Celebrating New Facade with "Blossoms of Hope"
A Message from the Executive Director

In January of 2021, during the fear of the covid pandemic and height of anti-Asian hate crimes throughout the country, we discovered that the three cherry blossom trees planted in front of the Center had been totally destroyed. The branches that bloomed spectacular pink blossoms every spring were completely ripped off, leaving nothing but bare, broken trunks. Not one branch was left.

I considered this act of vandalism an assault on our cultural heritage, as the trees were not just significant to the Center’s landscape but a symbol of our Japanese cultural identity. The cherry blossom trees were not only planted to dedicate the historic visit to the Center of the Emperor and Empress of Japan, but they also represented the first cherry blossom trees to be planted in Japantown since the Redevelopment Agency of San Francisco destroyed and uprooted every plant and tree that ever stood in our historic Japantown.

I have been fortunate to grow up, work in and serve this community for over four decades. I’ve witnessed the many phases and transitions of this neighborhood, for better or worse. I still can recall during the redevelopment era when the City had torn down the entire neighborhood leaving blocks with nothing but dirt surrounded by chain-link fencing around them. I also witnessed the rebirth of our community and the many nonprofit organizations that were founded during the seventies.

The enduring story of this neighborhood, through its eras and comebacks, is the story of resilience and resolve. And so is the story of our cherry blossom trees.

Once word got out that our three trees were destroyed, we could have never anticipated what came next. The overwhelming support and kindness of hundreds of people across the country. They gave us hope and we were able to plan for a future in which new trees could beautify our sidewalk once again.

“Blossoms of Hope” became the name of this project to welcome a new generation of trees outside the Center. A fourth tree, the “tree of hope,” was added to represent the nearly 600 donations from people all over the United States and different parts of the world who showed their humanity and concern for these symbols of Japanese culture.

On Saturday April 23, 2022, we held an intimate ribbon-cutting ceremony to commemorate the first blossoming of these trees and the unveiling of the new sidewalk landscape, featuring natural boulders and a flowing river made from carved stone that meanders through the trees, creating a single beautiful art piece. I want to personally thank The Honorable Consul General of Japan Hiroshi Kawamura; Supervisor Dean Preston who represents Japantown; Margaret Haas of the Margaret E. Haas Foundation; DiJaïda Durden, Deputy Director of Operations from the Department of Public Works and Gerald Kawamoto, the landscape architect, for being our honorary ribbon-cutters. The Blossoms of Hope project would not be possible without their support and dedication to the beautification of our neighborhood.

The next time you visit us, before you walk up the stairs or enter our doors I hope you will take a moment to enjoy our new sidewalk project, look up and notice our four newcomers to the Center landscape, standing tall and every springtime reminding us that even during some of the worst of times, hope still blossoms.

Paul Osaki
Executive Director

MISSION

The Center is a nonprofit organization which strives to meet the evolving needs of the Japanese American community by offering programs, affordable services and administrative support and facilities for other local organizations. The Center also provides educational, cultural and recreational programs that meet and address the interests and concerns of the community. Our goals remain rooted in preserving the Japanese American cultural and historical heritage as well as fostering the foundation for future generations of Japanese Americans.
In Memoriam

We Called Him “Norm”

The Center Board and Staff wish to offer our sincere condolences to the family of The Honorable Norman Mineta.

Many of us in the community only addressed him as “Norm.” That is what he told us to call him, and that is what we did. He was one of the most humble people I knew throughout his rise in politics to become one of the most powerful men in the United States. He never ever forgot about our community,” said Paul Osaki, Executive Director of the Center.

Norm was “our” Member of Congress, our voice in the White House and a strong and fierce advocate for all API matters. Even though he did not technically represent San Francisco, he represented the Japanese American community and always made time to see us when we visited him in Washington, D.C. even at the expense of making powerful people wait to meet with him. He was a truly once-in-a lifetime political leader of our community and an exceptional leader in the history of the United States.

Norm never once turned down an invitation to visit the Center or participate in one of our events. On September 7, 2001, the Secretary of Transportation made time in his busy schedule to participate as the keynote speaker in an event the Center helped organized in San Francisco to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the signing of the Peace Treaty between the United States and Japan. We wrote his speech for the event and spent the evening as friends having a good time together. He flew in just for the event and left the next day. Three days later, on September 11, his leadership would be called upon to help make our nation safe following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York.

All of us at the Center will deeply miss his perseverance in pursuit of civil, social and constitutional rights of all individuals. Because of his leadership, we will be forever grateful for the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988.

