

## Blossoms? Friendship, but Not Cherry

by Laurie Van Pelt (JALD 2018)

A group of 12 from Michigan and Chicago visited the Japanese tea garden at Meijer Gardens in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on Saturday, April 23.

What better way to transition from winter's falling snowflakes than to experience gently falling cherry blossoms? Well, that was the plan but winter decided to hang on a little longer, delaying the arrival of the blossoms. However, the group was rewarded with a summer-like afternoon with temperatures in the 80s.

The beautiful and tranquil Japanese garden was designed by Hoichi Kurisu and features a sakura promenade, an authentic tea house, waterfalls, and sculptures created by contemporary artists. There are also other themed gardens and more than 50 breathtaking world-class sculptures throughout the park. The most prominent sculpture admired was The American Horse, which stands three stories tall, inspired by Leonardo da Vinci and created by Japanese-American artist Nina Akamu.

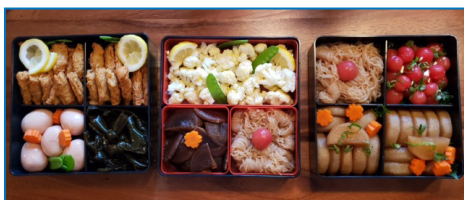
After viewing the garden, a leisurely bento picnic provided the perfect afterglow for the group to continue their visit with each other and prolong the enjoyment of a beautiful, warm day.



photos by  
Michael  
Tanimura,  
except as noted



Ron Van Pelt



Just some of the delicious food – enough to feed everyone – crafted by Laurie!



Above, from left to right: Kyle Nakamoto (JALD 2019), Dayne Kono (JALD 2010), Detroit Deputy Consul General Hiromi Otsuki, Henry Tanaka, Robert Corder, Dorothy Nakamoto, Laurie Van Pelt (JALD 2018), Hiroko Lancour, Lisa Sakai (JALD 2018), Laurie Tanimura, Michael Tanimura (JALD 2012). And at left, just right of the banner, Ron Van Pelt.



# From Anna Ninoyu: Sound Bytes



“What a strange thing! / to be alive / beneath cherry blossoms.” So wrote the Japanese poet Kobayashi Issa poem nearly three hundred years ago. He was one of the “Great Four” haiku masters in Japan, which includes Basho Matsuo, Buson Yosa and Shiki Masaoka.

Although I have yet to find the original Japanese text, this English translation distills that moment in life after strife to embrace and welcome the beauty in it all. 'Tis the season for hanami and humanity.

This year, engagement is the operative term after two years of COVID restrictions. Japan has announced their doors will open to tourists in June. U.S.-Japan Council's Annual Conference will be held in Tokyo October 27 & 28 and titled *The Great Reconnect: Strengthening Alliances and Partnerships*.

Let's continue this effort in three ways: 1) Engage regional members outside of the Greater Chicago Area for events, 2) Engage the larger Asian-American and Pacific Islander community agencies at-large to work together and widen our network, 3) Deepen our relationship with the Consulates-General of Japan in Chicago and Detroit.

The Midwest Region had a great start to the year. **Bob Kumaki** (JALD 2009) graciously arranged our inaugural dinner with Consul General Tajima and

his senior staff Deputy Consul General Naoya Kishi and Mr. Tsutomu Shibata, Director of the Japan Information Center at Torino Ramen in Wilmette.

**Laurie Van Pelt** (JALD 2018) brilliantly planned a hanami outing at the nationally renowned Japanese Garden in the Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids, Michigan with Deputy Consul General Hiromi Otsuki from Detroit and our fellow Michigander members, **Rob Corder** and **Kyle Nakamoto** (JALD 2019).

We also welcomed **Ryo Suzuki**, a new USJC member since March, based in Nebraska, who is assisting Wendy Abe and Lauren Matsumoto in reviving the educators' affinity group. He works at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK) as an International Recruitment Specialist. I had the opportunity to meet Ryo via Zoom and we are planning a February 2023 outing to UNK where they have one of the largest and most energetic Japanese Festivals in the country; almost 40% of UNK's international students are from Japan. Ryo will also be in Chicago for the Midwest U.S.-Japan Association Annual Conference on September 11–13. Please save the date as we will plan a gathering.

As a look ahead to this month, we are holding our first Bento Talks post-COVID with Midwest USJC member **Dr. Bill Tsutsui** (JALD 2011), President of Ottawa University in Kansas. He is a well-known cultural investigator and Godzilla expert. **Marion Friebus-Flaman** (JALD 2013) has convinced him to stopover in Chicago enroute to the Wisconsin campus of Ottawa University to give a lecture titled “Yokai and Japanese Monster Culture”. Please save the date for May 24 at the Japan Information Center and be on the lookout for the registration link in your

emails. Bento boxes will be provided by MSquared. This is sure to be an eye-opening event.

Something else to look forward to is the Japanese American Services Committee (JASC) celebrating their 75th Anniversary on May 19. With **Michael Takada** (JALD 2017) at the helm as CEO, this hallmark event will honor the history and evolution of JASC and peek into the next chapter of growth. I encourage you to register and donate to support the great work JASC contributes to the greater Chicago community.

