



USJC Joins in Welcome of CG Mizobuchi



Consul-General Masashi Mizobuchi was welcomed to Chicago by about 150 representatives from member organizations of the Chicago Japanese American Council (CJAC). Many Midwest USJC members were in attendance.

Meishi were exchanged with the Consul-General in a reception line, and opening remarks and welcome speeches followed. Mizobuchi-san seemed to spend the remainder of

the evening trying to greet every single one of the attendees.

This reception for a new Consul-General was remarkable in the breadth of those who were invited. Japanese, Japanese American and non-Japanese from the 12 member organizations of CJAC were able to illustrate Chicago's commitment to an inclusive Japanese community. Mizobuchi-san, who has previously served at the Embassy in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and New York, made note of this in his thank you address.

Consul-General Masashi Mizobuchi (above), The CG being welcomed at the Japanese American Service Committee by CEO **Courtney Sakai**, Board VP John Sasaki, and Board President **Stacy Uchida Brown** (above right). **Dayne Kono**, **Monica West Fuller**, and **Matthew Fuller** were in attendance (right), as were about 150 others from the community (below).



photos by lacorporatephoto.com



From Daniela One: Cultivating Connections



The second quarter of the year is always one of the most anticipated seasons in the Midwest. After a long winter, the arrival of warmth, blooming trees, and outdoor gatherings brings renewed energy to our communities – and this year was no exception.

To welcome the season, the USJC Midwest Region supported the Japan Culture Center's annual Cherry Blossom Festival in April – a celebration that brought thousands of attendees to Chicago's Jackson Park. Events like this remind us that Japan's presence in the Midwest is more than diplomatic – it is deeply cultural, widely appreciated, and enthusiastically embraced by the public.

We were also honored to welcome Consul-General Masashi Mizobuchi to Chicago. The USJC Midwest Region was among the organizations participating in a special reception hosted by CJAC and organized by USJC member **Courtney Sakai**, CEO of JASC, to celebrate his arrival.

On April 21, Governor J.B. Pritzker joined a reception in downtown Chicago honoring the long-standing relationship between Illinois and Japan. The event celebrated shared economic, educational, and cultural ties, and included members of the diplomatic community, business

leaders, and nonprofit organizations. Several of our members took part in this inspiring evening, which underscored the vital role Japan continues to play as a partner to our state and region.

This quarter also marked the culmination of an ambitious initiative in our region: the 2025 Japan Festival in Skokie. The festival was organized by the Chicago Japanese American Council (CJAC), an umbrella organization that brings together Japan-related nonprofits under a shared goal. As a member of CJAC, USJC Midwest has the opportunity to stay deeply connected to major community leaders and longtime cultural advocates.

Co-chairing the Japan Festival alongside **Mike Takada** required many months of late-night planning – often after full workdays – but together, we formed a strong team and delivered a high-impact celebration that welcomed thousands to experience Japanese food, culture, art, and performance. This achievement would not have been possible without the generous contributions of time, talent, and financial support from our volunteers, sponsors, and many dedicated USJC members (**George K., Dayne D., Courtney S., Stephen T., Marion F., Kris G., Lisa S., Mike T., and Sawako K.**). Their support was instrumental in bringing this vision to life.

Beyond the festival, this quarter also offered a more intimate moment of connection as members gathered for a private tour and dinner at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Hosted by **Nolan Jimbo**, the evening featured thoughtful commentary on the exhibit and an opportunity to connect over

shared interests in the arts and culture.

We extend our warmest congratulations to **Saira Chambers**, who recently stepped into a leadership role with the Chicago Park District. Under her guidance, the historic Garden of the Phoenix – now renamed the Osaka Garden – is poised for an exciting new chapter. We look forward to the continued growth of this treasured space as a site of cross-cultural exchange and reflection in the heart of Chicago.

We're also delighted to welcome a new member to the Midwest Region: **Miyako Yamamoto** of Michigan. Her addition brings even more richness to our growing and diverse regional network.

And finally, on a personal note, our family joyfully welcomed a new addition on June 22: baby Mira. Her big sister Iris couldn't be happier, and we are so thankful for this beautiful new chapter.

Thank you for continuing to support, connect, and contribute to the USJC Midwest community. With shared momentum, we look forward to what's ahead.



Annual



Unlike some recent years, Saturday, August 2 provided the perfect weather for a picnic. About 500 members of the Chicago Japanese community took advantage of that, to gather in LaBagh Woods for a bit of work then a full day of relaxation and camaraderie.

After all the tents and tables and chairs and grills were set up, picnickers began arriving with a range of offerings for the food buffet. Added to that were the items prepared on-site: yakisoba and gyoza cooked up by the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Chicago (A); burgers, hot dogs and chicken by Tohkon Judo Academy (B); kakigori by the Chicago Japan Club (C); and two roast pigs provided by Midwest USJC, hand-carved by **Bob Kumaki** and able assistants (D).