Thank you, Norm for being a friend to the Center. Our community and our nation are in a better place because of you. He will sorely be missed from our lives but his legacy will live on forever.
Linda Tomoko Mihara is a third-generation Japantown business owner, carrying on a tradition of selling Japanese paper products and showcasing origami craftsmanship in the same neighborhood in which she was raised. Her store, Paper Tree, is a haven of origami and wrapping paper, Japanese art supplies, notecards and gifts for every occasion.

Get to know Linda and the history of this Japantown legacy business in our first Meet Your Nihonmachi. She continues to serve the community and share her passion for origami.

Can you talk about the origins of this store and the business that your grandparents started in the 1950s?

My grandparents had an import business called Oriental Culture Book Company. My grandfather, Tokinobu Mihara, also wrote quite a few books, including two of the first books in English about origami and imported the first packaged origami paper and goods from Japan. While my family was interned in Heart Mountain, my grandfather's glaucoma worsened since he could no longer receive his regular treatments. That ultimately led to him losing his sight. Despite that, he was still able to publish 17 books over the course of his life. He wrote the first romanized English-Japanese dictionary, and while in camp, he developed a braille alphabet. He also helped bring the use of guide dogs to Japan.

He also taught English classes to the Issei and wrote a book on U.S. Citizenship in both English and Japanese. He was instrumental in improving life for those in the Japanese community that he cared about so much.

Did he have a background as a scholar or educator?

Yes, he graduated from Waseda University in Japan. He gave lectures, primarily focused on Japantown, and taught English classes. After camp, he settled in Salt Lake City before they returned to San Francisco permanently. He was also the editor of the New World Sun, which was a Japanese American publication. He saw many opportunities to engage the Japanese community. He saw a need to support the Issei, but he specifically saw origami as a way to share a little bit of Japanese culture with children of the U.S. He thought it was the perfect connection for that.

What was your childhood like growing up in Japantown?

I grew up half a block up from where the SF JACL building is now. Our house had a warehouse in the back, where all of the goods were. We did a lot of shipping from that location. Because my dad often traveled as a sales representative for Oriental Culture, he decided he wanted to be home to help raise us. So they closed the book company, and my father opened Paper Tree so he could spend more time at home.

Paper Tree first opened in the Japan Center in 1968 when it was first built. It was my father’s vision to be part of Japantown. When we opened it, it was primarily gifts, housewares, books and of
course, origami paper. It was really a fun store. At that time, it was still the time of 60s love. We had blacklight posters, ceiling wax, and incense, and my dad would wear a bright-colored shirt and a heavy chain with a peace symbol on it.

When did you start to get more heavily involved in Paper Tree?

Our family was involved with the Cherry Blossom Festival, and my sister, brother and I would do an origami demo in the grand ballroom at the Miyako Hotel for other kids. That was the start of a cool tradition for me that was handed down from my grandparents.

After working downtown in the cosmetic industry, I decided to come back to the store in Japantown and help run things. Eventually, I slowly turned the store into what you see now, which is paper-heavy. It occurred to me that people come to Japantown to get Japanese things, and since paper is my first love, I really wanted it to be reflective of its name. My goal was to have the largest selection of origami paper and books on the planet.

Why does paper resonate with you so deeply?

Well, there’s something about paper. Having an early understanding of it through origami makes you pay attention to the type of paper you’re using. The large decorative paper, there’s just something amazing about it. The ones I sell here are hand silk-screened by a company that is over 365 years old. That’s crazy; you don’t see that craftsmanship anywhere.

I see what people have done with paper, and it’s just magic. For origami, all you need are your hands to create something amazing. Paper touches everybody’s life.

When people visit Paper Tree, what do you hope they discover?

I want them to be enchanted by all the origami they see and how paper can be used for the cards and things like that. But when people walk in, the first thing they see is this beautiful origami dragon that I have in front. They look, and they read that it’s from one sheet of paper with no cuts, and immediately their mind is blown. Origami cranes, they know, but a dragon? Automatically, it just blows them away.

Then as they go through the store, they see all the handcrafted cards, a few of which are from local artists. But I really want them to see how paper can be showcased and what they can do. The question I most often get is, “What do you do with this paper?” And the answer is, “Anything you want.”

What would you say to someone new to origami but feels a bit intimidated?

