



Rain Doesn't Dampen Our Spirits!



Twenty-nine Midwest USJCers, Japan Consuls, Consulate staff and family didn't let the rain and cold keep them from enjoying watching the Cubs beat the Dodgers on April 7. In truth, none of us were around to see the finish of the game. We left at the rain delay, where the Cubs were leading 6-0 in the 4th inning.

We did get to see Shota Imanaga pitch 4 brilliant innings, including striking out his Japan National Teammate Shohei Ohtani! We also got to see Seiya Suzuki hit a sacrifice fly, making him 2nd in all the majors in RBIs.

Even more importantly, it gave attendees a chance for casual conversation along with the unique experience of watching two Major League teams, each with two premier Japanese players on their 40-man rosters! We also got to share in being cold and wet – which will just add another subject we can talk about when we next get together!



photos by Michael Tanimura



photos by Caryn Tono

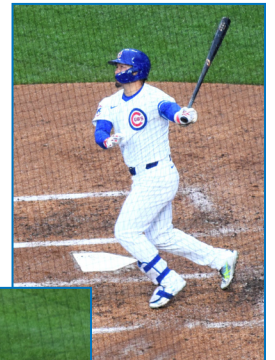


photo by Tsutomu Shibata

Through the efforts of Tsutomu Shibata, Director of the Japan Information Center, he, Consul General Jun Yanagi, and **Michael Tanimura** were able to talk briefly with Seiya Suzuki after he finished his preparations for the game.



From Anna Ninoyu: Sound Bytes



As the frost of winter melts away, we welcome the dawn of spring with open arms and eager hearts. Amidst the blossoming sakura trees, hanami festivities beckon us to revel in the splendor of nature's renewal. Yet, springtime in the Midwest wouldn't be complete without the crack of the bat and the roar of the crowd as baseball season swings into action. As we embrace the traditions of hanami and baseball, let's also embrace the spirit of spring and seize the opportunities it brings for connection and growth within our community.

“Together for a Brighter Tomorrow” served as our guiding motto during the 41st Asian-American Coalition of Chicago Lunar New Year Gala, hosted by the Japanese American Community on February 10 of this year. The evening marked a significant milestone, distinguished by its unprecedented success, thanks to the exceptional leadership of numerous USJC Midwest members. Furthermore, it was a testament to the fruitful collaboration with the Consul General of Japan in Chicago, fostering unity and harmony as it united the Japanese and Japanese American communities within the broader context of the Asian American community in Chicago. Let this event be the first of many that encourages solidarity between the Japanese and Japanese American communities, connected by our shared ancestry,

and to celebrate and acknowledge our diverse histories.

I am also thrilled to extend a warm welcome to **Audrey Yamamoto** (JALD '23) as the new CEO of the U.S.-Japan Council. Audrey brings with her extensive non-profit experience and a profound commitment to fostering strong ties between the United States and Japan. As we embark on this exciting journey under Audrey's guidance, our dedication to building a brighter future for the U.S.-Japan relationship remains steadfast.

USJC members play an integral role in this transformative period within the organization and the ever-evolving

landscape of global relations. Japan's rising influence in geopolitics, coupled with its renewed diplomatic efforts and innovative strides, underscores the importance of our partnership as President Biden officially hosts a state visit by Prime Minister Kishida, nearly nine years since President Obama hosted the late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2015. From thriving economies to widespread cultural influence across various domains, our alliance serves as a beacon of progress and opportunity.

Let us unite in our commitment to strengthening this alliance, fostering collaboration, and paving the way for shared prosperity.

Kudos to **Mia Guild** and her partner Thomas Remissong for hosting a fantastic Temaki Party for our February meeting! We were very happy to have new member **Ed Futa** from Madison, Wisconsin (3rd from left, back row), and soon-to-be members **Saki Anderson** (front row, left) and **Kimiko Varner** (front row, center) join us.



Meet Our Newest Midwest USJC Members

Matthew Fuller

Matthew (Matt) Gardner Fuller is a Partner at Geodesic Capital. Previously, Matthew was an American diplomat for eight years, serving his final tour at the White House on the National Security Council where he covered Jordan. Previous postings included Tokyo and Jerusalem. Prior to joining the Foreign Service, Matt served in Baghdad from 2003 to 2004. Other diplomatic posts included service as Special Assistant to the Secretary of State's Iraq Advisor in 2005 and later, head of the Jordan Desk in the Office of Near East Affairs at the State Department.

