



## Yokai on My Mind

Kathryn Ibata-Arens

Midwest USJC's signature program series *Bento Talks* was back on May 24 after a long Covid hiatus.

**William Tsutsui** (JALD 2011), Midwest USJC's very own Gojira expert, presented an abbreviated version of the "Japanese Monsters" course he taught at Harvard.

He noted that the Japanese have an unparalleled proclivity for demons and monsters, both historically (think kappa, tengu) and currently – like provincial and Olympic mascots. They are used in advertising to sell services and products, and are even wildly successful products themselves: like Sanjiro's Hello Kitty (a Yokai that really creeps Bill out!).

Because of Covid restrictions in place at the Consulate's Japan Information Center (JIC)

where the program was held, we were restricted on the number of participants who could attend. This turned out to be a big plus, as the after-presentation bento was an informal affair where everyone could exchange ideas and ask questions of Bill and all hear and be heard!

Our thanks again to Bill and also Tsutomu Shibata, Director of the JIC, who made the return of *Bento Talks* such a memorable occasion!



Above, Bill with Alex Bell, one of Kathryn Ibata-Arens' Global Asian Studies students from DePaul. Kathryn and Bill were in Tokyo on their JALD trip when the 3-11-11 earthquake struck.

Left, Marion Friebus-Flaman (JALD 2013) presents Bill with a print of Gojira attacking Chicago as a remembrance of his visit.

# From Anna Ninoyu: Sound Bytes



Summer was brief, busy, and hot this year for a lot of USJC members. Festivals, network meetings, and summer vacations filled up our schedules, but now that fall season is around the corner, I'll take this as a moment to reflect on recent events and what's in store for the rest of 2022.

Last month, the annual Japanese Picnic was held at Busse Woods in Elk Grove Village with **Michael Tanimura** (JALD 2012) at the helm. He volunteered to pick up the traditional pig roast and brought together the Japanese nationals and Japanese-American communities for a day of great food, great weather and fun family events. I highly recommend our members to have a show of support and attend next year's picnic. Right around the corner is the Midwest U.S.-Japan Association Conference in Chicago where our Midwest Region will gather for dinner at Chicago's iconic family-owned Bergoff Restaurant for some German fare to welcome our fellow members from Nebraska, **Kirk Zeller** and **Ryo Suzuki**.

**Aila Gomi** is full speed ahead in organizing a bi-monthly virtual version of our in-person gatherings to improve our engagement and participation over our 13-member state region, the greatest number of states in all of USJC regions. Each meeting will include USJC national and regional updates and highlight 2-3 members. It will be

an informal forum to present stories, projects or serious hobbies open to all members, new members and members who cannot always attend our in-person events in Chicago. Although we do not yet have a formal title, "Bonfire Banter" or "Seasonal Soapbox" is being tossed around as a name, and will be on track to roll out at the end of January 2023. Please be on a lookout for a questionnaire later this year for topics you would like to share or interest you, or if you have a better name for the event.

Planning is underway for the 2013 JALD 10-Year Reunion and Midwest Regional Conference in Chicago taking place April 2023. **Marion Friebus-Flaman** (JALD 2013) is our fearless leader pulling together a one-of-a-kind Chicago-style USJC experience for her 2013 JALD cohorts and Midwest Region members. Please make sure to bookmark this event at the end of next April and make a commitment to attend.

As you all remember Mike Tanimura was honored during the 2022 Asian American Coalition of Chicago Lunar New Year Gala for his service to the Japanese American community. The future 2024 AACC LNY Gala will be hosted by the Japanese American community where I will serve as co-chair alongside Karen Kanemoto of Japanese Mutual Aid Society of Chicago. The effort will be led by Megan Nakano of the Asian American Chamber of Commerce, and event planning will kick-off later this month. During the 2022 Gala, Consul General Tajima was in attendance as well as number of elected city, state officials, leaders and guests from over 16 Asian American communities. We look forward to USJC members' continued support, along with encouragement and sponsorship

from the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago and our several Japanese and Japanese American organization partners for a show-stopping event. Stay posted for updates on potential venues, performances and shows for the event, and our partners who will provide the evening's food and drinks.

Last but not least, a reminder to register for the U.S – Japan Council Annual Conference in Tokyo this October. USJC is providing a EFRS (Entrants, Returnees Follow-up Systems) certificate that allows eligibility for a 15-day business visa. Please contact Sonoko Plummer [splummer@usjapanCouncil.org](mailto:splummer@usjapanCouncil.org) for further information. Looking forward to seeing all of you who will be attending this event. It has been an interesting few years and I'm very excited to travel to Japan again.

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## Congrats to Midwest ELPs ELP 50 Initiative

The ELP 50 Initiative gathers 50 of the top next-generation Japanese American leaders to experience Japan and connect with their Japanese counterparts. It is a strategic program designed to strengthen the political, cultural, economic, and personal ties between young Japanese-American and Japanese leaders.

