

Groundbreaking Sharing of Family Experiences

Midwest USJC and the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago held an inaugural *Mirrored Lives* program on Jan. 14. This unprecedented program was an exploration and sharing of Japanese family life in the United States and Japan during and immediately after World War II.

Conceived by **Michael Tanimura** and developed in partnership with Consul Sanae Kanno, the goal of *Mirrored Lives* (big thanks to **Anna Ninoyu** for the title!) is to create a sense of mutual understanding and community by sharing family experiences of World War II and its aftermath.

“Government and military actions forced our ancestors to be enemies”, Mike said. “Now, generations later, I want us to cross that gap by talking about how World War II affected our families, here in the U.S. and Japan.”

As noted by Deputy Consul-General Naoya Kishi during his welcome remarks, this marked the first time in the Consulate’s history to be involved in any event regarding the war and post-war period. “The Consulate believed it would be an ambitious and meaningful step forward to break new ground this way, and that this would lead to the further building of trust and cooperation between both the Japanese National and Japanese-American sides of the Chicagoland community,” he said.

Hosted by the Japanese American Service Committee at its new building, 58 people – split almost evenly between Japanese Americans whose ancestors had gone through wartime incarceration, and more recent Japanese immigrants, whose ancestors had experienced the war and occupation in Japan – heard a highly condensed history of JA wartime and Chicago resettlement history from local historian **Erik Matsunaga**.

This was followed by a condensed look at civilian wartime and occupation experiences in Japan, presented by Consul Kanno. Longtime Chicagoan Kayoko Kawaguchi – a Shin-Issei known by all attendees – talked about her family experiences in a chat with Consul Kanno. Consulate staffer **Sawako**



photos by Tina Kato Rohde



Kojima, ex-Vice Consul (and new USJC Program Manager) **Karin Tsumagari**, and Consul Kanno shared their family stories.

Then participants got their bentos and began small group discussions, directed by facilitators. Clinical Psychologist Sayaka Machizawa developed ground rules and trained

discussion facilitators to ensure that there was a safe environment for everyone. Facilitators included Dr. Machizawa, Dr. Nobuko Chikamatsu, **Dr. Marion Friebus-Flaman**, **Jean Fujiu**, Asako Hoichi, Dr. Kenneth Kikuchi, **Bob Kumaki**, **Anna Ninoyu**, and Jacob Rohde.

Jean said, “I felt so honored and grateful to be a part of this initial program to bring the Japanese American and Japanese national community together around our families’ experiences during World War II. Even without specific knowledge, we are feeling the impact through the generations. I’m so grateful to Kay Kawaguchi and the others who provided a perspective from the Japanese experience that I wasn’t aware of on such a personal level. I hope this type of program will continue.”

That feeling was fairly universal among attendees. Everyone turned in an event survey, with 6 Agreeing they would attend another program, and 48 Strongly Agreeing!

additional photos on pages 7 & 8

From Daniela One: Cultivating Connections



It is with deep humility and great enthusiasm that I step into the role of Regional Chair for the Midwest. As I begin this journey, I am reminded of the remarkable leaders who have come before me – **Dr. Marion Friebus-Flaman, Lisa Sakai, Anna Ninoyu** – whose dedication, vision, and unwavering commitment have laid a strong foundation for the U.S.-Japan Council's presence and impact in our Midwest Region.

I am honored to take on this new role and serve alongside **Michael Tanimura**, Communication Director, whose invaluable guidance and hard work strengthens our Region's *kizuna*. Our Region thrives because of you – our incredible members – who bring unique talents, insights, and passion for our mission. It is your active participation and support that make this organization flourish.

Our mission remains steadfast: we cultivate and connect leaders at every level in the U.S. and Japan who are committed to strengthening our global partnership. As we move forward together, I am eager to listen, learn, and collaborate with all of you as we continue to promote our shared values

to strengthen our networks and reach in the Midwest.

