

How Many Events Can Be Packed into One February Weekend?

For those of us fortunate to live in the Chicago area, we have a large Japanese community and all that it implies: copious food choices, cultural events, and current and historic special events. And sometimes, all of them happen in one weekend.

Emperor Naruhito's Birthday Celebration

On Friday, February 21, the Midwest's Japanese community gathered at the Japan Information Center in celebration of His Majesty's birthday.

Lunar New Year Celebration

Our community took part in the annual Asian American Coalition of Chicago's Lunar New Year gala on Saturday, February 22.

Day of Remembrance Observance

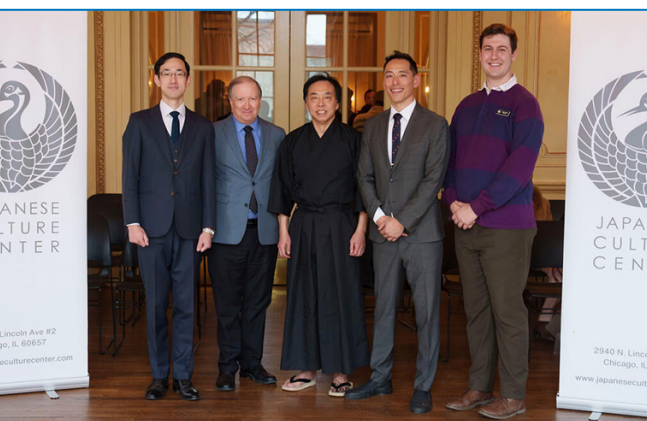
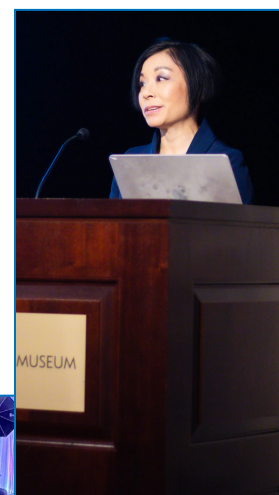
On Sunday, February 23, the Japanese American community held its annual observation of the signing of Executive Order 9066 at the Chicago History Museum.

Kodo One Earth Tour 2025

The Japanese Arts Foundation and the Japanese Culture Center partnered with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra to showcase Japanese artistic expression and heritage to concertgoers at the Kodo One Earth Tour 2025 concert, also on Sunday.



The Emperor's Birthday celebration was the last public appearance for Consul General Jun Yanagi and his wife Norika (above). The event was ably MCed by **Joe Galligan** (above right). JASC CEO **Courtney Sakai** did the honors at DOR (right). The Japanese contingent at Lunar New Year (below) included (clockwise from upper left) Junko Kono, **Lisa Sakai**, Consul Sanae Kanno, **Anna Ninoyu**, **Marion Friebus-Flaman**, **Sawako Kojima**, Kayoko Kawaguchi, Jennifer Trautvetter, and **Courtney Sakai**.



(above) JIC Director Yuya Murata (left), Hekiun Oda (center), and **Stephen Toyoda** at CSO.



From Daniela One: Cultivating Connections



As we wrap up the first quarter of 2025, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on the strength and momentum within our Region. From powerful remembrances to exciting future events, we continue to grow as a vibrant and engaged community. We're proud to share that our Region now includes 77 members, with two new members joining us this quarter (*see pg. 3*)!

We also celebrate the achievements of **Layla McDermott** and **Kimiko Varner**, who have both accepted new roles in New York. We wish them continued success and are confident they'll make a meaningful impact in this next chapter.

This quarter, USJC unveiled a new Vision and Mission Statement, led by President **Audrey Yamamoto**. We encourage all members to read and reflect on the direction of our organization: [USJC Mission & Purpose](#)

March marked 14 years since the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Tohoku. I was living in Japan at the time, and my husband-to-be Flavius and I traveled to Higashimatsushima shortly after the disaster to spend 10 days helping clean homes and support recovery efforts. Four years later, the Tomodachi-Mitsui Leadership Program

brought me back to the very same community, where I witnessed the resilience of its people, and saw some of the homes we helped restore standing strong. It remains one of my most life-changing experiences.