We have a great selection of origami books for all levels, including the highly advanced. But it’s important to understand how people learn. Some people are more comfortable watching a video, and others are more comfortable looking at a book. We have a Paper Tree YouTube channel, jump on there and see the videos that were created from the free class that I started on Saturdays during the pandemic. They can get some origami paper and start folding.
Blossoms of Hope
Center unveils rock garden-inspired sidewalk and four new cherry blossom trees

On Saturday, April 23, the Center hosted a small gathering of Center Board members, staff and community supporters to officially celebrate the Center’s four new cherry blossom trees, replacing the original three that were broken and vandalized in January of 2021. Named “Blossoms of Hope” in honor of the nationwide outpouring of support and donations that came to the Center in wake of the vandalism, the trees, and their newly landscaped sidewalk, were celebrated in an intimate ribbon-cutting ceremony on a sunny, Saturday morning.

These young but fully-grown trees, brought to San Francisco from Oregon, were chosen meticulously for their maturity. Young cherry blossom trees still in their growth phase would be too fragile and easily removed. Mature trees ensured a better chance for their permanent survival in their new home.

After the vandalism in 2021, the Center launched a GoFundMe campaign, intended to raise $5,000 in funds to replace the trees. What the Center staff could have never anticipated were the nearly 600 donations that came in online and by mail totaling over $30,000. These donations were able to cover the sidewalk’s removal and replacement, the removal of the damaged trees and root system, and the addition of a fourth cherry blossom tree named the “tree of hope,” representing the overwhelming generosity of all of our donors.

The history of the original trees was significant to not only the Center but further represented the relationship and goodwill between the United States (U.S.) and Japan. In 1994, the three original Kanzan trees were planted to commemorate a visit by his Majesty, Emperor Akihito, and Empress Michiko of Japan during a two-week tour of the U.S. These trees happened to be the first to be planted in San Francisco’s Japantown after the Redevelopment in the 1960s and 1970s uprooted every original tree in the neighborhood. For more than 25 years, the first planted trees graced the Center sidewalk, and community members and passersby would anticipate
Continued on page 8

the flowering of the vibrant pink blooms every spring. The violent damage was a shock and sober reminder of the rising anti-Asian rhetoric sweeping the country. While it was impossible to know if the vandalism was directly tied to anti-Asian sentiment, it was clear that there was an intention to break the trees over a consecutive three days.

Now, four new Kanzan trees have been planted to symbolize a forthcoming era of healing and peace. The sidewalk design featuring a flowing river made from carved stone and natural boulders now meanders between the four cherry trees, uniting them into a single art piece, reflecting the design of rock gardens often found in Japanese landscaping. For the ribbon-cutting event, pink origami tsuru (cranes) were hung on the branches of each tree, standing in for the blossoms that had yet to open.

In attendance for the ribbon-cutting were The Honorable Consul General of Japan, Hiroshi Kawamura; Supervisor Dean Preston; Margaret Haas of the Haas Foundation, who made the first major donation to the GoFundMe

For more than 25 years, the first planted trees graced the Center sidewalk, and community members and passersby would anticipate the flowering of the vibrant pink blooms every spring.

Continued on page 8
Blossoms of Hope
continued from page 7

The support we received from our initial ask for donations allowed us to imagine a new landscape much bigger than we initially anticipated. The Center remains deeply grateful to the first major donor of the project, Margaret Haas, who reached out to the Center immediately after hearing about the vandalism. It was her donation that helped propel the success of the entire campaign. Ms. Haas was also in attendance as an honorary ribbon cutter and reflected on the interconnectedness and diversity of San Francisco. “As a fifth-generation San Franciscan, when I read about the trees, and our relationship with all the wonderful communities that make the city great, replacing was a no-brainer. You’re part of us, we’re part of you. But what I didn’t expect was the outpouring from everyone else. I think we should take a moment to all be grateful for the goodness in all of us.”

Thank you to all of our donors who gave and supported this project. We are indebted to your generosity. We hope you will take a moment to come and see the new façade of the Center.

Consul General Hiroshi Kawamura, who just took the post in the fall of 2021, kicked off the ceremony with a message of hope for the future of the trees and Japantown. “I am very happy to witness these new trees. Since 1912, when we had the first sakura donated from Japan to the U.S., sakura has been the symbol of friendship between Japan and the United States. But these sakura here mean something more. They represent the resilience, the solidarity and the hope for the future. I sincerely hope in the near future we can have a hanami under these trees.” The Center’s Executive Director, Paul Osaki, reiterated to those gathered the vital role that the Consulate General’s office played in locating fully grown cherry blossom trees in Oregon. “Without the Consulate, we wouldn’t have had these gorgeous trees,” said Osaki.

