



photo by Consul General Hiroshi Tajima

Exploring Soft Power at *Kanpai Chicago!*

In what was described by one long-time council leader as “The best USJC event I’ve ever attended,” *Kanpai Chicago!* was successful at immersing attendees in the historic – and current – benefits of *soft power* in strengthening the U.S.-Japan relationship.

This amazing 3-day event brought together college students and retirees, new members and USJC executive staff, the ELP Steering Committee and JALD 2013 alumni, and Midwest members and folks from across the country. From a pre-event lunch at Billy Goat Tavern through Sunday’s films and a Garrett’s popcorn-infused discussion, the effectiveness of soft power as a modality of influence was examined and experienced.



photo by Consul Sanae Kanno

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From Anna Ninoyu: Sound Bytes



What happens when USJC National, USJC Midwest, JALD & ELP come together in the City of Big Shoulders?

A blend of members from the public service, diplomatic, business, and academic community attended a USJC members-only event at the Consul General of Japan's residence in Evanston, Illinois. Selections of premium sake, Japanese hors d'oeuvres, and '70s Japanese city pop mix was served for the evening's program. The networking dinner was quite an experience; it revealed the fast growth of our organization, and the different perspectives on the massive changes happening locally and geopolitically. The best part of the event is seeing the interest in Japanese and American relations across generations of Japanese-Americans who are willing and capable of making an impact in society. I look forward to hosting (and being the guest of) the next USJC movers and shakers party!



The following day was a visit to the Art Institute of Chicago, where we were treated by Saira Chambers,

Executive Director of The Japanese Arts Foundation, with a tour of the museum's collection of the Garden of Phoenix artifacts, a symbol of Japan's soft power diplomacy during Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. Packed full of information, we then headed over to Gaijin in Fulton Market to fill up on whiskey by Beam Suntory and a 10-course meal of an assortment of okonomiyaki, yakisoba, and kakigori. We jumped back on the party bus for nijikai at Konbini & Kanpai in Lakeview, where we helped ourselves to even more premium sake and assorted beverages. Afterwards, the more hardcore members were introduced to the Nisei Lounge with a Chicago Handshake, and this is about where things got a bit fuzzy for a few of us. Nonetheless, we made it back to the bus and took the scenic drive back to the Whitehall Hotel to drop off everyone for the evening. Rumors were the ELP members had a more sober after-hours affair back in Fulton Market, I'm glad of their show of maturity and self-control.

Our last day was a demonstration on soft power diplomacy through cinematic storytelling by Jason Matsumoto of Full Spectrum Features. The films screened included "The Orange Story" and "Resettlement: Chicago Story", and an introduction to their on-line educational tool. An engaging and thoughtful round table conversation followed. With the historic passage of the Teaching Equitable Asian American Community History (TEAACH) Act in April 2021, the legislation ensures that every public elementary and high school student in Illinois learns about the contributions of Asian Americans to the economic, cultural, social, and political development of the United States. With a Sakura-themed bento lunch and world-famous Garrett's

popcorn, this was perfect way to wrap up the weekend events with friends and colleagues.

Welcome to Our New Members

I'd like to welcome our new members; without your support our continued growth would be impossible, so please feel at home with us here at USJC:

- Mikiko Fujita
- Joe Galligan
- Layla McDermott:
- Megan Nakano

I am excited for our new members' inputs and ideas for future events and outreach. Please help me welcome them to our community and feel free to reach out to introduce yourselves and connect them with our other members throughout the Midwest and the other regions.

Bonfire Banter

Winter is over! This simply means barbecue season has started, and not to influence our next monthly USJC Chicago gathering, the event planner will get a badge for connecting the dots. Is *Bonfire Banter* the column where we feed the fire with rumors and conspiracies? No! This is where we share our recent experiences and insights from our daily human interactions that can enlighten us. Please watch for email notifications from **Aila Gomi**.

AC in DC

The annual conference this year will be held in Washington, D.C. from November 8-9 with the theme of *Building a Sustainable, Secure, and Inclusive Future Together*. With all the geopolitical tension, action and adventure brewing around the world, let's take this opportunity to regroup in D.C. to propagate and advocate the application of soft power diplomacy in the cultural, business, and public service realms.



Midwest USJC and Consulate Strike Friendships

The last time the **Kaiju Rollers** traded in their street shoes for rental bowling shoes, it was a pre-pandemic 2018, in honor of the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago's 120th Anniversary.



