

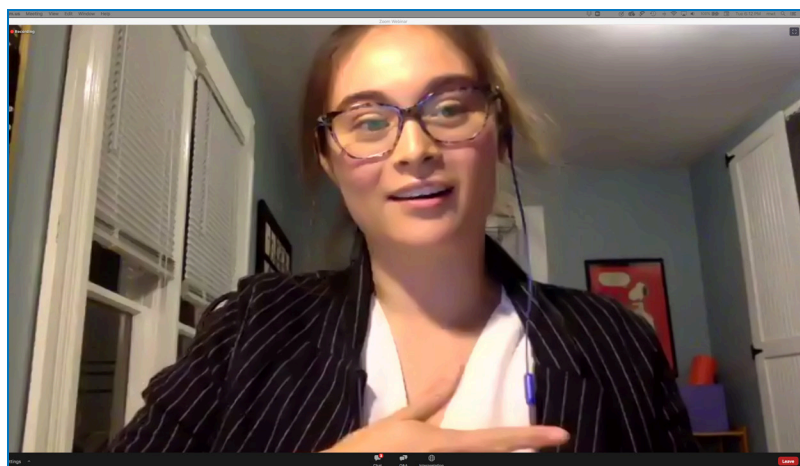
Midwesterners in National Spotlight

Even with the pandemic forcing the cancellation of an in-person Annual Conference in Chicago, Midwest USJCers were able to make significant contributions on-line.

Lisa Sakai (JALD 2018) and **George Kobayashi** (JALD 2020) ably co-MCed the USJC Members Forum on October 15. They provided continuity and context for the speakers, and the only regret from their presentation was that a video of George's dance number wasn't saved.

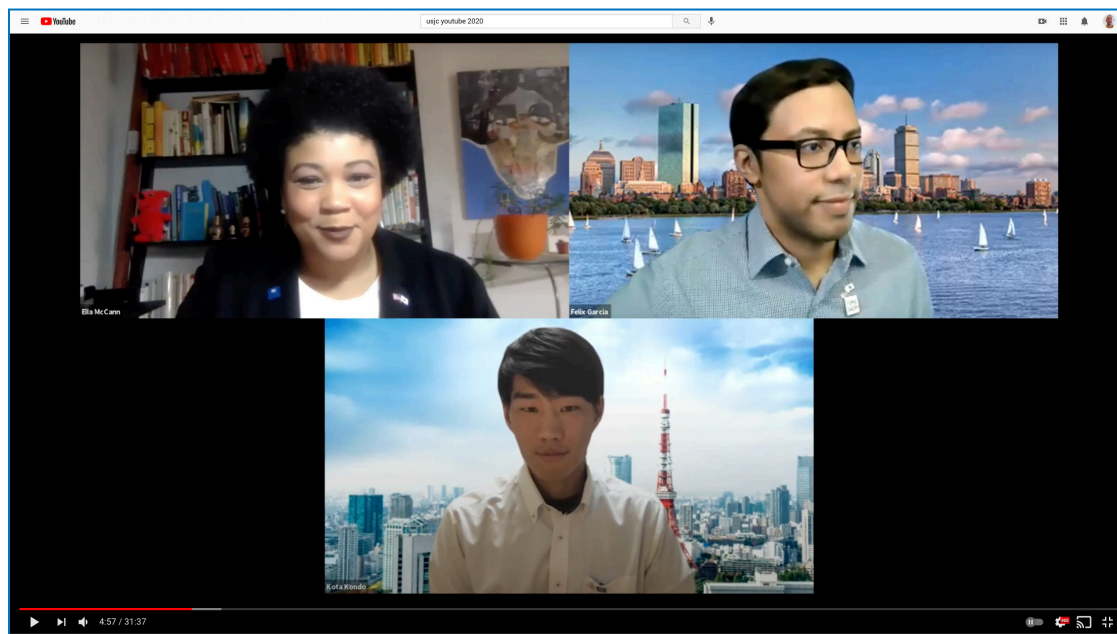
The member breakout session that following the presentations were noted by many as the highlight of the evening. **Stacy Uchida Brown** (ELP 2014) said the best part for her was "meeting and welcoming new people to the group!" **Ella McCann** noted that, "As far as virtual events go, USJC has had some of the best events I've been too. The transitions are seamless, the engagement is good in the chats and you feel immersed in the experience."

The Midwest's newest member was crucial to the success of the *Japanese American Stars* series featuring pro golfer Collin Morikawa on October 26. **Rob Ohno**, SVP, Head of International Tours for the PGA, was instrumental in getting the 23-year-old 2020 PGA Championship winner to participate.