Prior to his diplomatic service, Matthew worked at the United Nations in Geneva where he developed training programs for diplomats and worked as an English teacher in rural Japan (Aichi Prefecture) on the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program for two years.

Matt holds a Masters degree from the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin and an undergraduate degree from Pepperdine University. He speaks conversational Spanish, Japanese, and Hebrew. Originally from Austin, Texas, Matt collects sneakers, bourbon, and Willie Nelson records and smokes meats on his offset smoker in his spare time.



Matt with his son at Wrigley Field after his favorite player Seiya Suzuki tossed him a ball!

Jazmine Guzman



Jazmine (2nd from left) getting to know folks at our meeting last year at Gaijin.

Jazmine Guzman is the Accounting Associate at Sankyo America, Inc., a Japanese company specializing in automotive plastics and material management in the international automotive supply chain in Indianapolis, Indiana. She is responsible for the invoicing and payment processing of the company, and supports maintaining the relationship between clients and vendors both in the United States and Japan. She holds a bachelor's degree in International Relations from Drake University. As a student, she spent a semester in Nishinomiya, Japan as a U.S.-Japan Council Watanabe Scholar, a Bridging Foundation Scholar, and a Benjamin A. Gilman Scholar.



Edwin Futa

Edwin (Ed) Futa served as the General Secretary of Rotary International from 2001 to 2016. He was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawaii and is a fourth-generation Japanese American. He now resides in Madison, Wisconsin.

As General Secretary, Ed Futa played a crucial role in overseeing the operations of Rotary International, which is a global organization with over 46,000 community service clubs in more than

200 countries and geographic regions. Ed also played an essential role in guiding Rotary's first official corporate project – Polio Eradication. Rotary International has achieved day 99.9% eradication and as well on its way to 100%.

In his current role representing Rotary at the United Nations in New York City, Ed Futa continues to promote Rotary's mission of peace and humanitarian service on an international level.

Midwest JALDs Impact – and Are Impacted by – Japan

The 2024 cohort of the Japanese American Leadership Delegation (JALD) convened in Japan from March 2 through 9, with three Midwest USJCers adding their expertise to the mix: architect and regional chair **Anna Ninoyu**; litigator from Iowa **David Yoshimura**; and our adopted brother from Florida, Southeast regional chair **Rob Ohno**, head of a global women's sports foundation.

photos by Rob Ohno



Anna and David (far left), and Anna and Rob.

Ed. note: we all know how stressful and tiring the trip is; how are they managing to always look so happy?



One of Anna's favorite moments: celebrating International Women's Day with the women leaders from our delegation, at the CIC Tokyo incubator office space of **Kathy Matsui**, USJC Board Co-Chair and MPower Partners Founder (gesturing, between **Suzanne Basalla** and Anna, above).



"The trip change my whole perspective of being a Japanese American," Rob said. "I came home feeling empowered, wanted and needed by Japanese government/business entities to make a positive impact in our bilateral relations in some way, shape or form. Now it's time to make a difference."

Rob said there were too many to choose from, but one highlight was the meeting with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and individual photo with him. "He actually seemed to enjoy meeting all of us," Rob said.



George Represents Midwest in D.C. and S.F.

George Kobayashi was one of the prominent Japanese American leaders selected by their respective Consuls General from across the United States to participate in a discussion with Japanese government leaders as part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' annual meeting of the Ambassador, Consuls General and Japanese American Leaders (CG-JA) in Washington, D.C.



George said the discussions among the JA leaders revealed substantive issues of importance that were shared across the country in regards to relations between JAs and Japan. George thought the conference very worthwhile, but he, and other leaders, wished more time was available to present their ideas for better connecting the U.S. and Japan.

George also represented the Midwest at the U.S.-Japan Council Board of Directors' farewell dinner for **Suzanne Basalla** on March 23 in San Francisco.



We Can Zoom; Can You?

Suzanne and George also presented in recent Zoom meetings. On March 19, just days before she stepped down as President & CEO, Suzanne briefed the Midwest and Southeast regions about USJC Strategic Plan 2024-2026. (Thank you **Rob Ohno** for developing this program!) Thirty members attended.

On April 3, George briefed the Midwest and Southeast regions on the CG-JA conference in D.C. Following George, five of this year's 10 JALDs (!) – **Darin Mano** of Utah, **Derek Kenmotsu** of California, **Anna Ninoyu**, **Rob Ohno** and **David Yoshimura** – showed photos and gave us a brief recap and shared highlights from this year's delegation. It was an amazing gathering, and the 25 members on the Zoom were very appreciative of the chance to learn more about JALD.