Congratulations to Midwest ELPs **David Kenji Chang** (2015), **Kenji Negi** (2016), **Andrea Sugano** (2016) and **Ryota Sekine** (2019) for being chosen for this prestigious program. Although only Ryota still resides in the Midwest, we hope they all keep the Midwest in their hearts and minds.



# Midwest Forum Strengthens U.S.- Japan Relations



by **Robert Kumaki** (JALD 2009)

The 27th Annual Midwest Forum was held at the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago on June 27 and 28. The Midwest Forum is unique among MOFA Consular offices in the U.S., bringing together the Honorary Consuls for the 10-State region covered by the Chicago Office as well as non-profit organizations with a focus on U.S.-Japan relations such as the collective Japan America Society chapters, the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Chicago, the U.S.-Japan Council, and the Japan External Trade Relations Organization, among others.

The purpose of the meeting is to allow parties to report on and discuss Japan-related topics in their geographical areas, as well as gain a better understanding of the current state of Japan-related issues in the Midwest from MOFA's

perspective, in order to discuss those issues more cogently with stakeholders in their communities. Specifically, the CGJC goal is to “develop new and concrete actions to promote understanding of Japan and enhance Japan’s profile in the Midwest, as well as strengthen partnerships with Japan.”

## Midwesterners Have Affinity for Leadership

USJC has been supportive of members created groups based on shared interests. This is very helpful in fostering cohesiveness, since there are not many opportunities for the national membership (or international, including those in Japan) to get together, and not all regions are as active as the Midwest in holding meetings and programs.

**Aila Gomi** is one of the chairs of the Outreach & Allyship Committee, which aims to strengthen U.S.-Japan ties while confronting systemic inequities.

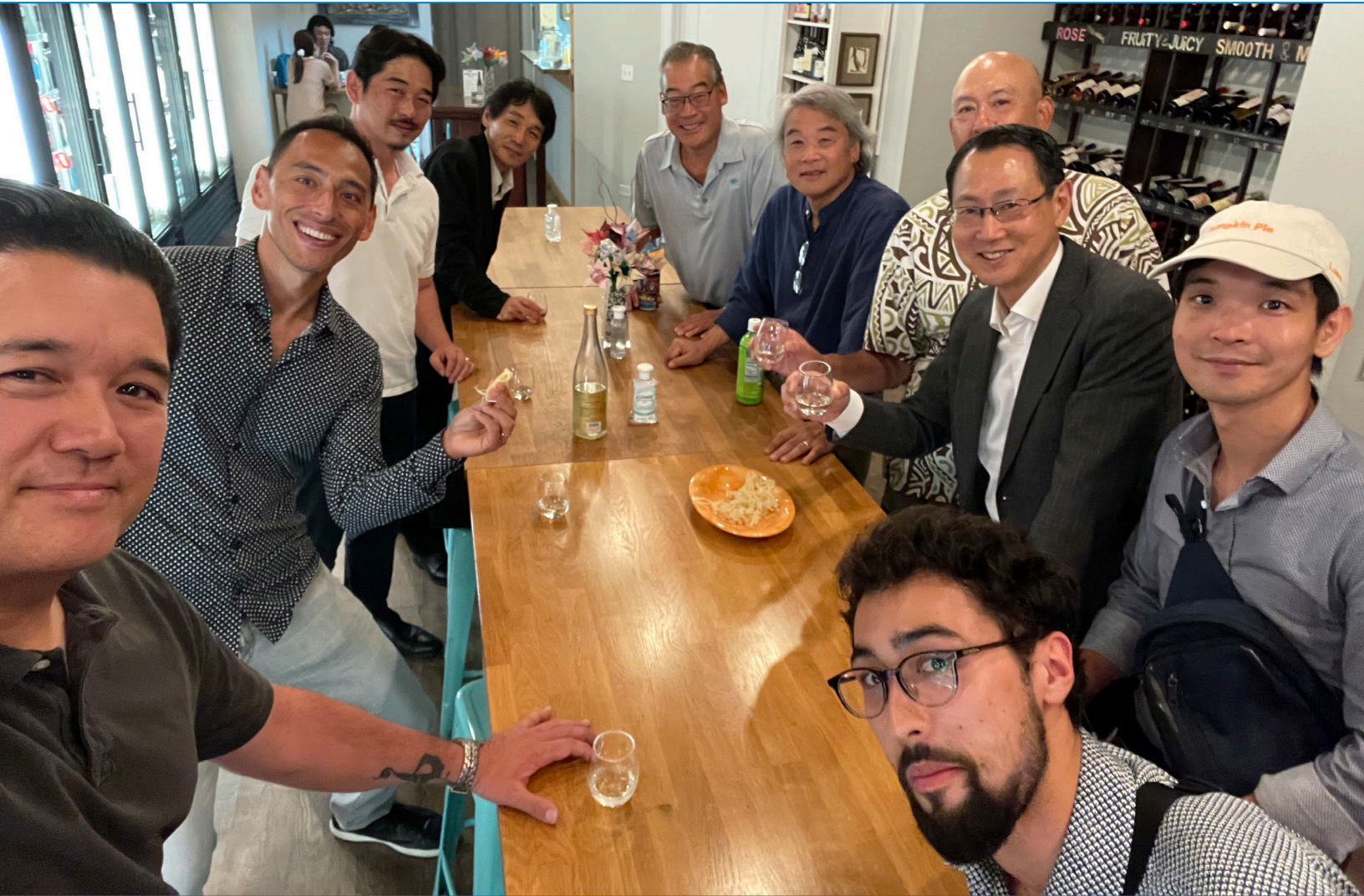
Moderated for the fourth year by **Bob Kumaki**, also in attendance from the Midwest USJC were **Dayne Kono** (JALD 2010), **Marion Friebs Flaman** (JALD 2013), **Michael Takada** (JALD 2017), and **Lisa Sakai** (JALD 2018) and **Vickie Sakurada Schaepler** (JALD 2019).