I remain deeply grateful to the late **Irene Hirano Inouye** and the TOMODACHI Initiative for their enduring impact. The U.S. Embassy in Tokyo recently released a moving video reflecting on the program's legacy: [Tomodachi Was Born](#)

Congratulations to **Ema Takahashi**, one of our very own members, who is now stationed in Osaka and attended the exciting opening of Expo 2025 Osaka. Ema will be an Ambassador at the US Pavilion and we are very proud to see our Region represented on the global stage (*see pg. 6*)!

Another exciting moment this quarter was the Chicago Cubs' game in Tokyo. While the Cubs may not have secured a win, **Naomi Hattori** and **Matt Fuller** proudly represented our community in the stands.

This quarter also marked the departure of Consul General Jun Yanagi from Chicago. CG Yanagi has been a tremendous partner to USJC and a passionate supporter of the Japanese American community. We extend our deep gratitude for his leadership, collaboration, and friendship during his post here.

I'm thrilled to share that planning for the **2025 Japan Festival** is officially underway! I have the honor of co-chairing the event with **Mike Takada**, and together we're building on the incredible work of past years to make this summer's festival even bigger and better. The event is free and open to the public, and we're aiming for a wide range of food, cultural programming, performances, and community fun. Save Saturday, July 19: You won't want to miss it!

Call for Volunteers!

We're actively recruiting committee members and day-of volunteers. Whether you have a few hours or want to join a planning committee, your support will make a big difference. Please email [me](#).



Meet Our Newest Midwest USJC Members

David Carpenter

David Carpenter is the President and CEO of the Japan America Society of Kentucky, where he spearheads initiatives to promote cultural exchange, understanding, and cooperation between Japan and the Commonwealth of Kentucky. His leadership responsibilities include overseeing a range of programs and events that strengthen bilateral relations, cultivating partnerships with local businesses and communities, and expanding membership to further the society's mission.

In December 2014, David was appointed as the Honorary Consul General of Japan to Kentucky. In this distinguished role, he represents and advocates for the interests and rights of Japan and Japanese nationals across the state. His duties encompass protecting and promoting Japan's commercial and

navigational interests, addressing civil disputes among Japanese nationals, and facilitating cultural exchanges between Japan and other countries.

From 2000 to 2011, David worked in Community and Government Relations for Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Kentucky, Inc. Prior to his tenure at Toyota, he spent over five years living and working in Japan. He served as a faculty member at the Nagasaki In-touch Community Center for four years and contributed to public relations efforts for the Nagasaki Prefecture government and tourism office. His final year in Japan was marked by his role as Assistant Director of the Kobe Friendship House and his work as a translator in international guest relations for Tokyu Sports Oasis.



Originally from Prestonsburg, Kentucky, David received his Bachelor of Science in Human Environmental Sciences from the University of Kentucky in 1995. He currently resides in Lexington with his spouse and is the proud father of an 18-year-old son.

Jason Matsumoto



Jason Matsumoto is a fourth-generation Japanese American producer and musician from Chicago. He is the co-executive director and co-founder of Full Spectrum Features, a Chicago-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to driving equity in the independent film industry by producing, exhibiting, and supporting the work of women, BIPOC, disabled, and LGBTQIA+ filmmakers. Full Spectrum also educates the public about important social and cultural issues, utilizing the power of cinema to foster understanding in our communities.

Jason co-produced *The Orange Story*, an early Full Spectrum project funded by the U.S. National Park Service that provide educational content about civil liberties as told through the lens of Japanese American incarceration during WWII.