One of my first initiatives is to engage more deeply with our local communities by partnering with nonprofits to create meaningful connections and opportunities that align deeply with our mission. This initiative might include partnering with local cultural organizations to host joint events or providing volunteer support for community-driven projects. If you know of an organization that would benefit from our involvement, please don't hesitate to reach out.

I am deeply grateful for the trust you have placed in me and for the opportunity to

serve this vibrant and dedicated group. I look forward to connecting with many of you as we embark on this new year of opportunity and collaboration.

As we welcome the New Year and celebrate the Year of the Snake, I wish you all health, happiness, and prosperity. The Year of the Snake symbolizes wisdom, intuition, and transformation – qualities that inspire us to approach our mission with thoughtfulness, adaptability, and a renewed focus on strengthening partnerships. Let us embrace this new beginning with a renewed sense of purpose and determination to strengthen the ties between the U.S. and Japan.

From Anna Ninoyu: One Last Sound Byte

As we kick off the new year, the USJC Midwest Region is excited to embrace a fresh chapter with a change in regional leadership. I am deeply grateful for everyone's support, enthusiasm and dedication that have helped us achieve meaningful milestones in the last three years. Together, we worked to increase membership and expand engagement with regional members beyond the Greater Chicago Area, foster collaboration with larger Asian-American and Pacific Islander community organizations, and strengthen our relationship with the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago.

This moment offers an opportunity to reflect on all we've accomplished, celebrate the connections we've built across regions, and look ahead to new opportunities. Please join me in welcoming **Daniela One** (ALC '24) as our new Midwest Regional Chair. Daniela brings fresh energy and ideas and is ready to build on the incredible foundation we've established. Daniela received her master's degree in economics at Kyoto University with her thesis in Womenomics, volunteered for the Japan Tsunami Relief humanitarian effort after 3/11, was ambassador to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, worked as the economic specialist for the Consul General of Japan in Chicago, led several USJC regional events, and is entrepreneur/controller for Ignite, a premier gaming lounge in Skokie, Illinois.

Our Midwest Region is built on a strong foundation of people-to-people connections, a core value of USJC. For many of us, being part of this organization has profoundly shaped both our professional careers and personal lives. To every member, my deepest gratitude—your engagement and generosity make our region truly exceptional, helping to illuminate and enrich each of our journeys. Together, we'll continue to strengthen bonds, empower leaders, and drive meaningful collaboration in the year ahead. Here's to an inspiring start to 2025!

Meet Our Newest Midwest USJC Members

Santa Ono

Santa J. Ono, Ph.D., is president of the University of Michigan and an experienced vision researcher recognized for pioneering work on the immune system and eye disease. He chairs the University of Michigan Health Board, Fulbright Canada, and the University Climate Change Coalition and is an honorary Chairperson of the Japan America Society of Michigan and Southwestern Ontario. He is a member of the United States-Japan Foundation Board of Trustees.

In higher education, Santa is the Chair of the Council of Presidents of the Association of Public & Land Grant Universities (APLU) and serves on the Boards of the American Council on Education (ACE), the American Association of Colleges and Universities, the Council on Competitiveness and Internet2. He served on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*, the *Journal of Immunology*,

Immunology and the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*.

Santa has been recognized with awards such as the Helen Hay Whitney Fellowship, the American Diabetes Association Career Award, Arthritis Foundation Investigator Award, Roche Award and the Pharmacia International Award in Allergy Research.



Santa at the recent Reliaquest Bowl, where his U-M Wolverines beat Alabama's Crimson Tide 19-13.

Courtney Sakai

Courtney Sakai, the Japanese American Service Committee's new CEO, comes to JASC from Washington, DC with over 20 years of experience in nonprofit leadership, most recently as the Chief Strategy and Communications Officer at Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP). At SFP, she led strategy development, marketing, and communications. Courtney's expertise spans advocacy and lobbying, press and media relations (including serving as an official spokesperson), fundraising, coalition

and constituency building, and special events. Her work has received top honors from US and international associations and has been featured as case studies in numerous textbooks.