Besides food and drink, there was karaoke, games for kids, a whole lot of sunshine and conviviality. Make sure you join in the fun next year, August 1, 2026!



A B



photos by [Felix Lanier](#)

C D

USJC was well represented, including Director of Programs **Aiko Harris**, in from Michigan with her family (third from right, below),

The Japan Consulate was also well represented, with Deputy CG Naoya Kishi (second from left), CG Masashi Mizobuchi (at right, below), and five other Consuls.



Japan Festival a Rainy Day Success in Skokie

Rain did not deter thousands of people from enjoying the look, taste and feel of Japan at the Chicago Japanese American Council's Japan Festival on July 19. Co-chaired by **Michael Takada** and **Daniela One**, this year's fest featured cultural arts and food from the traditional to the contemporary. There was something for attendees of all ages to get excited about. The fest in Skokie was so well received that next year's may be in the same location, but a 2-day affair!



photos by Robert Dicke & Tina Kato Rohde



Consulate Staff Tours Lakeview to Learn JA History

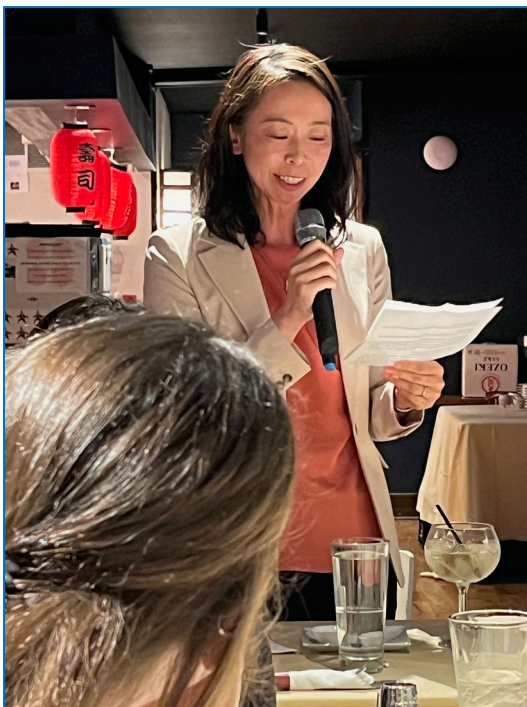
On June 6, Japan Consuls toured Lakeview and learned about Japanese American site and history. Led by local historian **Erik Matsunaga**, the group took a meandering walk from Sheffield and Belmont to Clark and Newport. In the 1960s, the long block of Newport between Clark and Halsted was home to more Japanese families than anywhere else in the city. Erik was assisted (or kibitzed) by **Bob Kumaki** and **Michael Tanimura**.



The tour started in front of the old home of the Japanese Cultural Center. (A photo of **Stephen Toyoda Sensei** can be seen at left above the Consuls.) The area and history was new to many of the Consuls. Their interest was genuine, and greatly appreciated



The tour ended with "Chicago Handshakes" (a shot of Malört chased with Old Style) at the Nisei Lounge. Indulging were (from left) Erik, Director of the Japan Information Center Consul Yuya Murata, Michael, Bob, Consul-General Masahi Mizobuchi, Consul Yasuhiro Nippashi, Deputy Consul-General Naoya Kishi, and Consul Naohito Fujimoto.



We bade a sad farewell to Consul Sanae Kanno at Kamehachi on May 6 (left). However, we are happy to hear she is doing just fine at the Denver Consulate. She ran into **Vickie Sakurada Schaepler** at the Sakura Festival in Denver in June (above).



USJC Program Manager **Karin Tsumagari** (above, at left) said that after over a year in DC, she was overdue to come back to Chicago. She had a chance to say "hi" to Kanno-san before her departure to Denver, and visit with the Consulate team, which brought back many wonderful memories from working there.

Midwest USJC a Presence at Community Events



Japan America Society of Chicago Executive Director **Marion Friebus-Flaman**, Illinois Governor JB Pritzker, and Acting Consul-General of Japan Naoya Kishi (left) were the featured speakers at the April 21 event celebrating and strengthening the ties between state and country. Midwest USJC was one of the collaborating organizations. About 150 business, government and cultural leaders were in attendance.

On April 26 at Osaka Garden a Hanami celebration, sponsored by the Chicago Park District (CPD), Japanese Arts Foundation/ Japanese Cultural Center and Midwest USJC, continued that week's festivities. Many USJC members took part, including **Saira Chambers** (below), in her new role as CPD Program & Events Facilitator for the Osaka Garden. The event was amazingly well attended, cause for both joy and consternation!