Jason is the director and primary composer for Chicago-based music ensemble Ho Etsu Taiko. Jason is also a strategy consultant for Miyamoto Unosuke Shoten (Tokyo), a 150-year-old traditional Japanese instrument maker who officially serves the Emperor of Japan. Prior to joining Full Spectrum's staff, Jason spent 10 years in the financial derivatives industry, retiring in 2017 as Director of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange's strategic pricing team.

MEMBER NEWS



(left) **Matt Fuller** and his son Isaiah were able to attend the Cubs-Dodgers Tokyo Series. While they were in town, they went to one of Matt's favorite restaurants, Andy's Shin Hinomoto. Also dining that night was Cub's outfielder PCA (Pete Crow-Armstrong), one of Isaiah's favorite (non-Japanese) players. PCA graciously spent time talking with Matt and Isaiah, and signed Isaiah's Cubs jersey.

(below) Southeast, Midwest and Japan USJC member **Keitaro Harada** created the first-ever concert for [orchestra and break dancing](#). He is Music & Artistic Director of the Savannah Philharmonic, Music & Artistic Director of the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra, and Permanent Conductor of the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra. Keitaro has upcoming performances with the [Indianapolis Symphony in May](#).



(above) **Tomoko Kizawa** (front left) recently hosted an event at Maria Pinto's boutique. Tomoko said, "We had a lovely evening trying on gorgeous pieces from Maria Pinto's Iwate Collection while sipping Prosecco. A percentage of sales benefited USJC. Thank you **Anna Ninoyu** (back left), **Lisa Sakai**, **Sawako Kojima** and others for a fun shopping evening and for supporting USJC!"



(left) **Layla McDermott**, a former member of USJC Midwest and erstwhile member of USJC Southeast, moved to New York City in January. She is at Lazard Frères Investment Bank, and works directly with Peter Orszag, Lazard's CEO and former director of the Office of Management and Budget under President Obama from 2008 to 2010. She is looking forward to connecting with new members of USJC in New York, and welcomes any visiting members from USJC Midwest!

MEMBER NEWS



USJC Midwest members **Tomoko Kizawa**, **Layla McDermott**, and **Andrea Sugano** met in Manhattan for dinner in March. Layla moved there in January, Andrea came in from Philly, and Tomoko was just visiting. Over a fine meal, they discussed their shared love of Chicago!



Jazmine Guzman recently moved to Des Moines, IA. She recently presented at a round-table entitled "Intentional Internationalization at Home and Abroad" at the 2025 International Studies Association Convention in Chicago. She spoke on her study abroad experience in Nishinomiya, Japan, as an undergraduate student and how internationalization can occur at home through "intellectual internationalization".



Vickie Sakurada Schaepler traveled in from Nebraska for the Emperor's Birthday to bid a fond farewell to CG Yanagi and his wife. He shared in the grand opening of the Japanese Hall in Gering, Nebraska at the Legacy Of The Plains Museum in June. She had the opportunity to catch up with many, and visited the new Japanese American Service Committee building. She received a special guided tour from **Courtney Sakai** and **Mike Tanimura**. She was able to learn about the history of the JASC and the many Japanese that settled in the Chicago area.



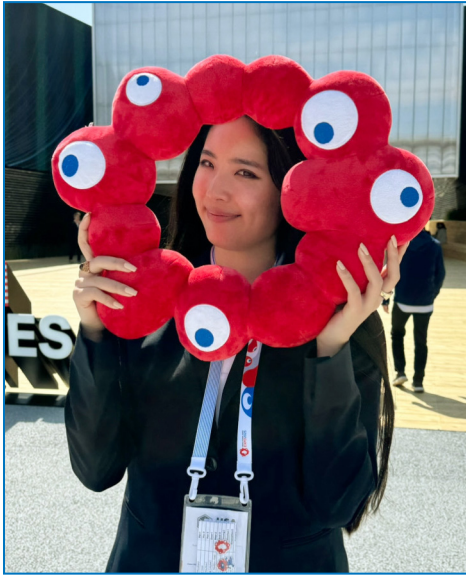
Karin Tsumagari now lives in D.C., and is lucky enough to have cherry blossom trees in bloom right outside her apartment! On Day of Remembrance, she attended a panel discussion and the kick-off of the national tour of the the Ireicho at the Navy Memorial Visitor Center. "It was moving to see the community, including the younger generation, join as part of the project through stamping hankos", she said.



