English with "an American accent." The persecution of those in the Muslim community is similar to what was endured by the Japanese American community—yet, we are all brethren, so what injures any one of us is an injury to all. As a Muslim, a religious leader, and a male of a certain age, the Imam has to live with racial profiling on a daily basis. The audience had questions for both Mas and the Imam after their remarks.

The evening was closed by a poem, "Sojourners," by Janice Mirikitani, read by Michelle Kui. The lines of the poem are a tribute to the Issei and Nisei in particular, and are inscribed on a monument in San Francisco's Japantown. The words ended with, ". . . the journey continues," and many in the audience pledged to work towards protecting civil and human rights, now and in the future.

The public program was preceded by an installation of the San Mateo JACL board. The Honorable Karyl Matsumoto, JACL member and South San Francisco Council Member, performed the installation. Incoming presidents Mary Jo Kubota-Arcarese and Steve Okamoto performed duties of the masters of ceremony. The Asian American Curriculum Project brought many of their books and resources to share. We are so grateful to all these individuals, and particularly to students Julian and Michelle and to our speakers Mas Yamasaki and Imam Tahir Anwar. Thank you to everyone who brought delicious treats for the reception afterwards.

KINTETSU TO SELL ALL SF JAPANTOWN PROPERTIES

Adapted from an article by KENJI G. TAGUMA, *Nichi Bei Times*

On its 100th anniversary and in what is destined to be the largest one-time sale of Japantown properties since the redevelopment era, Kintetsu Enterprises Co. of America is planning to sell its four remaining holdings (Radisson Miyako Hotel [218-rooms], Best Western Miyako Inn [125-rooms], Kintetsu and Miyako Shopping Malls) in the historic San Francisco development.

Japantown was founded in 1906 after the Great Earthquake. Its identity and vitality as a cultural center were challenged by but two landmark events: the relocation of tens of thousands of Japanese-American during World War II and the 1948 redevelopment of some 27 blocks of Japantown that displaced more than 1,500 residents and dozens of businesses.

Attorneys hired by Kintetsu have held two meetings with select community leaders to discuss the sale and solicit community feedback. According to attorney Don Tamaki whose law firm is retained by Kintetsu, the company (based in Osaka) has had "difficult times" due to the "prolonged recession in Japan." Attempts to restructure locally have not succeeded. Kintetsu agreed to a number of conditions that Tamaki characterizes as "unconventional" in real estate transactions:

that there be disclosure to the community prior to any sale,

that Kintetsu would do its best to find a buyer interested in the preservation of Japantown and in holding the property long-term,

to preserve the properties with a Japanese cultural theme, and

to obtain the buyer's commitment in writing to do that.

But community leader Allen Okamoto, a Japantown realtor, commented: "As far as I'm concerned, they seem like hollow, unenforceable statements. In the long term, who knows what's going to happen?"

Kintetsu hopes to move into contract negotiations with a buyer by the end of the month for the hotels—an aggressive timeframe for action. Although the hotels are targeted first, all

four properties can be sold together, Tamaki said. Kintetu's attempt to garner community input contrast with the sale of its last San Francisco property sold, the Japantown Bowl. Despite community efforts to retain the popular recreation facility, Kintetsu sold the property a little over five years ago, and the developer built a five-story condominium and retail building.

In a separate action, AMC Entertainment, the owner of the AMC Kabuki 8 Theater in Japantown, is being forced to sell to satisfy state anti-trust concerns about its merger with Loews Cineplex.

San Francisco's Japantown is one of only three remaining in California. The other two are in San Jose and Los Angeles. Recently, legislation was passed to protect and preserve these vestiges of Japanese American history and culture. But the Japantown site is a piece of prime real estate in San Francisco and, therefore, very desirable to those seeking to develop. Properties of this size tend to be converted into condominiums—a precious commodity in the Bay Area's competitive housing market.

San Francisco Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi represents District 5, which includes Japantown. He is looking into designating it as a landmark preservation site or a special-use district.

ONLINE PETITION

Immediately after the above article was written, the below petition was made available:

To: Mayor and Board of Supervisors of City and County of San Francisco, Kintetsu of America Corporation, and AMC/Lowes Theatre Corporation

We the concerned people of San Francisco's Japantown are outraged by the actions taken by the Kintetsu of America Corporation for their intention to sell all of all the property that they own in Japantown. Due to the large amount of property they own, we stand to lose nearly 3/4 of Japantown's property which includes the Miyako and Kintetsu Mall, the Miyako Hotel, and the Miyako Inn.

There has also been intention by AMC/Lowes Theatres to also sell-off the Kabuki Theatre, a major center of business to the Japantown community and to some of the major events such as the Asian American film festival, and the Day of Remembrance to remind everyone about the internment camps during WWII and the struggle for redress.

This turn of events had to come at the worst time while the neighborhood celebrates the centennial (100 years) of this special place that some consider "home" and to the creator of this petition a neighborhood that he has been raised in.

In history, Japantown has been an integral part of San Francisco. During its early years, the neighborhood stretched as far south up to Height Street and the Japanese American population was only allowed to live in this enclave. What promoted the near total destruction of this neighborhood were the redevelopment projects that enraged not just the Japanese American community, but also the African American community of the Fillmore neighborhood. Thus Japantown was downsized to a near three blocks east to west, and two blocks north and south.

There are only three existing Nihonmachis in the United States, which also includes Los Angeles (Little Tokyo), and San Jose (Japantown).

We expect that the City of San Francisco, the Kintesu of America Corporation, and the AMC/Loews Theatre Corporation will take a serious look that losing nearly 3/4 of our neighborhood would be a devastating loss to the preservation of our neighborhood. If the properties are sold to the people for the wrong intentions, we will surely see that our neighborhood will surely disappear and be forgotten.