Courtney holds a BA in Economics from Smith College and is a graduate of the California Executive Fellowship. She also holds the professional Accreditation in Public Relations and is a Kentucky Colonel, the highest title of honor bestowed by the Governor of Kentucky.

Courtney is also a PADI Master Diver and a certified origami instructor.

Courtney welcoming participants to JASC for the *Mirrored Lives* program.



Chisato Sakamoto

Chisato Sakamoto is Assistant HR Manager and PR at ELSA LLC, an automotive manufacturing company in Indiana that was started by her grandfather. Previously, she served as Senior Manager, Programs & Communications

at Global Citizens Initiative, a nonprofit based in Connecticut.

Born in Gunma, Japan, Chisato was raised in Indiana. She majored in history at Barnard College and studied human rights with a concentration in gender and public policy at Columbia University School of International Affairs. Her hobbies include swimming, trying out new craft projects, and watching Japanese comedy shows.



Shinnenkai: Welcome to 2025!

Tomoko Kizawa once again graciously hosted Midwest USJC at her Lincoln Park home. Twenty members and guests made a sake toast to 2025, ate a variety of homemade food (potluck-style), and enjoyed each other's company!

Anna Ninoyu passed our now-traditional gavel (in reality, a plastic whoopee hammer) to new Regional Chair **Daniela One**.

And then it was time for Tomoko's traditional *Ozoni*, with fresh-made mochi. It was delicious, as always, even though things did not proceed precisely as planned . . .



photos by Tomoko Kizawa, Dayne Kono, Megan Nakano, Michael Tanimura



Annual Conference: Midwest Highlights



Over a dozen Midwest USJCers made it to Tokyo for the 2024 Annual Conference. **Sawako Kojima** (at left, second from right, in the traditional Japanese front row pose), said “I was able to connect with so many wonderful members. One of them happened to be a participant of the Japanese Language Speech Contest which the Consulate organizes every year. He is now the head of Data Management at Coca-Cola Japan and told me that the contest made a huge impact on his life.

“At the conference, passionate speakers discussed their work, careers, and journeys,” she continued. “I learned so much about how we can strengthen U.S.-Japan relations, nurture the next generation of leaders and live a fulfilling life, both professionally and personally.”

Mia Guild and **Nolan Jimbo** were our ELPs this year. Mia said, “I loved my time in ELP. I absolutely adore my class and the broader ELP community, and found the time to be valuable. The conference helped me refine my future goals and I made wonderful connections in the food/beverage space that I am excited about. I am so grateful for the experience. I also had some time to spend with my family back in Tokyo!”



Rob Ohno (at left, in middle) was part of the Members Day panel where we reflected on how the USJC has impacted members.

Marion Frieus-Flaman got to hang out with the coolest kids: Minister Taro Kono (below), and **Kenji Negi** (below, left)!



Stacy Uchida Brown (at right) said, “The ALC was unlike any other leadership program I’ve been a part of. The focus was on building a deep, authentic community of people of all backgrounds and ages. Truly people to people connection at its very best. I left feeling less alone in life’s challenges, leaving with a new family, inspired to tackle what’s next. Many summed it up as finding their *ibasho*.”





Nineteen Midwest USJC members gathered at **Daniela One's** Ignite Gaming Arcade in Skokie for a fun-filled year-end party. (left) **Michael Takada** saves the universe, while (below) **Anna Ninoyu** and Kris Gorospe fight off treasure hunters. (right) **Mai Hayashi-Vo** shows some dance moves to Yuna, who leans on dad **Kai Mitsushio** for support.

photos by Christine Allender and Michael Tanimura



Midwest USJC members bid a warm farewell to Consul Rie Arai (at left above), prior to her heading back to Japan for reassignment. Best wishes!



