



An Auspicious Beginning to 2024

It was a lively and engaged group of Midwest USJC members who welcomed in the New Year with a *Shinnenkai* at **Tomoko Kizawa's** Lincoln Park condo in what has become an annual tradition.

Members new and old and young and (well) old, brought a variety of delicious offerings to share. Tomoko made fresh mochi with her decades-old automatic mochi maker (astonishing some attendees), to eat with traditional toppings or in her heart-warming *ozoni*.

2024 will hopefully continue with this same energy and camaraderie!



photos by Tomoko Kizawa
and Michael Tanimura

Happy New Year!



From Anna Ninoyu: Sound Bytes



Suzanne Basalla, Wendy Abe and Allison Murata.

As Consul General Tajima finished his tenure in Chicago, we welcomed Consul General Yanagi and his wife Norikasan to our city and the Midwest. Plans will be in the works soon to continue the tradition for the CG-USJC Bowling night, Boys Night Out (BNO) and Girls Night Out (GNO). We look forward to a fruitful relationship in the continued support for events and initiatives that bring together the Japanese and Japanese-American communities in business, education and diplomacy.

We are less than a month away from the Asian American Coalition of Chicago Lunar New Year Gala event taking place on the evening of February 10 at Drury Lane Theater in Oakbrook Terrace. This year, I am proud to announce the Japanese American community will be hosting the evening with cultural performances, exhibits and entertainment. The AACC was formed to provide a platform for Asian-American civic engagement and create our seat at the table with elected officials at all levels. We have over 10 USJC-Midwest members volunteering time and resources for the annual gala representing over 16 Asian-American Communities in Chicago. A special thanks to USJC National for becoming a nonprofit sponsor; **Lisa Sakai, Dayne Kono and Hiromi Nakazawa** for leading the fundraising effort and encouraging sponsorship from major Japanese companies and businesses in Illinois; **Mike Tanimura** for taking the lead on the program book design and production; and **Megan Nakano**, serving as the President for AACC and leading the effort with several extraordinary volunteers from our community. It is a pleasure for me to assist her as co-chair for the event.

Happy Year of the Dragon! As the most auspicious of the 12 Asian zodiac animals, the qualities associated with the Year of the Dragon can foster unprecedented opportunities and success. It is the year to embrace the dragon's symbolism of intelligence, leadership, creativity, passion, courage, and confidence, and encourage each other to be innovative and bold. This is the year to continue harnessing the positive energy and inspire collaborative efforts and create value through strategic projects that strengthen US-Japan relations.

Last year, we endeavored to increase our engagement in the larger Asian-American and Pacific Islander community at large to work together and widen our network, deepen our relationship with the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago, and engage with regional members outside of the Greater Chicago Area for events. Here are some of the highlights of personal and professional achievements by our Midwest members from 2023:

In April we had a highly successful 3-day "mini" conference *Kanpai Chicago!* hosted in collaboration with Consul General Tajima and his team, to celebrate and honor the history of soft power diplomacy between Chicago and Japan. This event brought together over 40 USJC members from Japan and the US, as well as our esteemed leaders

It will be an evening of remarkable entertainment, great company, and networking opportunities, as well as an important time to increase our presence and outreach. For tickets, please email me at aninoyu@metisdesignarchitects.com.

Thank you to all of our members for your support and enthusiasm to advance and raise our Midwest Region's morale. As always, I welcome all your suggestions for events, volunteering opportunities, and additional goals you feel strongly our group should pursue. Thank you to USJC National for your continued support and recognizing our effort and mutual commitment to developing the next generation of leaders and inspiring our members to share in a stronger U.S.-Japan relationship.

In conclusion, I extend my gratitude to **Suzanne Basalla** for her unwavering leadership during a pivotal period following the passing of **Irene Hirano Inoue**. Steering the organization through the challenges posed by the unprecedented times of COVID and global unrest, Suzanne has demonstrated remarkable resilience and vision. Under her guidance, the organization has not only weathered these storms but has also achieved significant milestones in the evolution of our organization.

With the completion of the new Strategic Plan, we now possess a comprehensive road map for our long-term growth and sustainability. As we move forward, I am confident that our Midwest chapter will play a vital role in making a lasting impact on the organization's journey, and I strongly advocate that we support each other's effort to make an impact at the national leadership level. With your support, let us gear up for another year of growth and transformation to improve the core mission of USJC!

Building a Future Together at the Annual Conference

The Midwest made quite an impact at the 2023 USJC Annual Conference. The Midwest was mentioned from the stage a couple of times for *Kanpai Chicago!*, we had two members in this year’s ELP cohort (**Joe Galligan** and **Aila Gomi**), three in the inaugural ALC group (**George Kobayashi**, **Daniela One** and **Andrea Sugano**), Aila presented during Members Forum, and George was introduced as a new member of the USJC Board.