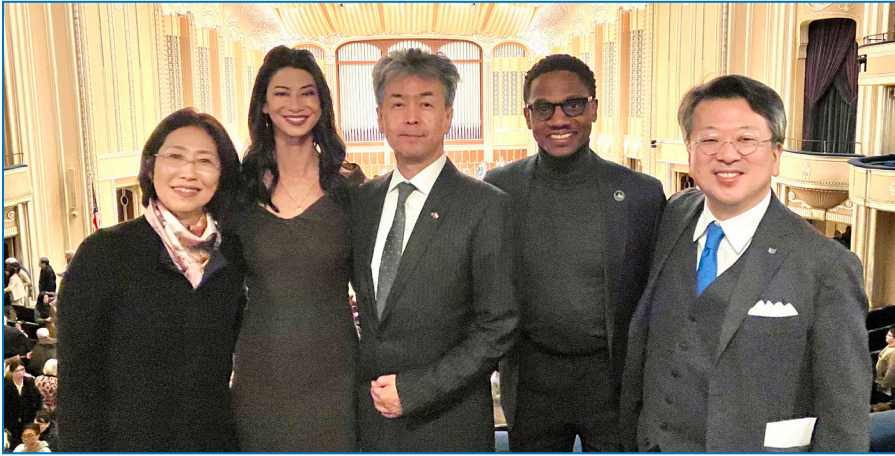
Sawako Kojima (above, at right) and friend excited at Hanami. Director of the Japan Information Center Consul Yuya Murata (right, at left) makes a point to Acting CG Kishi, CPD CEO Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, and **Bob Kumaki**.



Midwest USJC was also well-represented (below, left) at the Midwest Forum on June 25. This convening by the Japan Consulate annually brings together state honorary Consuls of Japan, Japan America Society executive directors and community leaders to discuss issues of importance between Japan and the 10 states in the Consulate's region.



MEMBER NEWS



Mikiko Fujita, Mia Garcia, Consul-General Hajime Kishimori of the Consulate General of Japan in Detroit, Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb, and **Dr. Hiroyuki Fujita**, Honorary Consul of Japan in Cleveland at Severance Center, the renowned home of The Cleveland Orchestra, where they had the pleasure of attending a performance of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony.



Ed Futa, the former General Secretary of Rotary International, continues to serve as Rotary's official representative to the United Nations in New York City. In this capacity, he is actively involved in advocating for the eradication of polio. Another key focus of Ed's UN representation is the advancement of women and children's health and well-being. He actively champions initiatives that address critical health issues affecting vulnerable populations, leveraging Rotary's extensive global network and expertise. Furthermore, he emphasizes the significance of educating teenage girls, recognizing education as a pivotal factor in breaking cycles of poverty and empowering future generations.



Lisa Sakai, **Marion Friebus-Flaman**, **Megan Nakano** and **Anna Ninoyu** took first place in the women's division of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Chicago Foundation Charity Golf Tournament. (Marion noted they were the only all-women team in the history of the tournament, and hence, there actually wasn't a women's division.) They had a great time, though, she said, and had no idea what their score was.



Kathryn Ibata-Arens was in Vietnam conducting field research for her current project on the role of Japanese health diplomacy in Asia. She was invited as honored luncheon guest of Japan Ambassador to Vietnam Naoki Ito. They discussed the ambassador's work when he was Japan's Global Health ambassador, subsequent to his service as ambassador to Bangladesh.

The photo was taken at the ambassador's residence in Hanoi, Vietnam. Pictured with them is Kathryn's local research assistant, Yen Chi Le.

Bob Kumaki was part of a distinguished panel on Chicago's take on Japanese food at the Japan America Society of Chicago's *Sizzle and Slurp*. Enjoying the fruits of the discussion were **Sayaka Kojima**, **Joe Galligan**, and **Mia Guild**.



MEMBER NEWS



Vickie Sakurada Schaepler (center in red, below), has had much to celebrate this quarter. On April 29, it was announced she was being awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, Silver Rays, for her contribution in preserving the history of Japanese Americans and promoting understanding of Japan in the United States.

On May 6, 2025 members of the Japanese American community, Japanese Hall Advisory Council, area dignitaries and other interested parties celebrated the dedication of the Historical Marker at Japanese Hall. Tatsi Sato, age 99, was present, as were many others for this wonderful recognition.

