

PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT For Immediate Release

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Community Luncheon Honors Nisei Generation

SAN FRANCISCO (March 24, 2016) – On Saturday, March 5, 2016, at the Japanese Cultural and Community Center (JCCCNC), and fittingly in the Nisei Community Hall, a crowd of 250 came together to honor the Nisei generation and celebrate the 110th Anniversary of Japantown. The day included a special Nisei Appreciation Luncheon tribute program, followed by the return of “*Nihonmachi: The Place to Be,*” a musical play by the Los Angeles-based Grateful Crane Ensemble.

The luncheon program titled “*Nisei Stories: A Salute to the Greatest Generation Ever*” was emceed by Wendy Tokuda. The program included stories from Sansei and Yonsei community members and songs by members of the Los Angeles-based Grateful Crane Ensemble. JCCCNC Takahashi Program Fellows, Riki Eijima and Junko Taniguchi, who are both Yonsei, grew up participating in San Francisco Japantown programs like the Japanese Bilingual and Bicultural Program (JBBP), Nihonmachi Little Friends, the Buddhist Church of San Francisco Girl Scouts and Youth Athletic Organization, spoke about the Nisei in their lives.



Riki began with a story of her maternal grandfather who was imprisoned during WWII at Amache and “just wanted to play (base) ball.” One day the only ball in camp went outside of the barbed-wire fence. To the dismay of the armed guard, her grandfather retrieved the ball while he had dozed off. When the guard angrily inquired with the group of young men they all pointed the finger in different directions so no individual could be blamed. She went on to

mention the struggles of the Nisei who endured camp, returned to the Bay Area, like her paternal grandparents Warren and (the late) June Eijima, and how they came together to build the Japantown community we have today. Toward the end of her speech she said, "What is Nihonmachi to me? It is in my core." She thanked the Nisei audience who withstood extreme discrimination and placed a value on community, "You have all played an essential role in instilling the importance of community in me. We are all the beneficiaries of your sacrifices. *Okage sama de*. Because of you, I am."



Junko Taniguchi spoke about her late maternal grandfather, Kenji Murase, her "*ojiichan*," and her paternal grandmother Barbara Taniguchi who resides in Fresno. She recently learned that her *ojiichan*, a child of the Depression, grew up "dirt poor," on a small farm in Reedley, CA. He ran away because he really wanted to go to college but during the war he was sent to Poston. Junko recalls, "...the time he spent in Poston inspired him to join other Nikkei parents to urge that the Japanese Language and culture they lost as a result of the wartime incarceration be taught to their children in public schools," and so the JBBP was born. Grandma Barbara taught Junko about *gaman* or endurance. "She was nine years old and she went to the mess hall where they were served 'mystery meat,' and canned peaches on



Minute Rice. She cried over that first meal, and had to overcome many more challenges with her sister and family during her four years in the Manzanar prison camp," she said. Junko closed by saying, "I admire the Nisei characteristics of selflessness and *gaman*. My life and the lives of countless other Japanese Americans have been enriched by the Nisei. Thank you for thinking of me, your grandchildren and the many more generations to come."

"*Chanto*," is a word that may not be as familiar to younger Japanese Americans growing up today, but for many Sansei, like Diane Matsuda, it was a way of life. After a few laughs from

the audience about things Nisei keep around the house, but not sure how/when they use them, like tofu containers and rubber bands on the doorknob, Diane spoke of her mom and aunts constant reminder to be *chanto*, respectable, done properly, and maybe for her family, it meant perfect. One memory she shared was about her aunt questioning her serving a “new dish” to others before actually making it and tasting it to see if it was ok to serve.



Paul Osaki, Executive Director of the JCCCNC mentioned, “These traits and values – *gaman* (perseverance), selflessness, sacrifice, *chanto*, community, family and others – are the reasons why the Nisei are so special to us. They endured difficult times much of their life but they returned to Japantown to build and reestablish organizations and businesses. They are why we can celebrate this 110th Anniversary today. The Nisei Appreciation lunch is a small thank you to them, the greatest generation who have and will continue to allow us to enjoy and learn about our culture, community and history.”

The Nisei Luncheon was followed by “*Nihonmachi: The Place To Be*,” a musical journey written by San Francisco native Soji Kashiwagi and performed by the Grateful Crane Ensemble. It told the 100 year story of a manju-ya family and California’s Japantowns featuring Japanese and American songs. “All of the songs trigger fond memories and takes our community back to a special time and place in their lives,” said Kashiwagi. “For the Nisei, the Japanese songs especially bring back memories of their Issei parents.” Returning to the JCCCNC after its debut 10 years ago, it was well-received by the audience who reminisced, clapped and sang along to the nostalgic hits that spanned the decades of our community.



To see photos of the Nisei Appreciation Luncheon and the musical *Nihonmachi: The Place To Be*, visit the JCCCNC website: www.jcccnc.org.

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About JCCCNC

Envisioned by the Japanese American community, JCCCNC will be an everlasting foundation of our Japanese American ancestry, cultural heritage, histories and traditions. The JCCCNC strives to meet the evolving needs of the Japanese American community through programs, affordable services and administrative support and facilities for other local service organizations. The JCCCNC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit community center based in San Francisco.