Most, but not all, of the Midwest members in attendance at the AC (above).

photos courtesy of USJC, Kathryn Iбата-Arens and Michael Tanimura

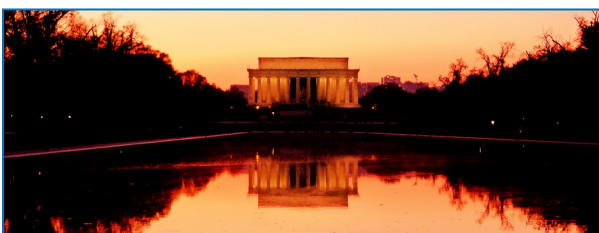
The conference offered 2011 JALDs **Bill Tsutsui**, **Kathryn Iбата-Arens** and **Susan Morita**, Co-Chair of the USJC Board, a chance to catch up (right).



The inaugural ALC cohort (below left), and the 2023 ELP cohort (below right).



Aila Gomi (2nd from left) on the Members Forum panel *What it Means to be Japanese American*.



A Few Words from Suzanne Just for Midwest Members

(ed. note: As everyone should be aware by now, Suzanne Basalla is stepping down as USJC's President and CEO at the end of this quarter. I asked her if she would like to address Midwest members.)

Hello, Midwest Region.

Thank you for the invitation to say a few words in this quarter's newsletter.

I grew up in Missouri, so perhaps that hometown connection explains in part why I've always felt such a comfortable connection, but I think most of the credit goes to your open friendliness and authentic hospitality.

I have many wonderful memories of Chicago visits – from TOMODACHI talks at the Japan Society, in Schaumburg and at DePaul; to Culinary Diplomacy at Yoshi's Cafe; dining with various CG's over the years; the virtual cocktail webinar during COVID; and the spring's Kanpai Chicago. **Dayne** kindly drove me around the city (even after a snowstorm), **Tomoko** (and Daisuke, her dachshund) opened their home to me, and **Naomi** helped me cheer on my husband in his first Chicago marathon. I had a blast accompanying **George** on JALD and look forward to getting to spend time with **Anna** and **David** on the upcoming JALD trip.

My affection and appreciation for the Midwest region extends beyond my personal experiences; I always get goosebumps when I read your quarterly newsletters and see how much the Midwest region epitomizes all that I



Pre-CEO Suzanne at the February 2015 Culinary Diplomacy event at Yoshi's Cafe (above) and at 2023's AC in D.C. (below).



love about USJC's members. I also know how hard you worked to get ready to host USJC in Chicago for AC 2020. THANK YOU for all you do to advance USJC's mission, to build our network, platform and community; and to take care of each other.

Even after I step down, I look forward to continuing to see you all as a fellow Council Member at the next Annual Conference, on Zoom calls, and – if I am lucky in my timing of a future visit to Chicago – on a future USJC **Kaiju Rollers** outing.

Warmly, Suzanne.



In November, some Midwest USJCers were invited to dine at Consul General Jun Yanagi (center back row) and his wife Norika's (seated at right) residence, treated to an exquisite meal made by Chef Akiko Nishimura (seated at left). Continuing to strengthen the relationship between Japanese and Japanese Americans in the region was the topic of discussion.

Midwest Fields Three 2024 JALDs!

The Japanese American Leadership Delegation (JALD) program – the original program upon which the US-Japan Council was formed, has its 21st class, and three are Midwest members!

Anna Ninoyu (Illinois), **David Yoshimua** (Iowa), and adopted Midwest brother **Rob Ohno** (Florida) will be headed to Tokyo and Osaka in early March.

Anna, Owner and Principal Architect at METIS Design in Chicago and our fearless Midwest leader, said “I am thrilled to connect with fellow leaders in both Japan and the US, to foster a profound exchange. I look forward to forging partnerships and discussing innovative practices to advance business, education, and government that is mutually beneficial to Japan and the US. I anticipate an enriching journey ahead!”



David is a Partner at Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP in Des Moines; a litigation attorney with focuses in complex commercial litigation, international arbitration, and regulatory/criminal defense. He said, “As the first Japanese-Iowan member of USJC, I’m thrilled to be able to join this year’s JALD to represent those of us in the Japanese American community who are based in smaller cities and towns throughout the American Midwest. I look forward to meeting my fellow delegates and building strong relationships to endure for years to come.”

Although Rob is the chairman of the Southeast region, we are pleased that he remains a member of the Midwest (his dual Regions duly noted on the official National membership list). Rob is President and CEO of the ANNIKA Foundation, headquartered in Orlando. He said, “I can’t wait for the JALD trip! It will be exciting to learn more about the US-Japan relationship and how we can further develop it, as well as build long-lasting relationships with the other participants.”



We know our three Midwest representatives will have an amazing journey, and contribute much to the U.S.-Japan relationship!