This March, in their 125th Anniversary year, consular staff once again joined Midwest USJCers on the pine-wood alleys to share good times and improve their bowling prowess.

The 5-year gap meant all from the Consulate were newbies to this tradition, but they all comported themselves with

good nature and a can-do attitude, no matter how unfamiliar bowling was to them. **Eric Hattori** ably catered the event held at Avondale Bowl, leaving participants pining for pins, not for more food.

His sister **Naomi Hattori** even rolled the high game. Whether it was her euphoria at being the pin master or just her good nature, everyone was invited back to her shop Kombini & Kanpai for drinks after.



Flashback: The Kaiju Rollers crew from 2018.

Let's Welcome Our New Midwest USJC Members

Mikiko Fujita

Mikiko Fujita is actively involved with many organizations in the Cleveland area. She is a member of the Womens Council of The Cleveland Museum of Art, The Garden Club of Cleveland, The 21st Century Club, Ikebana International, and Blossom Committee at the Cleveland Orchestra. She resides in Pepper Pike, Ohio, with her husband, **Hiroyuki** and their dog, Goemon. They have two adult sons, one of whom is pursuing a PhD in the UK, and the other works in a business consulting firm and resides in New York City.



Megan Nakano

Megan Nakano is the Executive Director and a founding member of the Asian American Chamber of Commerce of Illinois. She is also Board President of the Asian American Coalition of Chicago, and is helping the Japanese community's host duties for next year's Lunar New Year Gala.



Born and raised in Chicago, Megan attended Francis W. Parker School for 14 years, where the primacy of community and the value of cooperation over competition were ingrained from an early age. From there, she went on to earn a BA in Political Science from Northwestern University.

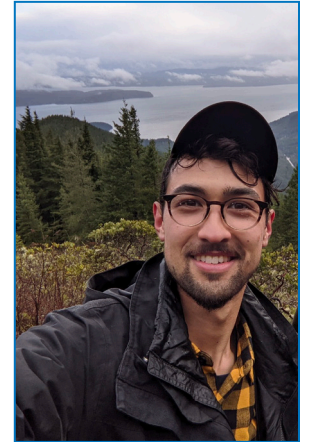
Megan has over 20 years of experience developing strategic partnerships between the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Drawing from her large and diverse network, Megan connects corporations and government agencies with Asian American and other minority communities throughout the Chicagoland area.

Joe Galligan

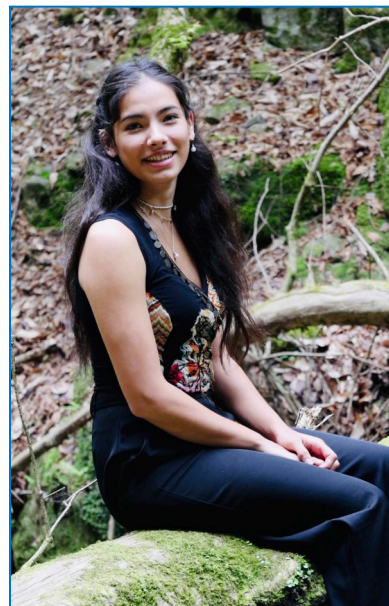
Joe Galligan is a Shin-Nisei born and raised in Madison, Wisconsin. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he spent a year living in Oita Prefecture as a participant in the JET Program. He spent the next two years living in Fukushima, where his mother's family lives.

Since returning to the States, he has been working as Outreach Coordinator for the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago. Joe's favorite part of the job so far has been helping students in the Chicago area get to know Japan better and experience Japanese culture.

Outside of work, he loves playing basketball on Saturday mornings, and enjoys trying new food at different restaurants around Chicago. Joe also is trying to find time to work on his drumming skills, which he has neglected over the last few years. He is very excited to be joining the USJC, and looking forward to meeting everyone!



Layla McDermott



Layla McDermott is a current student at the University of Chicago in a BA/MA program for Middle Eastern Studies. She also studies Anthropology, Archaeology and Digital Studies, along with Japanese, Farsi and Arabic for language study.

She was first introduced to the USJC while conducting independent fieldwork in Japan, and hopes to contribute to building meaningful relationships between US and Japanese companies and universities.

George and His JALD Class of 2020~~21~~23 Take Flight

by *George Kobayashi*

The Japanese American Leadership Delegation (JALD) trip was a truly transformative experience for me and one that I will continue to draw direction and perspective from for years to come. One of the most impactful aspects of the trip was being able to see Japan through the eyes of my fellow delegates – dynamic leaders from the highest levels of academia, business, non-profit and government representing so many different generations of Japanese-Americans. This diverse group of leaders was truly inspirational and their insights and experiences provided me a lens to see Japan in a way I've never experienced before.

