Honoring Our Past

(San Francisco, July 18, 2017) - Over 300 volunteers showed up for Japanese Colma Cemetery Clean-up Day. In preparation for the 66th annual Memorial Day Services at the Japanese Colma Cemetery, 300 volunteers from ages five to over 80 years old gathered on Saturday, May 20, 2017, to participate in the annual Japanese Colma Cemetery Clean-up day. Volunteers from around the Bay Area and even as far as Chicago journeyed to the Colma Cemetery to pull weeds, rake leaves, clean the walk-ways, rinse headstones, and place fresh flowers throughout the three-acre cemetery.

The Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California’s (JCCNC) Annual Japanese Colma Cemetery Clean-up day started in 2010. This annual community service project was organized as a way to honor the past, remember those who had passed on, and to bring the community together to educate them about a place that deeply represents the history of the Japanese American community. Executive Director Paul Osaki recalls coming to the Colma Japanese Cemetery with his father, noticing that some of the plots were grown over with weeds as if no one had visited them in years or some since they were laid to rest. He remembers looking at some of the Nisei buried that were volunteers, members, and donors of the JCCNC who had no children and wondering if anyone would ever visit their sites, to say a prayer or leave flowers. The Issei headstones in the old section were so worn that you could hardly make out some of the names on the headstones. He wondered if their families in Japan ever knew what happened to them or where their final resting place is located.

In 2010 Osaki along with Diane Matsuda a volunteer for the JCCNC and Donna Kotake a Board Member wanted to find a way to honor and remember those who had passed on and to give the community a reason to visit this cultural treasure. At our first Colma Cemetery Clean-up in 2010, we had 80 volunteers come out to help, and over the years many other volunteers and organizations have joined in with the cleanup efforts. “The program has grown beyond my expectations in scope, and it’s a beautiful sight watching three generations of our community, all over the cemetery working so hard” commented Osaki.
The cleanup day as even drawn Joe and Lillian Kurata who have been traveling from St. Charles, Illinois for the past few years who make it a family affair to visit the cemetery and pay respects to their grandparents buried at the cemetery.

The JCCCNC would like to thank the many volunteers and organizations that joined in the clean-up efforts. Organizations included; Consulate General of Japan in San Francisco, Japanese American Religious Federation, Japanese Chamber of Commerce, Japanese Community Youth Council, Girl Scout Troop 32704, Boy Scouts Troops 12, 29 and 58 of San Francisco, Millbrae Radio Taiso Group, Boy and Girl Scout Troops of San Mateo, San Francisco Mita-Kai, Buddhist Church of San Francisco, and JCCCNCl Shinzen. This annual program is held each year on the Saturday before Memorial Day, and the JCCCNCl is always looking for additional volunteers and organizations to join in. If you would like to join us next year, please contact us by calling (415) 567-5505 or email programsevents@jccnc.org.

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About the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California (JCCNCl)

Envisioned by the Japanese American community, the JCCNCl will be an everlasting foundation of our Japanese American ancestry, cultural heritage, histories, and traditions. The JCCNCl 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 JCCNCl is a 501(c)(3) non-profit community center based in San Francisco.