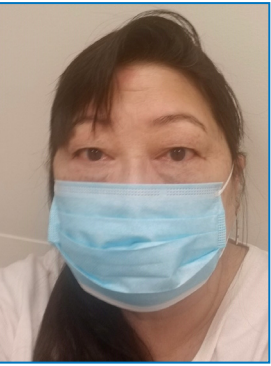
On November 17 as part of the Public Symposium, USJC member **Aila Gomi** (above) was featured as an inspiring role model in the "Women's Leadership: The Power of Story" session. She shared her personal journey in becoming an engineer. She noted that "Be comfortable in your own skin" is advice she would have given her younger self.

Ella McCann (below, upper left) moderated the "Critical Conversations: Voices Within – How is BLM Reshaping Conversations About Discrimination?" on December 11 as part of the USJC Next Generation Summit.



Kudos to all Midwestern participants for helping to turn the disappointment of *not* hosting the Annual Conference into an on-line success!

From Lisa Sakai: The Straight Stuff



Happy Lunar New Year! The Year of the Ox officially begins February 12, 2021 and that is when my New Year will begin since the year 2020 appears to have 13 months. (With its less than auspicious

start, it seems fitting to just roll January into last year.)

Necessity is indeed the mother of invention, and during the last quarter of 2020, the USJC held its first virtual Annual Conference and we all learned the different ways to chat on Zoom. A new Signatures Series started with the Bilateral Boardroom in September, the Member's Forum (hosted by yours truly and **George Kobayashi**) in October, the Public Symposium in November and closing with The Next Generation Summit held in December. Virtual will never be the same as in-person, but in many ways, the virtual format seemed more intimate. Rather than be viewed up on a stage across a grand ballroom, the speakers were closer. It felt like a lot of fireside chats.

On the local level, those of us in the Midwest continue to meet on Zoom and we even managed a group (masked) outing to a winery in Michigan in October. Braving the cold and a drive through the middle of a political rally, we had an enjoyable day gathering grapes and eating. Last quarter we also got to welcome two new members to the Midwest region: **Monika Oyama**, an attorney at Masuda Funai Eifert & Mitchell and our 2020 ELP delegate; and **Rob Ohno**, SVP-Head of International Tours at the PGA. It is a tough year to join any organization, but we are grateful for our new additions. Connections are everything (especially

if you are physically isolated) and if you haven't met either of them, please reach out to introduce your avatar.

2020 ended with more of a whimper than a bang. Nine months of the pandemic and a recession definitely took its toll. Without Irene at its head or an in-person Annual Conference, the USJC could easily have floundered. However, a dedicated Board of Directors, a new President & CEO and a committed membership gave us an organization that's come through the other side and is eager to move forward. Albeit, slightly differently than we were used to, but I am grateful for the technology

that allows me to stay in touch – even if it is in a digital format. Can you imagine what this year would have been like if we had to rely on telephones and fax machines? (For those of you born in a year beginning with a 2, a fax machine is like a visual version of a cassette tape. A cassette tape? Well, that's a...uh, never mind!)

Like everyone else, I am hoping that the new year will bring us a brighter future. Remember: "When you're going through hell, keep going!"

2021 - Forward ho!

Anna Ninoyu Takes on Vice

With an eye to the future, Lisa convinced **Anna Ninoyu** (in sketch at right, done by world-renowned Japanese architect Tadao Ando) to become Vice Chair of the Midwest USJC.

Lisa also gave the rest of the Midwest a job: to NOT scare off Anna in the remaining months of 2021.

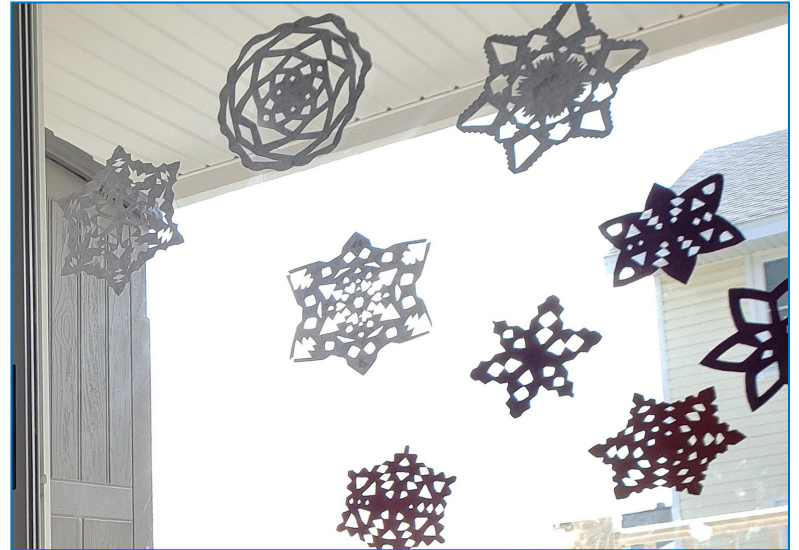
From Anna: "As the new vice chair for USJC Midwest, I hope to make a lasting contribution to the organization by growing our network of Japanese-American members and create an open door to new members from all cultures and nationalities.