Karin Tsumagari (above with her grandma Miyako in Tokyo), said, "The past two months since I joined USJC as Program Manager flew by so quickly. I was fortunate to have many opportunities to meet in-person and learn more about my teammates, USJC members, sponsors, and stakeholders. This network of people passionate for the U.S.-Japan relationship makes USJC so special to me, and I can't wait to explore more in this new year."



Midwest member and USJC Board Member **George Kobayashi** (left, at the Annual Conference with President & CEO **Audrey Yamamoto**) recently attended the U.S.-Japan Council Board of Directors Retreat in Honolulu, Hawaii, which is also the location of the upcoming 2025 USJC Annual Conference. During the retreat, it was announced that George had been appointed as the USJC Finance Chair, succeeding **Sachi Hamai**, the newly appointed USJC Board Chair.

Additionally, George will serve as a moderator and panelist at the 2025 Japanese-American Leadership Delegation (JALD) Orientation in Los Angeles, taking place on February 1 and 2. He is also scheduled to attend a dinner on January 31, 2025, hosted by Consul General of Japan in Los Angeles, Kenko Sone.

Midwest member **Akira Yamamoto** of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, has been named a 2025 JALD. Akira is the National Leader of Deloitte's US Japanese Services Group. He is a seasoned professional with over 36 years of experience, specializing in serving Japanese multinational corporations across sectors like automotive, life sciences, and technology.

Midwest JALDs

2025 – Akira Yamamoto (MI)

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

JASC's new "Forever Home" (see page 9) was a perfect venue for *Mirrored Lives*. It allowed participants to be comfortably spread-out so small group conversations at each table were intimate and not heard at adjacent tables.

photo by Consul Sanae Kanno



More Faces from *Mirrored Lives*



(from left) Presenter **Erik Matsunaga**, presenter Consul Sanae Kanno, lead facilitator Dr. Sayaka Machizawa.



(far left) Facilitators **Bob Kumaki** and **Anna Ninoyu**. (left) Facilitators Dr. Kenneth Kikuchi and Asako Hoichi. (below) Presenter **Sawako Kojima** and facilitator Dr. Nobuko Chikamatsu.



photos by Tina Kato Rohde



(upper left) Deputy Consul General Naoya Kishi and JASC board member Jeff Uchida. (above) Facilitator **Dr. Marion Friebus-Flaman** and host JASC CEO **Courtney Sakai**. (right) Linda Kawano, Roy Wesley, and Japanese Mutual Aid Society of Chicago President Gary Shimomura. (left) **Hiromi Nakazawa** and **Tomoko Kizawa**.



MEMBER NEWS



The Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) officially opened its new building at 5700 N. Lincoln Ave. in Chicago on December 12! Dignitaries taking part included Alderperson Andre Vasquez (front row, 5th from left) and Consul General Jun Yanagi (front row, 4th from right). USJC members involved in JASC immediate past CEO **Michael Takada**, new CEO **Courtney Sakai**, Board President **Stacy Uchida Brown**, and board members **Marion Friebus-Flaman**, **Bob Kumaki**, **Meredith Maimoni**, **Kaz Maniwa**, **Stephanie Nitahara**, **Andrea Sugano**, and **Michael Tanimura**.



Bob Kumaki was Master of Ceremony for the Kagami Biraki and kanpai.

photos by Felix Lanier



Two days later was JASC's annual Holiday Delight celebration. **Jean Fujiu** said, "It was wonderful to experience Holiday Delight in the new JASC building. We were able to share information about our sister city relationship with Osaka and about the Social Services Exchange. It is an exciting year with the Expo and we will be sending delegates from Chicago this year in September 2025."



The event also marked the official retirement by **Michael Takada** as JASC CEO. He is being warmly congratulated here by **Stacy Uchida**. Mike was feted at a retirement luncheon immediately after the ribbon cutting.