While the trip had so many highlights, such as seeing a Shizuoka sunrise for the first time, meeting with leaders like Prime Minister Kishida, Foreign Minister Hayashi, Minister of Digital Affairs Taro Kono, Princess Takamado and members of the Keidanren and Keizai Doyukai, it was also an emotional journey. Unfortunately, my grandmother passed away during the trip, which added a layer of complexity to my experience. Despite the challenges, my JALD family provided a supportive and nurturing environment that allowed me to process my emotions, while at the same time allowing me to continue experiencing and enjoying my JALD journey. My sincere gratitude and love to my wonderful JALD family.

The JALD trip reaffirmed my commitment to the message of the U.S.-Japan Council and its mission. The trip reminded me of the importance of building bridges between our two countries and the critical role that

personal connections and relationships play in this effort.

The JALD trip made me remember that every day is a new opportunity to grow, learn and make a difference. I

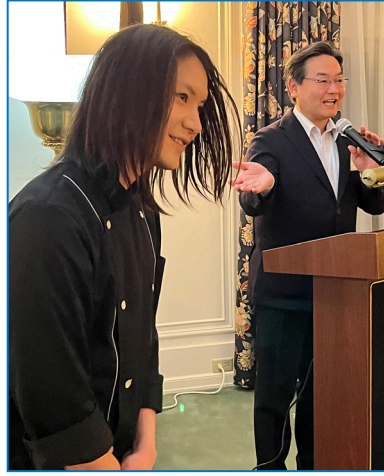


am grateful to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the U.S.-Japan Council, especially **Irene Hirano-Inouye** and **Suzanne Basalla** for their leadership and vision, **Wendy Abe**, **Allison Murata**, Mayumi Tsubakimoto (our wonderful JALD sister), Jennifer Usyak, Michio Akutsu (our wonderful guide) and everyone else who made this trip possible. The opportunity to participate in the JALD program was truly life changing and I am honored to have been part of this incredible experience.

(ed. note: I expect most can identify **George** in these photos; if you are unsure, he's the distinguished fellow just to the left of center.)



More from Kanpai Chicago!



photos by Consul Sanae Kanno



Food was one of the soft power tools amply employed (and consumed): cheeseburgers and chips at Billy Goat Tavern and the caramel and cheddar cheese popcorn mix from Garrett's reflected Chicago gastronomy. [ed. note: yes, that's Bob Kumaki (above) who refused to muss up his hair and look like a tourist.)

Friday evening at Consul General Hiroshi Tajima's residence, we enjoyed an amazing Japanese buffet with nine small plates, tempura, four types of sushi and three desserts created by the residence's Chef Satoshi Ito (being introduced by Consul General Tajima above center, with some of his food shown at right).

At Gaijin on Saturday, we experienced chef/owner Paul Virant's acknowledged "outsider" interpretations of traditional Japanese offerings, including two types of okonomiyaki, pickled vegetables, many other small plates, and a gigantic kakigori (at far right).

In the arena of drink, Japan is having a grand moment in the sun. International enjoyment of sake has never been higher, as we learned at the Consul General's residence from sake sommelier Tona Palomino. He brought five amazing sakes, provided by Breakthru Beverage

Group, for tasting and pairing with dinner.

Japanese whiskeys are also enjoying world-wide favor, and we were treated to a selection of them from the house of Suntory at Gaijin (right).

Guaranteed never to catch on big was the Chicago Handshake – a shot of locally distilled Jeppson's Malört (a traditional wormwood-based liqueur) and a can of Old Style – enjoyed by those that made the trip to the historic Nisei Lounge.

Art is another aspect of culture that can be used as soft power. At the Consul General's reception, DJ Van Paugam played City Pop – eclectic music from Japan's Bubble era of the 1980s. This music is making a global resurgence. (ed. note: I have been to many receptions at the residence under various CGs, and this one – by far – was the most relaxed, noisy, and exuberant. I credit the music.)

