



Laughter Was Definitely on the Menu



photos by Daiki Ishiyama

Midwest USJC members were treated to a welcome night of laughs in early November as they took in the stand-up comedy of Saku Yanagawa at Epiphany Center for the Arts.

Saku, a Japanese comedian based right here in Chicago, was “an international tour de force of comedic insights and, of course, a lot of laughs,” said **Kathryn Ibata-Arens** (JALD 2011). Big thanks to **Daiki Ishiyama** for arranging the evening!



Midwest USJC was pleased to welcome USJC President and CEO Suzanne Basalla to the October dinner meeting. “Always a pleasure to visit with Suzanne,” **Kathryn Ibata-Ahrens** (JALD 2011) said. “I was honored to have met her in March 2011 and witness her steadfast leadership; she was both calm and visionary in the face of the devastation and crisis of the Triple Disaster. Hope to see that book she should write about her experiences bringing the military-led Operation Tomodachi to its current form.”

From Lisa Sakai: The Straight Stuff



I hope everyone watched the USJC's *Member's Forum* on October 21, 2021. I have to admit I was a little reluctant to register for the virtual event – Zoom fatigue

being a very real thing. However, I wanted to support the USJC, so I sucked it up, grabbed a caffeinated beverage and braced myself. Instead, not only was I pleasantly surprised and engaged, I was awed! It was a fabulous program.

What particularly stood out for me was the panel discussion “Elevating the Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (AANHPI) community: A view from the Biden Administration” and the USJC's Artists & Creative Affinity Group's performance: *Art Heals, Art Unites, Art Transcends*.

Moderated by **Stephanie Nitahara** (ELP 2019), the panel discussion featured Erika Moritsugu, Deputy Assistant to the President and Senior Liaison for AANHPI and Krystal Ka'ai, Executive Director of the White House Initiative on AANHPI. Two things immediately caught my attention: the fact that the AANHPI community even have people in the White House concerned about their issues; and that those people are two amazing women. Outreach and points of access are a big part of what they are trying to do. Rather than make decisions in a bubble, they are holding briefings and roundtable events to talk to members in the community. Krystal's Initiative has 10 Regional Offices throughout the country. I hope one of their roundtable discussions will be in Chicago. One of the most interesting questions Stephanie asked

them was how their identity shaped and influenced their leadership. Both of them felt the disparity between the cultural inclination to “keep quiet” and “don't be the nail sticking out” vs. their passionate activism. As Erika stated, “consensus is not the same as collaboration.”

The Artists & Creative Affinity Group video highlighted various USJC members showcasing their talents. I had no idea we had so many talented, creative people in the USJC. What was fascinating was the diversity of the performers and the performances. Taiko with rap, haiku made into song, a musical on the internet.

On a more local level, I would like to give a shout out to **Michael Tanimura**. Mike is being awarded the 2022 Community Service Award by the Japanese/Japanese American community in Chicago! Mike has been an active member of the USJC, the editor of our Midwest newsletter and was a 2012 JALD Delegate. He has also been very active in the JA community: served as President of the JASC; curated

JA exhibits for the Consulate, JASC, Redress Conference; organized the Japan Community Picnic; and volunteered for numerous community organizations (Tohkon Judo, BTC, JASC). It is a well-deserved award and we are very proud to call him a member of the USJC.

The award will be presented at the Asian American Coalition's Lunar New Year Gala on March 12, 2022. This year the event is hosted by the Malaysian Community, and it would be great to see a strong show of support by USJC members at the Gala.

This is my last article as Midwest Chair. I am turning the gavel over to the very capable hands of **Anna Ninoyu**. While it has been a honor and a privilege to serve as Chair to this region, I believe this change in leadership will bring a new focus as well as a strong re-engagement by membership. The last two years have been hard, but it's the start of a brand new year. Let's look to the future and please join me in welcoming Anna to her new role!

Time to Renew Your Membership

If you have not yet done so, please go to <https://www.usjapanCouncil.org/annual-membership-contribution/> to renew your USJC membership for 2022.