"We need to foster and strengthen our interdependence with as many friends and allies and continue our growth into the new decade, to promote connections and multi-cultural pursuits and to share our identity with the wider world. I look forward to working together with our Chair Lisa Sakai and all members of our Midwest Region in 2021 and beyond. Happy New Year!"



Congratulations and thank you, Anna!

MEMBER NEWS



Daniela One said: "Like many others, we had a very quiet holiday season. Flav, Iris, and I made paper snowflakes on Christmas morning and later ventured ourselves to cooking lobster at home for the first time. To my pleasant surprise, it came out delicious!"

Amy Houlihan (ELP 2013, second from left) took in Brookfield Zoo Lights with (left to right) her mom Debbie, brother Trace, sister, Allie, husband Matt, and front and center, daughter Layla.

Toshiki Masasaki's (JALD 2015) Top Five List of Binge Watched Shows over the Holidays (or just another week):

1. Alice in Borderland, Season 1 (Netflix)
2. Queen's Gambit (Netflix)
3. The Morning Show (AppleTV+)
4. The Crown, Season 4 (Netflix)
5. Stay Tuned (Netflix)



Here's a family Christmas photo and update from Rob Ohno (second from right): (from left) "Ben is an '18 Harvard grad and has been working remotely at Booz Allen in Washington DC. Pam (wife) has been busy with her college consulting business, although sadly her mom passed away recently. Sam is a senior at Dartmouth and has been going to college remotely. Thankfully, both boys are really into golf, so I am a very lucky dad right now."

(editor's note: Yes, this doesn't look like winter in the Midwest. Rob is a native Minnesotan who currently lives in Florida, and we either adopted/kidnapped him or he adopted us; either way, we're happy to have him as a Midwest USJCer!)

MEMBER NEWS



From Stacy Uchida Brown (ELP 2014): "Teaching Syd how to play the piano at 10 months. Totally kidding, but how great is this photo?! We often forget to stop to take pictures so we wanted to take some over the holidays. I swear we took 1,000 shots to get just one with everyone looking!"

Mai Hayashi-Vo, like thousands of others, lost her job back in June due to the pandemic. After five rough months of job searching, she got an offer to work for Omron in its Electronics Components Division as a Marketing Communications Coordinator.

She said, "Throughout the journey, a lot of people in my network were willing to help me out. Some people offered me great career advice, and some connected me to amazing people in the industries (thank you, Kai Mitsushio!). Although I lost a job that I cared about because of Covid, what I gained from this experience was huge. I encountered so many inspiring people, expanded my networks, and most importantly, landed a job that I have been aspiring to do. I am very grateful."



From Aila Gomi: "I was lucky enough to have my brother (center) and his fiancé drive from Boston to spend New Year's in Columbus with me and my husband. We did manage to make some osechi to celebrate."



Ryota Sekine (ELP 2019) co-founded Cubii with two other University of Chicago classmates in 2014 after a successful Kickstarter campaign. In October the company was acquired by private equity firm Gridiron Capital.

"I would like to thank the USJC family for your continuous support and encouragement from the earliest days

of my entrepreneurial career in the United States. Being a foreign-born founder, I've had to navigate many obstacles along the way. I thank each person whom I had the opportunity to meet and had given me encouragement, advice and support," Ryota wrote. "With the acquisition in October 2020, I've stepped down from executive management. I plan to spend a few months in Japan, Singapore and Canada in 2021 to reconnect with family members while incubating my next startup, which I hope to run throughout this decade, and continue to create a positive impact for people and organizations across the planet. I look forward to continuing to be a part of the USJC and Tomodachi family and getting to know current and future members more deeply. The road ahead may not be smooth and certain for many of us, but we'll all make it through together. Let's make 2021 a healthy and prosperous year."

ELPs Lead Fund-Raising Efforts

Exhibiting real leadership, ELPs committed to raising \$25,000 in the 4th quarter to help support the USJC when it needed it the most to combat the financial impacts of COVID-19. Through their on-line Poepple-to-People Campaign, \$27,507 from 243 donors.

Stacy Uchida Brown (ELP 2014), **Ryota Sekine** (ELP 2019) and **Amy Houlihan** (ELP 2013) led the effort here in the Midwest, and raised \$3,588. They would like to thank all those who contributed, and also those who made donations directly to USJC during this challenging year.