Midwest JALDs

2024 – Anna Ninoyu, Rob Ohno (FL)
David Yoshimura (IA)

2020-23 – George Kobayashi

2019 – Vickie Sakurada Schaepler (NB)
Kyle Nakamoto (MI)

2018 – Lisa Sakai, Laurie Van Pelt (MI)

2017 – Michael Takada

2015 – Richard Morimoto
Toshiki Masaki (MI)

2014 – Gary Yamashiroya

2013 – Marion Friebus-Flaman

2012 – Michael Tanimura

2011 – Kathryn Ibata-Arens
Bill Tsutsui (KS)

2010 – Dayne Kono

2009 – Robert Kumaki

2008 – Lori Yokoyama

2007 – Robert Takagi

2006 – Calvin Manshio

2005 – Jean Fujiu

MEMBER NEWS

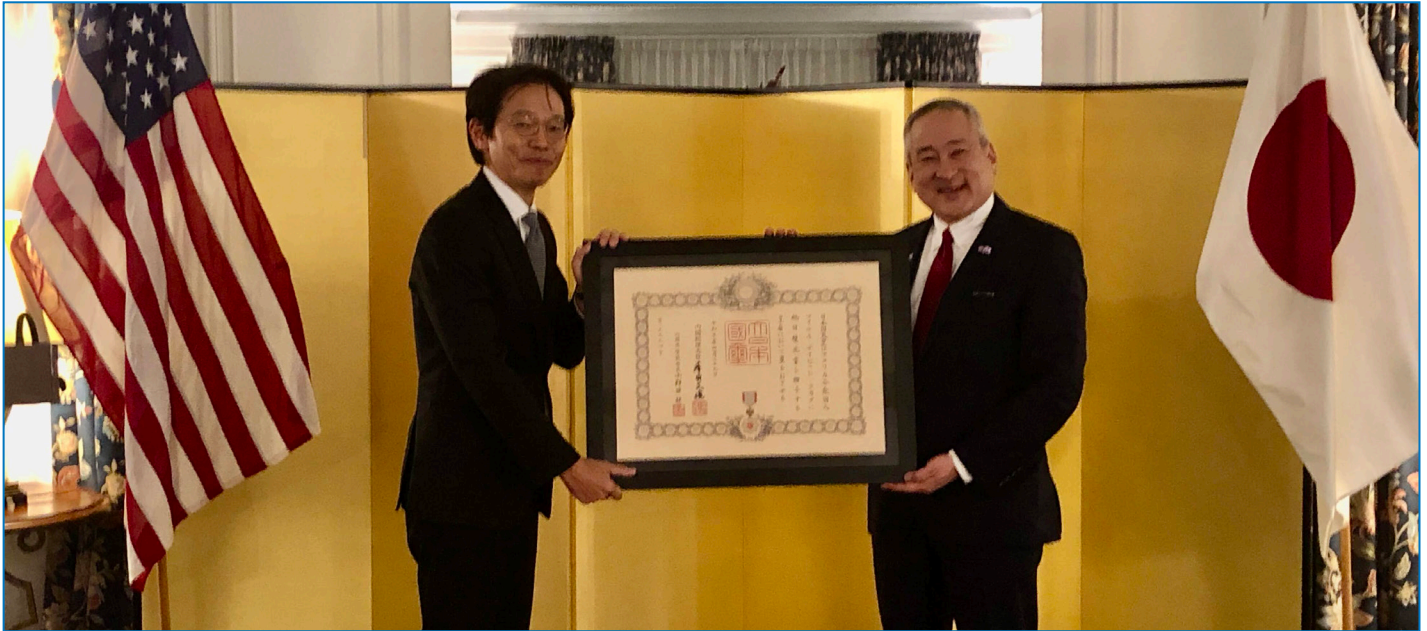


On Dec. 1, **Michael Takada**, JASC CEO, **Stacy Uchida Brown**, JASC Board President, welcomed attendees to celebrate the start of renovations on JASC’s new home. JASC’s Forever Home (left) was designed by **Anna Ninoyu** and METIS Design. Mike, Stacy and Consul General Jun Yanagi (above) wielded sledgehammers to help get the renovations started. Consulate staff and JASC Board members also taking part in the event included Midwest USJCers **Sawako Kojima** (below, 2nd from right) and **Robert Kumaki** (below, 5th from right).

photos courtesy of Felix Lanier



MEMBER NEWS



On Dec. 19, **Michael Takada** was conferred with the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays by Consul General Jun Yanagi at his residence. Mike was recognized by His Majesty the Emperor of Japan for his continuous dedication to the Japanese and Japanese American community, promoting friendly relations between Japan and the U.S., and introducing Japanese culture to the U.S. through his active involvement with the local community.

Aila Gomi had a chance to travel in Japan with her family, including with her father, USJC Board Member **Kazuhiro Gomi**, this holiday season. Her favorite part of the trip was enjoying the hot springs in Hakone. Kanpai!