Go to: www.petitiononline.com/jtown/petition.html

TULE LAKE INTERNMENT CAMP MADE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

The Bush administration has designated Tule Lake as a national historic landmark in recognition of the Japanese Americans interned at the Northern California camp in Siskiyou County during WWII.

California Senator Dianne Feinstein pressured Interior Secretary Gale Norton to make the designation before February 19, the anniversary of the signing of Executive Order 9066.

The designation as a landmark will help pave the way for more federal money to support the camp, which is located near the California-Oregon border.

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY: HAGIWARA JAPANESE TEA GARDEN

Adapted from an article by Charles Burrell, *San Francisco Chronicle*

The five-acre, beautifully landscaped Hagiwara Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park is, at 112 years, the oldest public Japanese garden in the United States. Recently, differences arose about whether the tea garden and its open-air concession should more accurately reflect Japanese culture.

Makoto Hagiwara designed and landscaped the tea garden for the Japanese Village exhibit at the California Midwinter International Exposition of 1894. The Hagiwara family were the garden's caretakers--though one major interruption was the 1942 internment of Japanese Americans.

Under management by Fred Lo, who has held the tea garden contract for 14 years, tea is served with a fortune cookie and almond cookies. (The tea garden is the reputed birthplace of the "Chinese fortune cookie"—which, like "chop suey," is an American invention.) The waitresses wear robes meant to suggest yukata. There are snacks for sale as well as Japanese and Chinese items, as well as souvenirs of San Francisco.

Burrell's article reads:

"We're very uncomfortable with the products being sold at the tea garden," said Rich Hashimoto, president of the Japantown Merchants Association. "They reflect more a Chinese culture than a Japanese culture. And the quality of the products doesn't meet our standards." Hashimoto and leaders of other Japantown organizations are backing a bid from a Japanese American cafe owner to take over the concession from the current operator, a Chinatown business owner, and bring in more Japanese-themed food and items.

Carol Murata, who owns Café Hana in Japantown, submitted her plans to restore the Tea Garden with greater authenticity and put in a bid to the Recreation and Park Commission. Lo wants to maintain the concession.

Members of the Japantown Merchants Association appear to favor Murata's vision of greater cultural fidelity for the Japanese Tea Garden. The practices and artifacts of a culture, however mundane, comprise a living legacy of a people. However, it is also undeniable that cultures are dynamic. Cultures interact with other cultures, evolve over time and across generations, absorb other cultural influences, and transform their own canons. Even traditions that are closely observed and transmitted, such as the Art of Tea, cannot remain in a pristine state. Cha-no-yu was conceived by Sen no Rikkyu, but can revered traditions of Omote Senke and Urasenke be said to be identical to forms practiced in feudal 16th century Japan?

When Maxine Hong Kingston was writing *The Woman Warrior* and *Tripmaster Monkey*, she was criticized by writers, such as Frank Chin, who attacked her for taking legendary figures and changing them to suit the purposes of her art. Her defense was that she was writing fiction, not chronicling history. But the greater question is: who determines which parties have entitlement to carry on a tradition or to initiate change?

The controversy over the Japanese Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park is part of an ongoing conversation about cultural history in our community. There is merit on both sides of the issue.

NJAHS EXHIBIT ON JAPANTOWN

The National Japanese American Historical Society's next exhibit, JAPANTOWN: A CENTURY OF REBIRTH AND RESILIENCE, will open in the Peace Gallery on March 17, 2006 and be on display until May 31, 2006.

This exhibit, designed by Naganuma and Associates and curated by NJAHS, will explore the experience of Nikkei in San Francisco with images, old newspaper articles, documents and objects framed by personal stories and historical information. It will address the history through these themes: The First Issei; Settlement; Born From Ashes; the 1920's; Japantown's Heyday; War and Displacement; Homecoming; Urban Renewal; 1970's Activism and 1980's to Today.

NJAHS Peace Gallery
1684 Post St.
San Francisco, California 94115

JACL 2006: "PHOENIX RISING/ LEADERSHIP FOR A NEW GENERATION"

The JACL 2006 39th biennial convention will be held June 21 to 24, 2006 at the Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort and Spa at the Gila River Indian Community. If you postmark registration by April 29, 2006, you can take advantage of reduced fees and discounts on special events. In addition to the usual business conducted at the convention to set policy and priorities of JACL for the next two years, there are workshops ranging from Native Seeds to Multiracial Identity to the shared history of American Indians and Japanese Americans at Gila River and Poston, and more.

Booster activities include a Sedona Tour, a visit to Downtown Tempe, a tour of the Heard Museum, shopping at Chandler Fashion Mall, a trip to the Japanese Friendship Garden, and even the opportunity to combine thrills, speed, and safety at Bob Bondurant's School of High Performance Driving.

NON-ENGLISH SPEAKERS' DISPARATE TREATMENT BY ER

An article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* titled "Non-English speakers hung up on when calling ER," by Vanessa Hua, reported that limited English proficient (LEP) persons do not receive adequate access to emergency room services in Alameda County. The Discrimination Research Center conducted 551 tests at 12 Alameda County Hospitals in several languages. None of the testers who called seeking emergency services were disconnected or hung up on when they called speaking English, nor were they put on hold longer than 10 minutes. About 62 percent of calls in Vietnamese resulted in a hang-up or disconnection; calls placed in Cantonese resulted in a hang-up 63 percent of the time, Speakers of Tagalog and Spanish fared better. Testers began each non-English call by mentioning—in English—the language they spoke. The report recommends that hospital administrators designate a staff member to coordinate language services, use a multilingual telephone system menu, and perform self-audits.



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1-800-400-6633

Japanese American Citizens League
415 Claremont San Mateo CA 94401

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