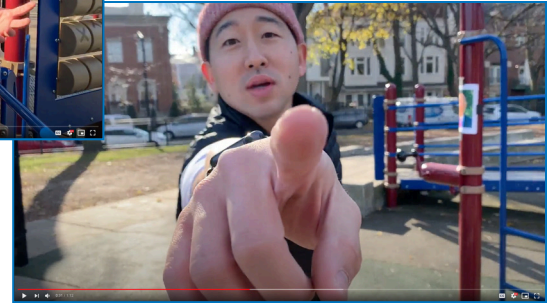
Besides leadership, ELPs are all about fun! A tea tasting event was hosted by ELP sponsor Ito En. Rona Tison, Sr. Vice President at ITO EN (North America) INC., passionately shared the history of tea and best practices for enjoying the teas that Ito En generously shipped to participants' doorsteps. Rona also shared recipes for tea-infused cocktails and even a tea-crusted pork dish! It was enjoyed so much, a second event is planned for 2021.

USJC's first karaoke and lip sync competition, Kohaku Uta Gassen, was judged by **Kaz Maniwa** (JALD 2000) and **Britt Yamamoto** (JALD 2019). The lively audience had a blast witnessing the incredible talent!

In addition, after Irene's passing, nearly 90% of active ELP alumni participated in the ELP-led fundraising campaign in her honor, and raised over \$15,000 for USJC. In all ELP raised over \$42K for USJC in 2020. Stacy said this shows the ELP network is a powerful one, and how much can be accomplished when our community comes together. "We hope you will continue to support the next generation and celebrate with us these wins," she said.



Eric Hattori (ELP 2018) submitted a spirited rendition of "Wrecking Ball" for his entry in the lip sync competition.



Our Newest ELP



Congratulations to **Monika Oyama** for being chosen as a 2020 Emerging Leader! She is a principal at Masuda Funai.

Born and raised in the United States, Monika spent her developmental years in Tokyo, and then attended law school and worked in the United States as a young adult. Monika is a true bicultural and bilingual professional. She is the chair of Masuda Funai's Associate Liaison Committee as well as the Visiting Attorney Program at the firm.

Monika is actively involved in a number of organizations, including serving as vice chair of the Chicago Mita-kai (Keio University alumni group), vice chair of the International Law Committee of the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association, and board member of Global Kids Judo Association (a newly established Japanese nonprofit). When Monika is not working, she enjoys traveling, scuba diving, cooking and wine tasting, as well as Latin culture, food and music.

When Life Gives You Grapes . . .

Daniela One is organizing an outing to [Lemon Creek Winery](#) in Berrien Springs, Michigan on October 25. For those that could make it, it was a welcome break from the monotony of our stay-at-home pandemic existence.

The Chicago and Michigan members took a tractor ride, picked delicious sweet concord grapes, tasted local wine, and enjoyed socializing in-person. This trip energized the group to continue to stay positive and look forward to future outings, hopefully sometime in 2021.

Enjoying the day (pictured at right, from left) were **Daniela One**, **Anna Ninoyu** and spouse **Kris Gorospe**, **Robert Corder**, and **Daiki Ishiyama**. Also in attendance were **Dayne Kono** (JALD 2010), spouse **Junko**, and **Lisa Sakai** (JALD 2018).



[Click to check out a short video Daiki made of the visit.](#)

Virtual Arts Festival

Ikigai Indoors was a free virtual festival highlighting Japanese arts and artists in Chicagoland teaching the vast community at home hosted by the Japanese Arts Foundation, Japanese Culture Center, and Japan Foundation.

The event, held December 5, explored the theme of ikigai: “iki” (to live) and “gai” (reason) describes the pleasures and meanings for life. Some of the arts featured were Aikido, Iaido, Ikebana, Sumi-e, Suminagashi, Shodo, and Taiko.

Much thanks to **Stephen Toyoda**, president of the Japanese Cultural Center, and all those involved in this presentation of Japanese arts.

New Shin-Issei Affinity Group

An initiative to form a new USJC affinity group, tentatively named “Shin-Issei Group”, is underway, **Toshiki Masaki** (JALD 2015) reports. The steering committee drafted the following statements to define the group:

Our Mission

The Shin Issei group contributes to the mission of USJC to strengthen the U.S.-Japan relationship, by bringing together members with bicultural competences who aspire to bridge the two nations, regardless of immigration status.

Our Purpose

We provide a forum that builds relationships among Shin Issei leaders and generates innovative ideas for the betterment of our communities.

We serve as a resource to USJC by providing bilingual and bicultural expertise to enhance dialogues between Americans and Japanese.

We develop our unique identity and pride as Shin Issei to help advance our understanding of the U.S.-Japan relationship, contribute our Shin Issei perspective and experience to the U.S.-Japan ties, and promote friendship through diverse programming.

Who We Are

Our interpretation of Shin Issei is postwar Japanese immigrants or Japanese citizens who came to the United States for education, work or other obligations and have settled in the country.