Congressman Mike Quigley stopped by Holiday Delight to tour JASC's new "Forever Home" and congratulate new CEO **Courtney Sakai**.



MEMBER NEWS



The Japan America Society of Chicago's Bonenkai 2024 was a wonderful celebration of friendship and collaboration! With the theme "The Charm of Osaka", the evening highlighted the enduring sister city relationship between Chicago and Osaka. Attendees were inspired by engaging remarks from **Dr. Hiroyuki Fujita**, a U.S.-Japan Council Board Member, who emphasized the importance of strengthening ties between our two nations in a fireside chat with fellow Midwest USJCer **Marion Friebus-Flaman**, Executive Director of the Japan America Society of Chicago. Remarks from Consul General Jun Yanagi and Deputy Mayor Kenya Merritt, along with heartfelt remarks video messages from Mayor Yokoyama of Osaka, Governor Pritzker and Ambassador Emanuel added a special touch to the evening.



(upper left) Consul General Jun Yanagi and Norika Yunagi also celebrated the end of one year and the coming New Year at the Buddhist Temple of Chicago's annual mochi tsuki. Also helping preserve this JA tradition were (right) **Marion Friebus-Flaman**, (below) **Michael Tanimura** with his rice steaming crew, and (left) **Bob Kumaki** and mochi master Gary Nakai.

photos by Felix Lanier



MEMBER NEWS



At Holiday Delight, Consul General Jun Yanagi presented **Michael Tanimura** with a Foreign Minister's Commendation for promotion of mutual understanding between Japan and the U.S.



Kendoka **Bob Kumaki** ran the largest Midwest Kendo Federation Tournament in its 50 year history, with over 230 participants coming from nine Midwestern states, New York, California and Canada.

Jazmine Guzman has started a new internship at Penta Group as a Media Monitoring Analyst Intern in Penta Group's Intelligence department.



Rob Ohno had a delightful Christmas with son Sam, wife Pam, her father George Kao, son Ben, and his girlfriend Yang Guo.

Aila Gomi and husband Ian Ferre welcomed Sean Gomi Ferre on October 31. He is a healthy boy who loves movement. Aila said they are loving all the cuddles in the cold and the smiles.



Stephen Toyoda and Irene welcomed Natalie Ryuko Toyoda on December 21. Stephen said it's still all a big blur. "She and Irene are doing well, and we are starting to experience the joys of 'cluster feeding.'"



MEMBER NEWS



Founded in 2011, the Kansha Project is a JACL Chicago program that connects self-identified Japanese Americans, ages 18-25, from the Midwest to their identity, history and community. Participants engage in an in-depth examination of the WWII confinement site experience through an immersive educational trip to Los Angeles' historic Little Tokyo neighborhood and Manzanar National Historic Site. Through workshops with local experts and community activists, historical tours, and group reflections, participants work to interpret and promote the stories, lessons, and the legacy of the Japanese American confinement site experience.

Joe Galligan (the tall one at the right end in the back row) is currently the Chair of the Programs Committee of the Kansha Alumni Leadership Board, which plans and facilitates the trip each year. He is a former participant and current facilitator, and personally attests to the transformative nature of this program. Joe encourages any eligible JAs to apply at: <https://jACLchicago.org/programs/kansha-project/>



photos by Stephen Toyoda

The Japanese Cultural Center (JCC) held sold-out a "Hands-On Japanese Homestyle Cooking" workshop presented by **Mia Guild** (who said of her mochi experience [pg. 4], "It was a very unexpected surprise, but an excellent excuse to get new tights for this winter season :)") at the Chopping Block on January 23.

Upcoming JCC events of interest are a [Valentine's Day Flower Arrangement Workshop](#) at SUSHI-SAN with Yuko Inoue Sensei on February 16, and a [Hinamatsuri / Girl's Day Tea Ceremony](#) with Omar Francis Sensei at the JCC on March 2.