The Midwest USJC bids farewell to Karin Tsumagari, Vice Consul, General Affairs at the Consulate General of Japan in Chicago (in yellow, above). She previously worked in the Embassy of Japan in Malawi, MOFA in Tokyo and the Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria in Japan. Karin and her husband will be moving to Washington DC (and joining the USJC). She will be missed!

COMMUNITY EVENTS



The 2024 Asian American Coalition of Chicago's Lunar New Year Celebration was a huge success, especially for our Japanese American host community. Midwest USJC members and the Japan Consulate were very involved in planning the event, which brought together our community's largest turnout ever in the pan-Asian organization's 41 galas. **Megan Nakano**, AACC President and **Anna Ninoyu**, event co-chair, are especially to be congratulated for creating such a unifying event for our community.



Whether or not it's true that **Dayne Kono** (2nd from right) owns an interest in CH Distillery, the Chicago-based maker of Malör, he shared his passion with many Japanese businessmen that evening. At the pre-dinner reception, Kikisake-shi **Sawako Kojima** (right) offered samples of sake, courtesy of the Japan Consulate.



photos courtesy of Felix Lanier

(top) Just a few of the over 200 JAs and Japanese Nationals who attended.

(above) Consul General Jun Yanagi and Mrs. Norika Yanagi with the Midwest USJC table.

(below) Megan and the Consul General gave opening remarks to the crowd of over 850.



COMMUNITY EVENTS



On Feb. 18, a group of Midwest USJCers met at Kamehachi, Chicago’s original sushi bar, before the annual Day of Remembrance ceremony at the Chicago History Museum. They were treated to an elegant (and tasty!) sushi platter by third-generation owner Giulia Sindler (at left, middle).

photo by Kris Gorospe



photo by Michael Tanimura

Joe Galligan, staff member at the Japan Information Center and one of our 2023 ELPs, has become the go-to for MC duties at the Japan Consulate. He emceed at the Consulate’s birthday reception for His Majesty Emperor Naruhito on Feb. 23, and again at the *Food as a Cultural Bridge* program on Mar. 13.



photo by Vice Consul Karin Tsumagari

How Japan is expressed through food was the topic of discussion for panelists at the Consulate of Japan’s *Food as a Cultural Bridge* program on Mar. 13. With **Bob Kumaki** as moderator, panelists (from left, above) **Naomi Hattori**, Co-founder of Kombini & Kanpai and VP of Tourism, Choose Chicago; **Eric Hattori**, Co-owner of Kombini & Kanpai Wrigleyville and owner of WGN Chicago’s “Best Food Truck”; and **Mari Katsumura**, Michelin starred chef at Cherry Circle Room, Chicago Athletic Club; talked about how they expressed being Japanese through their culinary endeavors.

Just one more Lunar New Year pic: how many people does it take to get someone dressed in a kimono? Well, in the case of **Anna Ninoyu**, at least three!



photo by Michael Tanimura

MEMBER NEWS



Lisa Sakai (2nd from left) was awarded the Foreign Minister's Commendation for her outstanding contributions in promoting Japanese culture in the U.S. and promoting friendly relations and mutual understanding between Japan and the U.S. She was presented with the award at the Consul General's residence on March 1 by Consul General Jun Yanagi. In attendance to help honor Lisa was the Consulate General Affairs staff (from left) of Consul Sanae Kanno, Vice Consul Karin Tsumagari, and Assistant Sara Ceasrine. Congratulations Lisa!

Naomi Hattori and her husband Jun-Jun Vichaikul continue to receive accolades for Konbini & Kanpai. *TimeOut Chicago* recently named it as one of the nine Japanese restaurants and shops that "offer a true taste of Japan."

And *Eater Chicago* just named Konbini & Kanpai Wrigleyville one of "Chicago's most anticipated restaurant openings, spring 2024." Brother **Eric Hattori** will be creating home-style Japanese and JA dishes

Ikigai is the Japanese reference to something that gives a person a sense of purpose, a reason for living. On Feb. 10 in Nebraska, the concept of *Ikigai in Action* was showcased by outstanding Nebraskans, including **Vickie Sakurada Schaepler** (at left) and **Kirk Zeller** (middle). University of Nebraska students, faculty and community members heard from them about the core values that fuel their leadership: for Vickie, openness; and for Kirk, contribution.



Four years after Covid changed so many aspects of our lives, **Michael Tanimura** continues to take his daily morning walks in Graceland Cemetery. Not only is it tranquil, but art, history, and nature abound. As do coyotes.

photo by Michael Tanimura