We learned of Japan's first large-scale foray in the United States at Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 from Saira Chambers, Executive Director of the Japanese Arts Foundation. At the Art Institute of Chicago, we saw carved and painted

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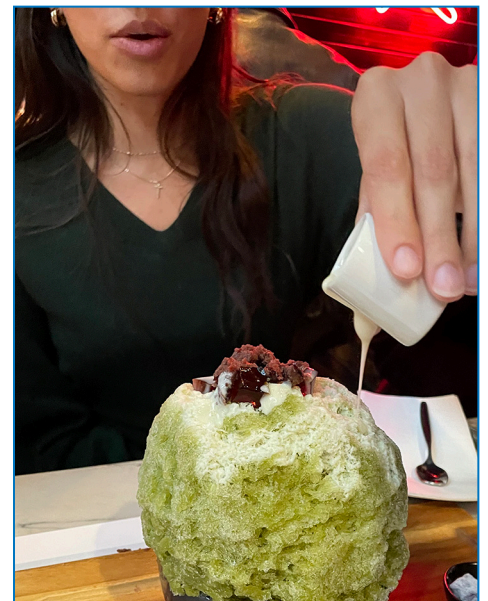


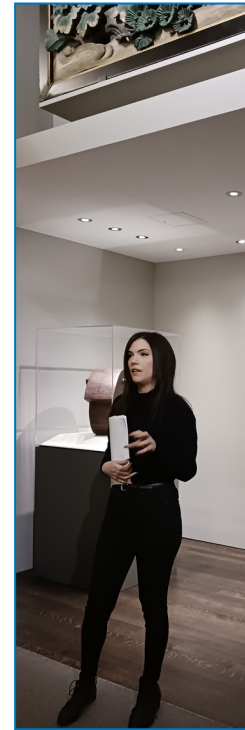
photo by Tomoko Kizawa

Kanpai Chicago! Continued and Completed

wood transom panels, all that is left of the Ho-o-Den (Phoenix Palace) that was constructed for the Exposition. We also saw a large contemporary painting by Takashi Murakami, *Mr. Pointy* (right), that embodies his “Superflat Manifesto”, where many layers of culture fuse into one, in a very two-dimensional aesthetic (think *anime*).

On Sunday we were treated to viewings of two educational films and integral website created by Jason Matsumoto’s Full Spectrum Features. The production company’s work illuminates the Japanese American incarceration and resettlement experiences, and presents them in ways that allow cognitive and emotional learning to take place. The presentation, at the Consulate’s Japan Information Center, was also instructive in that while Jason and many others who worked on their latest film were Japanese American, and so had already internalized the experiences of their elders, the director was Shin-Issei, and she brought a different perspective and awareness to the film. Their ability to work together to create a compelling, collaborative work stands as a microcosm example of USJC’s core mission. It was a fitting way to end the weekend and our exploration into soft power and the relationship of the United States with Japan.

We would like to thank our sponsors, without whom the weekend could not have happened: U.S.-Japan Council; Consulate - General of Japan in Chicago; Japan Information Center; Japanese Cultural Center; Japanese Arts Foundation; Different Roads; Verne Naito; Mikiko Fujita; Ito En (see next page); Ryota Sekine; George Kobayashi; Dayne Kono; Beam Suntory; Breakthru Beverage Group; Full Spectrum Features; and Konbini & Kanpai.



Saira Chambers explicating under one of the Ho-o-Den panels (left).

Yuga Cohler, chair of the ELP Steering Committee, provides his take on the Murakami (far left).

Our resident architect, Midwest chair Anna Ninoyu, talking about Renzo Piano and his philosophy behind his design of the Art Institute’s Modern Wing (below).

Thanks also to the organizing committee: Marion Friebus-Flaman, Robert Kumaki, Anna Ninoyu, Michael Taimura, and Stephen Toyoda.

And a big THANK YOU to all our attendees. **Kanpai!**

The JALD 2013 group enjoying their 10-year reunion reception (below).



ed. note: Please excuse me if I used one of your pictures and you weren’t credited. I got many of them from the shared Dropbox so I didn’t know who submitted them.



USJC Women + Forum Leadership Journeys

On May 17, join our own **Andrea Sugano** (ed. note: yes, I know she lives in Philly now; but she's a Sugano, hence a Chicagooan forever), Senior Strategy Analyst at Vanguard, as she moderates a discussion between current and former USJC Board members **Sachi Hamai**, former CEO, Los Angeles County; **Tomoko Kizawa** (an actual Chicagooan, both physically and in spirit), Partner, Deloitte; and **Ann Teranishi**, President & CEO, American Savings Bank. They

will be candidly discussing their paths to executive leadership, and how being a woman affected their climb up the organizational ladder.