Supervisor Dean Preston, a staunch ally of Japantown who represents San Francisco’s District 5, spoke about the unprecedented swiftness of the project due to overwhelming community support and the unanimous passing of a resolution by the Board of Supervisors just one week after it was introduced. “The broader community came together to really say that what happened wasn’t okay, but also that from this, something better will emerge. I think it’s really a sign of the approach and attitude that so many of us have tried to take here in Japantown through this pandemic.”
Get Cooking with the Center

Hijiki by Michie Koga

Since our rediscovered Center cookbook, *Nikkei Potluck: A Collection of Recipes and Stories of Japanese American Culture*, found its way once again into the hands of the staff during the pandemic, we’ve reconnected with some of our old standbys and favorite dishes. Following these recipes reminds us of how important it is to keep our traditions alive.

Some of these dishes were passed on to our Nisei contributors by their Issei mothers and mentors. The detailed instructions they wrote require us to go back to an era when things were prepared without the use of a microwave or food processor, making these recipes even more special.

Today’s recipe comes courtesy of Michie Koga, who submitted her mother’s recipe for hijiki for *Nikkei Potluck*. We always count on Michie to help us with our community events, particularly the Center’s Tabemasho annual event, as she is a great and caring volunteer.

**MICHIE KOGA’S STORY**

“The reason this recipe is special to me is that it is one of my favorite Japanese side dishes that my mother made for me after I got married. Now it is a favorite dish for my son. It is a recipe that I hope our future generations will enjoy from Obachan.”

Have you made a special recipe from *Nikkei Potluck*? Send us photos of your finished dishes and we will be happy to feature them on our social media! Email us at development@jccnc.org.

**Hijiki**

**Ingredients**
- 1 box hijiki
- 4 aburage
- 2-3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 3 cups water (just to cover hijiki)
- 1 bag hondashi (.35 oz. bag)
- ¼ cup shoyu
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- 1 carrot, small, cut into bite-size pieces
- water to boil aburage

**Directions**

Wash hijiki thoroughly and discard any irregular pieces and soak for about 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, boil aburage whole for about five minutes to remove excess oil. Drain and squeeze out excess water and cut it into bite-size pieces.

Drain the washed hijiki and sauté in vegetable oil. Add aburage, water, hondashi, shoyu, brown sugar and carrots. Cook down until the juice/sauce is gone but the hijiki is moist, not dry. Serve and enjoy!
Center Membership Benefits

In addition to access to members-only events, Center members enjoy discounts to Japantown businesses, discounts on Center programs, and more. Please visit jcccnc.org, email membership@jcccnc.org, or call (415) 567-5505 for more information or join as a Center member today at bit.ly/JCCCNCmembership.

**TRAVEL**

Special offers, discounts and rates to the below.

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- HAWAIIAN AIRLINES
- PRINCE WAIKIKI
- AQUA ASTON

**ENTERTAINMENT**

Discounted movie vouchers.

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  - $10.50/TICKET
- CINEMARK
  - $10.50/TICKET
- AMC THEATRES
  - $11.50/TICKET

**DINING**

- ON THE BRIDGE
  - FREE SOUP OR SALAD
- KRISPY KREME
  - VOUCHER $12
- SEE’S CANDIES
  - GIFT CERTIFICATES $22.50
- NISEI RESTAURANT
  - NISEI 15% OFF MATCHA CAFE MAIKO 10% OFF
  - YAKINIQ CAFE 10% OFF DRINKS

**SHOPPING**

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  - 10% OFF
- TOKAIDO ARTS
  - 10% OFF
- ASAICHI
  - 15% OFF
- JAPAN VIDEO AND MEDIA
  - 10% OFF
- PAPER TREE
  - 10% OFF
- SFMTA PARKING CARDS
  - $20 EACH
- KATACHI
  - 10% OFF
- AMIKO BOUTIQUE
  - 10% OFF

New Membership Benefits Added Every Month!
Prince Waikiki is offering preferred room rates and golf and tennis discounts at the Hawaii Prince Golf Club during their stay. Room rates start at $240* per room/night for Ocean View. Enjoy no resort fees; complimentary high-speed internet, bottled water daily for two, continental breakfast daily for one at 100 Sails Restaurant and daily self-parking; bonus airline miles; 10% discount off retail in Abiste; 10% off couples massage and any single 90-minute service from Naio Bliss Spa; access to fitness center, and much more (savings valued at $100+/night).