Last, but not least, I had a wonderful encounter with Megan Nakano, Executive Director for the Asian American Chamber of Commerce of Illinois during the Asian American Coalition of Chicago's 2022 *Lunar Gala* where our own **Michael Tanimura** (JALD 2012) was recognized for his exemplary community service. Thank you **Lisa Sakai** (JALD 2018) for making this introduction. AACC celebrates all Asian American communities, bringing together elected officials, community leaders and emerging youth in Chicago. The 2024 AACC Gala will be hosted by the Japanese American community, and USJC-Midwest has been invited to have a presence and contribute our ideas and resources for the event. Please reach out to me [aninoyu@metisdesignarchitects.com](mailto:aninoyu@metisdesignarchitects.com) and get involved with the 2024 AACC Gala.

In the spirit of discovery and new beginnings, I will paraphrase a line from my favorite show. During my 3-year mission as chair, *we will explore and seek new life and new organizations, to boldly go where no he/she/they has gone before!*



# The Drudgery of Meetings, Meetings, Meetings . . .



On April 4, the Midwest Region hosted a dinner for Consul General Hiroshi Tajima (back row, middle, above), Deputy Consul General Naoya Kishi (back row, second from right), and Director of the Japan Information Center Tsutomu Shibata (far right) at Torino Ramen. The dinner was attended by Kris Gorospe, Bob Kumaki (JALD 2009), Michael Tanimura (JALD 2012), Michael Takada (JALD 2017), Naomi Hattori (ELP 2019), Dayne Kono (JALD 2010), Anna Ninoyu, Kathryn Ibata-Arens (JALD 2011), Amy Rubinger, Marion Friebus-Flaman (JALD 2013), Mai Hayashi, Ella McCann, George Kobayashi (JALD 2020), Daiki Ishiyama, and Robert Takagi (JALD 2007). In addition to dining on the area's best ramen, the USJC and Consulate Staff faced off in a Jeopardy-style quiz on Chicago and Tokyo trivia master-minded by Bob Kumaki. Who won? The evening's better team, of course!



Naomi Hattori

Our February meeting was held at Naomi Hattori and husband's new store Konbini & Kanpai, where we enjoyed specially-selected spirits and bento from M Square.



Kris Gorospe



Amidst tapas at La Tosca in Arlington Heights on January 22, the gavel was officially passed to our new Midwest USJC Chair Anna Ninoyu. None were happier at the meeting than our wonderful chair of the past three years, Lisa Sakai.



# The Continuing Saga of the 2020 JALDs

by George Kogayashi (JALD 2020)

The ten members of the Japanese American Leadership Delegation Class of 2020 met in Los Angeles in March to hear updates on U.S.-Japan relations ahead of their trip to Tokyo and Shizuoka next year and to report on issues concerning the Japanese American communities in their respective regions.

They also had an opportunity to renew their bonds and sense of kinship as they heard from a series of speakers in a two-day session at the Japanese American National Museum. JALD members were encouraged to become “players” in U.S.-Japan relations by cultivating deep ties with Japan.

After the delegates reported on the issues affecting their local Japanese and



Japanese American communities, they were encouraged to keep connecting with their local consuls general and

work together on initiatives such as mental health and anti-Asian hate.



## The Return of Bento Talks

### Yokai and Japanese Monster Culture

**William Tsutsui** (JALD 2011), USJC's very own Gojira expert, will present on “Yokai and Japanese Monster Culture” as *Bento Talks* returns.

The Japan Information Center will host Bill and 30 attendees on May 24 for networking, discussion and bento by M Square.

You can make a reservation at <https://yokaibentotalk.eventbrite.com/>.

Bill is a specialist in the economic, environmental, and cultural history of modern Japan. Educated at Harvard, Oxford, and Princeton Universities, he has published widely on Japanese popular culture and globalization, Japan's postwar

“imagination of disaster,” and giant monster movies in Japan and the United States. His 2004 book *Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters* was called a “cult classic” by the *New York Times* and a Japanese translation was published by *Chuko soso*.

He currently serves as President and Professor of History at Ottawa University (a private comprehensive university with campuses in Kansas and Arizona), and previously taught at the University of Kansas, Southern Methodist University, and Hendrix College. In 2020-2021, he was the Edwin O. Reischauer Distinguished Visiting Professor at Harvard, where he taught the course “Japanese Monsters.”



# MEMBER NEWS



Congratulations to Kathryn Ibata-Arens (JALD 2011)! Her new book, "Pandemic Medicine: Why the Global Innovation System Is Broken, and How We Can Fix It" (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2021), has been named Best Book in Global Health by the International Studies Association for its contribution to understanding the business and politics of global health.



Kudos to Naomi Hattori (ELP 2019) and her husband Jun-Jun Vichaikul for the *Chicago Magazine* article in praise of their new Lakeview store Konbini & Konpai. You can check the article out at <https://www.chicagomag.com/chicago-magazine/april-2022/cooler-rulers/>.



Consul General Tajima and Midwest USJC members were on hand as Michael Tanimura (JALD 2012) was presented with an award for Exemplary Community Service at the Asian American Coalition of Chicago's Lunar New Year Gala on March 12.



Help celebrate the Japanese American Service Committee's 75th Anniversary on May 19. Join CEO Michael Takada (JALD 2017), Board President Stacy Uchida Brown (ELP 2014), and Directors Marion Friebus-Flaman (JALD 2013) and Bob Kumaki (JALD 2009) for an evening of fellowship with cocktails, spiritfrees (nonalcoholic mixed drinks), sushi and heavy appetizers.

JASC Cranes & Cocktails  
75th Anniversary Celebration  
Thursday, May 19, 6-8 pm  
Artifact Events  
4325 N Ravenswood Ave., Chicago  
Silent auction is open until May 19, 7:45pm  
<https://www.jasc-chicago.org/75th/>