**Ryo Suzuki**, an international recruitment specialist at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, leads the Educators Affinity Group, which shares information on student exchange programs and cross-cultural education, from elementary to post-doc.

**Toshiki Masaki** is one of the leaders of the Shin-Issei Affinity Group, that serves as a forum for shin-issei to build relationships, and also serves as a resource to USJC by providing bilingual and bicultural expertise.

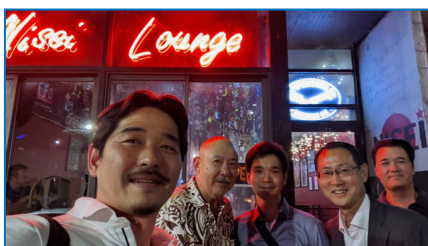


# Boys Night Out Hopefully Just the First of a New Tradition



Organized by **Robert Kumaki** (JALD 2009), the Midwest USJC hosted its first ever Boys Night Out with members of the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago. Following a dinner of Hong Kong style roast meats, the Consulate staff were treated to their first “Chicago handshake,” a shot of Malort followed by and Old Style beer chaser at the famous Nisei Lounge, and then a variety of sake, beer, and other libations consumed at Konbini & Kanpai, owned by **Naomi Hattori** (ELP 2019).

Above, at Konbini & Kampai (from left), Chicago JA historian Erik Matsunaga, **Stephen Toyoda**, Japan Information Center Director Tsutomu Shibata, Deputy Consul-General Naoya Kishi, Japanese American Service Committee director John Sasaki, **Bob Kumaki**, **Michael Tanimura** (JALD 2012), **Dayne Kono** (JALD 2010), **Ryota Sekine** (ELP 2019), and JIC staffer Joe Galligan.



Can't wait to see pics from the Girls Night Out, happening later in September!





Yes! We still have (mostly) monthly meetings. At far left is the May meeting at CoCo Pazzo, notable for attendance by newly-married **Kenji Negi** (ELP 2016) visiting from Japan, and guests **Fumi Kikuyama Maher** (newly-selected ELP 2022) and Megan

Nakano (referenced in Anna's column), all seated. Above is the group from June 25 at Daruma, followed by no photo of the July 28 Zoom meeting.

## MEMBER NEWS

**Stephen Toyoda** invites everyone to the Kintsugi Gala on Saturday, October 22: an unforgettable evening celebrating Japanese culture through music, food, and artwork to support the International Museum of Surgical Science's exhibition of the art of "gold repair."

Experience an evening of fine Japanese cuisine, spirits, and artistic performances and activations with full access to the historic museum and its charm. Enjoy a special viewing of the new Kintsugi exhibition, the work of Japanese Arts Foundation resident artist Mami Takahashi, who fuses human skulls with gold, bringing to life the philosophy of celebrating the beauty of broken cracks. This fundraising gala directly supports the efforts of the Japanese Arts Foundation and the International Museum of Surgical Science. visit <https://imss.org/kintsugigala> for additional information.



... and the Bob – he himself – carved the roast beast.

This year's annual Chicago Japanese Picnic was a great success, according to chairman **Michael Tanimura** (JALD 2012), with well over 500 attendees, and over 400 at the picnic site in Busse Woods at noon to share in the potluck lunch. This included a roast pig provided by **Anna Ninoyu** and Midwest USJC.

An event this big doesn't happen without a lot of help. Thanks to all who contributed monetarily and with their time. Special thanks go out to **Marion Friebus-Flaman** (JALD 2013) and **Douglas Zubka**, **Dayne Kono** (JALD 2010), and **Stephen Toyoda**, who came early to set up and then could not stay for the festivities!