Additional special rates available at Prince Resorts Westin Hapuna Beach Resort and Mauna Kea Beach Hotel on the Big Island.

Executive Account Code: 111111559
www.princewaikiki.com

*rates vary by season

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Managed by Aqua-Aston, the first Hampton Inn & Suites Hotel in Hawaii is situated in Kapolei within the Ka Makana Alii Shopping Center on Oahu, which has more than 150 shops, restaurants and entertainment options. Rates start at $160/night!

Use Account Code: 3114307
hamptoninn3.hilton.com

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1840 Sutter Street, San Francisco, CA 94115 | (415) 567-5505 | membership@jccnc.org

Book online with Hawaiian Airlines to receive 5% off of the lowest available web fare and earn bonus miles for the Center at a rate of one mile for every dollar spent.

Enter Affiliate Code: AMWEBJCC
www.hawaiianairlines.com/affiliate
**Ongoing Classes at The Center**

We welcome you to peruse the list below that features all of the fun and enriching cultural and recreational classes that we offer. The first class session is free for any first-time participant (materials costs for select classes still apply). We encourage you to try something new! Please be advised that all in-person programs require participants to be fully vaccinated and pre-register. For more information or to register for a class, please visit our website, jccnc.org, or call (415) 567-5505.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>IN PERSON CLASSES</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ASIANS AMERICAN WRITING</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>A place for both new and experienced writers to write and share about themselves, their families and others to preserve the stories and memories of our Asian American community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructor: Genny Lim</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Wednesdays of the month, 10-11:30 a.m.</td>
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<td>Cost: $14 M</td>
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| **KARATE — MONDAY AND WEDNESDAY CLASS** |
| Karate is an Okinawan martial art meaning “empty hand.” Develop self-defense skills and strengthen yourself mentally and physically. Our class is part of the International Karate League (IKL) which instructs a modified Shorin-Ryu style of karate. This class is open to all skill levels age 6+.  |
| Instructor: Craig Hamakawa  |
| Mondays and Wednesdays, 6-8 p.m.  |
| Cost: $30 M | $48 NM/monthly  |
| $9 M | $14 NM/drop-in  |

| **KARATE—SUNDAY CLASS** |
| Instructor: Craig Hamakawa  |
| Sundays, 10 a.m.-noon  |
| Cost: $15 M | $24 NM/monthly  |

| **KENDO WITH SAN FRANCISCO KENDO DOJO** |
| Learn the modern Japanese martial art of Kendo. Kendo is an activity that combines martial arts practices and values with strenuous sport-like physical activity. Kendo uses bamboo swords and protective armor to discipline the human character through the application of the principles of the katana. This class is hosted by San Francisco Kendo Dojo. To learn more and to register visit sanfranciscokendo.org or contact them at info@sfkendo.org.  |
| Instructor: Koji Lau-Ozawa  |
| Thursdays, 7-9 p.m.  |
| Cost: $45 M | $55 NM/per season  |

| **BRIDGE** |
| Keep your mind sharp while playing bridge in a fun, social environment.  |
| Coordinator: Alice Moriguchi  |
| Fridays, 12:30-4 p.m.  |
| Cost: $2 M | $3 NM/drop-in  |

| **MAH JONGG** |
| Engage in social activity and develop creative strategy skills by playing this popular Chinese tile game. If you would like to learn how to play Mandarin style Mah Jongg, classes will begin when we have four new players. Sign up at the Center’s front office and indicate if you would like to attend either a Tuesday, Thursday or both classes. You will be contacted by the Mah Jongg coordinator when we have at least four students enrolled. Invite your friends!  |
| Coordinators: Yone Higashigawa and Nancy Nakai  |
| Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30-4 p.m.  |
| Cost: $2 M | $3 NM/drop-in  |

| **COMMUNITY VOLLEYBALL** |
| Create a team for your non profit, service or interest organization and join us for a volleyball league filled with fun, food and friends! Each team must consist of either board, staff members or volunteers in your organization. Please contact the Programs Department at programsevents@jccnc.org if interested in forming a team.  |
| Tuesdays, 7-10 p.m.  |
| Cost: $45 M | $55 NM/per season  |

| **30 AND OVER BASKETBALL** |
| Sign up for the Center’s Monday Night (draft) Basketball League. Participate in games that are competitive, but friendly! See our website for league information.  |
| Mondays, 6-10 p.m. (up to 15 weeks per season)  |
| Cost: $120 M/$155 NM/per season  |

| **40 AND OVER BASKETBALL** |
| Get your friends and join the friendly competition in our Wednesday Night (draft) League. See our website for league information.  |
| Wednesdays, 7-10 p.m. (up to 15 weeks per season)  |
| Cost: $105 M | $130 NM/per season  |