After eight years at Kraft Heinz, **Stacy Uchida Brown** joined Kellanova in August, leading its Salty Snacking division (which includes billion dollar brands like Cheez-It and Pringles). Here's Sydney (5) and Sophie (2) helping mom's revenue by munching on a can of Pringles! Kellanova is being acquired by Mars Wrigley later this year. She's looking forward to satisfying her sweet tooth by adding M&Ms, Snickers, KIND bars, and other to the portfolio! Stacy's new job brings her back to Chicago once a month, so she is excited to see more of this special group!

MEMBER NEWS

2025 Osaka World Expo Update



Hello, everyone! *Konnichiwa minasan!* My name is **Ema Takahashi**, and I was born and raised in Chicago, IL. I speak Japanese and French and was a competitive figure skater from age three to 23! My alma mater is UIUC where I graduated with a degree in international relations and global markets—with professional interests in bilateral relations between the U.S. and Japan.

Currently, I am reflecting on my experience from the 2025 Osaka World Exposition as a Youth Ambassador for the USA Pavilion. In total, 87 Youth Ambassadors were selected by the Sister Cities International organization to represent 47 states across the U.S. in three cohorts of spring, autumn, and full. I am part of the full cohort of 25 Youth Ambassadors and will be here the whole duration of the Exposition until October. My goals while I am here are to connect with as many visitors as possible, network about different career opportunities that align with my professional goals, and of course, appreciate the different facets of Japanese culture.

Please say “Hi.” if you come to the Osaka Exposition in person!

At the end of March, we were all flown from our respective cities to Fort Worth, Texas for Youth Ambassador orientation. We were able to connect and learn from one another via team-building exercises and panel discussions with speakers, culminating with good old fashioned line dancing and a Texas style BBQ dinner. I was amazed by the true diversity of our country and enjoyed learning about the differences of

local wildlife (e.g., Chicago squirrel vs. South Dakota Bison). We learned a lot about our Pavilion and received our uniforms. It was my first time in Texas, and I loved the people and



all the cowboy hats and boots that everyone was wearing. I have never felt such a culture shock within the U.S. in Texas and with the plethora of unique experiences from our cohort.

From Texas, our cohort flew to Osaka. We all successfully moved into our apartments with all our luggage. I was thankful to settle into the room with the biggest closet. Our arrival was about two weeks before the opening of the Expo, and we had ample time for on-the-ground logistical training.

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MEMBER NEWS

2025 Osaka World Expo Update, cont.

The first time entering the Osaka World Exposition site was absolutely astonishing. I had never been to a world exposition before and had no idea what to expect. It was as if they made a completely new world. It is incredible to think that over a year ago, the same land was completely flat and barren. In a way, it feels as if I am entering a simulation every day when I walk into the exposition site. The scale of the expo grounds was much, much, much bigger than I could have ever fathomed.

The first day at the USA Pavilion was very special. There was a lot of anticipation surrounding our Pavilion since the inside was kept a mystery until opening day. The Pavilion is positioned right in front of the East gates and has an innovative and inviting architectural design. The interior has so many moving parts that it feels like an immersive roller coaster across the country and then to outer space and beyond.

So far, I have met almost all of our exuberant 87 Youth Ambassadors, learned interesting facts about many of the 47 states, eaten Osaka-style *okonomiyaki*, and even briefly debuted on Japanese TV program for 0.2 seconds. I am excited for the next six months. Hope to see you here soon, if not in person on our next USJC newsletter, or my soon to be blog on Substack @emataka

Cheers! Mata-kondo!

Can you spot Ema in these group shots? She's pretty much right in the middle below, and slightly right of middle at the right.