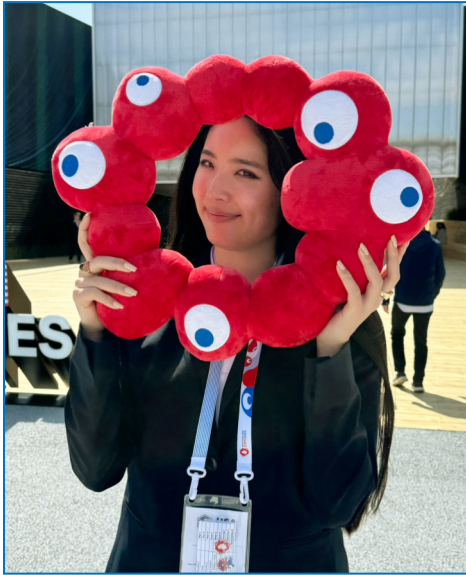
The PBS Nebraska Story Special, "Rescuing Japanese Hall", premiered at the Historic Midwest Theater in Scottsbluff, Nebraska and began airing on Nebraska Public Television. You can watch the film at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oM6QpMLhrd0>



Toshiki Masaki, as a member of the youngest generation that remembers attending the previous Osaka World Expo back in 1972, has been looking forward to attending this year's version. He went in June, and said and it didn't disappoint! He went three times and plans to go several more times in late August (he got a season pass!). He said no single photo (above) can do justice to capture the immensity of the 2km long Big Roof Ring. This amazing wood structure (left) is the underbelly of the ring. Toshiki says anyone interested in going can contact him as he has pointers on how to purchase tickets and reduce the wait time at the Expo.

MEMBER NEWS

2025 Osaka World Expo Update



Hi everyone!

Checking in from the USA Pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka. If you missed the first newsletter, I am your USA Pavilion Youth Ambassador, **Ema Takahashi**, representing Chicago, Illinois.

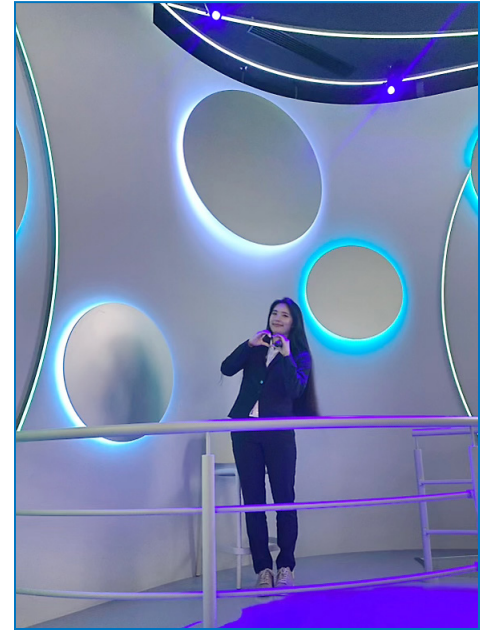
The past few months have been a whirlwind of activity. The USA Pavilion has welcomed over half a million visitors so far! As a Youth Ambassador (YA), we take on a variety of responsibilities at the pavilion.

One of my favorite roles is supporting the Protocol Department in coordinating and managing visits of high-profile delegates from both the U.S. and overseas, including Heads of State and CEOs of major corporations. These visits have significantly increased my attention to detail, strengthened my ability to perform effectively under pressure, and refined my cross-cultural communication skills. The opportunity to connect with every guest on a personal

level is one of the best parts about this job.

Another task I enjoy is speaking on our Innovation Stage (photo A). It is one of the spaces in the pavilion where guests can interact directly with a YA. For some visitors, we may be the first Americans they have ever met, and I think this role offers a special opportunity to build a genuine connection.

Aside from these tasks, the Expo provides a myriad of opportunities to meet lots of people from around the world. I took part in a cultural exchange event and spent time at the Vietnam pavilion wearing their traditional áo dài. A friend in Vietnam even sent me a photo (B) of the event being broadcast on her TV!



B

I also joined a dance session with the Japanese boy band Be:First, who filmed part of their music video at our pavilion (C).

On my off days, I have had the chance to explore other pavilions. I love seeing how each country expresses their culture in a unique way—some

continued on page 10



C

MEMBER NEWS

2025 Osaka World Expo Update, cont.



At the Gundam Pavilion (above), and one of her trips to Universal Studios Japan (below).



Emma and fellow YA keeping cool.



of the pavilions I particularly enjoyed were France, Italy, Kuwait, and Jordan. The Expo truly feels like a cultural playground, and I hope to continue to visit more pavilions.

I recently visited the Australian Pavilion as the handler for our mascot, Spark (D), during a collaboration event with 20 other pavilion mascots where we all danced to “Hot Potato” by the Wiggles (E). I realized while dancing how a small, silly moment can spark shared joy to build lasting connections.



D

I hope to go to more events, such as the one hosted by my fellow YA, De’Jia, for TOMODACHI alumni at the USA Pavilion (F).



E

In my free time, I have been enjoying exploring Osaka and the greater Kansai region. I have already visited Universal Studios twice (and counting!) and cannot wait to unlock more of Osaka in the next few months.

Mata-ne! Until next time, I will try my best to stay cool in the summer heat.

F