Andrea noted that she is excited to moderate this discussion amongst such accomplished USJC leaders. This online event will be held at 6 p.m. Chicago time, and is for USJC members only. Please contact **Aiko Harris** aharris@usjapancouncil.org to register.



MEMBER NEWS



Please welcome Tyler Hayashi Vo, son of **Mai Hayashi Vo** and her husband Andy. Tyler was born March 31, and was 6 lbs. and 19.5" long at birth. Mai said everyone is doing great.

Naomi Hattori and her husband **Jun-Jun Vichaikul** continue to rack up accolades for their store **Konbini & Kanpai**. She reports they were excited to recently learn that **Konbini & Kanpai** has been named by **Wine Enthusiast** as one of The Best Beer Shops of 2023 <https://www.winemag.com/2023/04/26/best-beer-shops-2023>.

photo by Lauren McPhillips



Unfortunately, this year's Hanami was missing its guests of honor, as too hot, then too cold weather caused most of the cherry trees in Jackson Park to go from stage 2 directly to leaves. Nonetheless, hardy souls turned out to commemorate the event, including, of course, Consul General **Tajima** (at right), and **Dayne Kono** and **Tomoko Kizawa** (board members of the Garden of the Phoenix Foundation), **Stephen Toyoda** (director of the Japanese Cultural Center) and new USJC member **Layla McDermott**.

photo by Tomoko Kizawa

MEMBER NEWS



In honor of AAPI Heritage Month, the Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Profession held an on-line examination of the Japanese American Corum Nobis (setting aside of an erroneous legal judgment) cases of Gordon Hirabayashi, Minoru Yasui, and Fred Korematsu.

Moderating the panel was Brandon Mita (upper left), one of our Midwest ELPs from 2013, and speaking on the panel was **Megan Nakano** (directly below Brandon), Executive Director of the Asian American Chamber of Commerce of Illinois and one of our new members.



photo by Michael Tanimura

Consul General Tajima feeds some koi (at right) at the Garden of the Phoenix after the Kodomo no hi Children's Day celebration (above) and ceremonial starting of the garden's waterfall feature on May 5. **Stephen Toyoda** (center, above and at far right) and the Japanese Cultural Center sponsored the event with the Chicago Park District.



photo by Quinlan Tanimura

MEMBER NEWS



Righting a Wrong

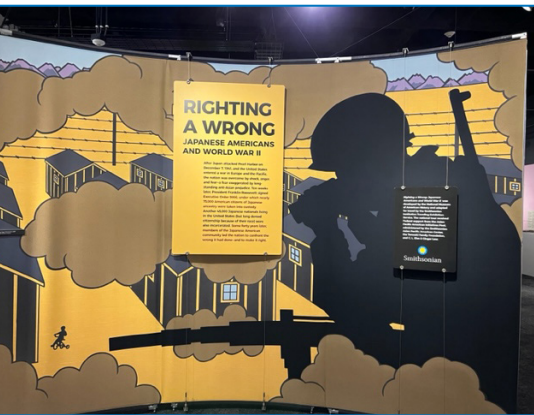
For the first time in Nebraska, a Smithsonian Museum traveling exhibit opened at the History Nebraska Museum in Lincoln. *Righting A Wrong* showcases the history of Japanese incarceration and the process of redress and reparations.

Partnering with the Legacy Of The Plains Museum of Gering, Nebraska, the exhibit tells the story of Japanese immigration, and those who came out of the camps during World War II, called *Preserving a Legacy: Japanese in Nebraska*.

The initiative to preserve the Japanese American history in Nebraska has been spearheaded by **Vickie Sakurada Schaepler**, Midwest USJC member and JALD 2019 (at left). Consul General Tajima opened the exhibition, and shared the history of the project and the many people who made the exhibition possible.

Early immigration of Japanese to Nebraska started with the railroads, and many stayed to work in the new sugar beet industry. Others came during World War II. Few people realize the contributions of Nebraskans who brought people out of the incarceration camps. The University of Nebraska raised funds for tuition and living expenses, and accepted the third largest number of students from the camps. Father Flanagan, of Boystown, brought around 300 Nisel kids through Boys Town, or helped them find placements in other cities.

The strong relationship between Japan and the U.S. continues to show through these initiatives that connect us.



photos by Vickie Schaepler & Kirk Zeller



Kirk Zeller (left, on right) with Nebraska Honorary Consul General Andrew Schilling, came out to support the opening of the exhibit.