As President and CEO Suzanne Basalla has noted, “While we're seeing glimmers of hope in ending the pandemic, we recognize that working from home and travel restrictions remain in place for most of us. Throughout this global crisis, USJC has been developing innovative ways for members to connect and collaborate with one another, and to stimulate broader dialogue and action.

For almost two years now, USJC has hosted nearly 200 events to facilitate discussions and strengthen bonds between our two countries.”

Your support is necessary for USJC to successfully continue its mission.

Constructing the New Normal



by *Anna Ninoyu*

Happy Year of the Tiger! With risks come rewards, and this year will be the year to turn crises into opportunities.

Sure enough it has been a crisis-filled 2021, now let's see what we can do to sublimate this experience into something constructive. As the new Chairman for the Midwest chapter, I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight a few positive events of the last quarter of 2021, and a peek at what to expect this year.

Despite restrictions on gatherings and assembly due to the ongoing covid pandemic, USJC Midwest would not let our sense of humor get dampened

by social distancing and vaccination requirements. Our members pulled up our collective breeches, got our shots, and went to see Saku Yanagawa at the Epiphany Center for the Arts in Chicago's West Town neighborhood during his brief stop before Thanksgiving. A few beers could not loosen us up enough from the shocking material. This young man has a brilliant career ahead of him in stand-up comedy and the performing arts; Saku would be an amazing addition to the USJC family. Thank you, **Daiki Ishiyama** for getting us out and back to enjoying the important things: beer and laughter.

On a more serious note, USJC National made a strong push in the affirmation of environmental, social and governance issues and sustainability towards the international community. A virtual symposium held on November

titled "Purpose-Driven Leadership in U.S.-Japan Relations" convened with U.S. and Japan's top business, government and civil sector executives to share their assessments and forecasts on adversities and opportunities related to ESG issues, particularly in adapting business and social interactions in a post-epidemic environment. Despite a few early setbacks, cautious optimism and perseverance in adversity are the recommended antidotes, along with some good news to anticipate this year.

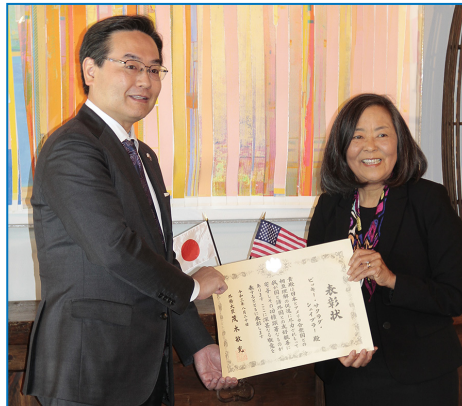
Last but not least, thank you **Lisa Sakai** (JALD 2018) for your leadership these past three years keeping our pack tight and engaged during this pandemic. Let us begin this new year with optimism and resilience in embracing and adapting to the new normal. As we say, all good things come to an end, but so does the bad.

MEMBER NEWS



Congratulations to **Naomi Hattori** (ELP 2019, Mitsui LP 2013), who was selected as one of the Association Forum's Forty Under 40 for

2021. Naomi, Acting Vice President for Global Development at Choose Chicago, was recognized for her outstanding contributions to NPOs and for her demonstrated commitment and leadership.



On November 18 a special ceremony was held in Omaha, Nebraska to honor **Vickie Sakurada Schaepler** (JALD 2019). Chicago's new Consul-General Hiroshi Tajima officially presented her with a Ministry of Foreign Affairs' commendation for her work on the Japanese Hall and History Project at the Legacies of the Plains Museum, in Gering, Nebraska. The Hall is expected to open this summer. Congratulations, Vickie!

Aila Gomi had a busy holiday season. She was settling into her new job, hosted three Thanksgiving meals, flew out to San Jose for a visit with her parents and grandmother from Japan, fit in a visit to Yosemite, and also helped prepare a traditional Oshogatsu meal!