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Instructor: Chizuko Nakamura
Wednesdays, 6-8 p.m.
Cost: $70 M | $90 NM/monthly
$22 M | $28 NM/drop-in

Instructor: Craig Hamakawa
Mondays and Wednesdays, 6-8 p.m.
Cost: $30 M | $48 NM/monthly
$9 M | $14 NM/drop-in

Instructor: Koji Lau-Ozawa
Thursdays, 7-9 p.m.
BEYOND BASIC ART CLASS
This weekly art class is designed for intermediate and advanced students and will allow participants the opportunity to explore new media, subject matter and ways of thinking. This class will use basic drawing, painting concepts and subject matter, but will also look to expand participant’s artistic horizons. The atmosphere of the class is very informal for creating art.
Instructor: Rich Tokeshi
When: Saturdays, 10 a.m.–noon
Cost: $30 M | $40 NM/monthly
$11 M | $14 NM/drop-in

WASHI NINGYO
Engage in the art of Japanese paper doll making and create your own 3D Japanese washi (traditional Japanese paper) dolls. In this class made for all skill levels, participants will learn the basics, or perfect their skills in doll making. First-time participants must register by phone by the first Saturday of the month. Class fees include all materials. Class is for ages 18+.
Instructor: Yurie Nakamura/Rochelle Lum
Second Saturday, 10 a.m.-noon
Cost: $30 M | $40 NM/monthly
$11 M | $14 NM/drop-in

YOSAKOI DANCING WITH
ITO YOSAKOI DANCE GROUP
Join the Ito Yosakoi Dance Group’s weekly class to learn the lively, energetic dance style of Yosakoi dancing! Yosakoi dancing features choreographed group dances with traditional movements mixed with modern, uptempo music to make for a captivating dance style that is growing in popularity in Japan and abroad! No dance experience is necessary. Class members have the option of dancing with the class recreationally, or learning the group’s repertoire to perform in public.
Fridays, 7-9 p.m.
In-person: $25 M | $30 NM/monthly
Cost: $8 M | $9 NM/drop-in
Virtual: $12 M/ $17 NM/Monthly
$3 M/ $5 NM/ Drop-In

HYBRID CLASSES
STUDENTS MAY CHOOSE TO ATTEND
IN-PERSON OR ONLINE

ONLINE CLASSES

SENIOR CHAIR AEROBICS
Designed for seniors who want to build basic physical strength in a low-impact class. Students will use a chair to participate in exercises to increase flexibility, muscle coordination and strength.
Instructor: Kaeko Inori
Thursdays, 10-10:45 a.m.
$3 M | $4 NM drop-in

UKULELE: ADVANCED
This class is for experienced ukulele players that focuses primarily on Hawaiian song traditions, as well as chords and rhythmic strumming techniques.
Instructor: Don Sadler
Thursdays, 6:30-7:30 p.m.
Cost: $50 M | $65 NM/monthly
$12 M | $17 NM/drop-In

UKULELE: INTERMEDIATE
Designed for ukulele players who have prior experience. This class will focus on learning and reviewing chords, as well as songs and strumming patterns. (New students with no prior experience should participate in the Ukulele 101 workshop held twice a year to cover basics such as tuning, basic chords and techniques.)
Instructor: Don Sadler
Saturdays, 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Cost: $50 M | $65 NM/monthly
$12 M | $17 NM/drop-In

THE HEALING ART OF
KINTSUGI – VIRTUAL
CRAFT WORKSHOP
Saturday, June 11, 1-4 p.m.
Zoom
$75 Members | $85 General
Learn the healing art of kintsugi - repairing broken pieces of pottery with lacquer and gold. This virtual workshop is taught by studio artist Alexandra Kitty, author of The Art of Kintsugi: Learning the Japanese Craft of Beautiful Repair and includes a kit with everything you’ll need to create your own kintsugi art pieces out of your broken and chipped dishware.

KANPAI: AN EVENING OF SAKE AND OCHOKO CUP PAINTING
Join founders of Kenshin Sake, Graig Inaba and Steven Santa Maria, as they present on and educate about the different types of sake, how to drink them, and what foods to pair them with for the perfect marriage. Everyone will also be able to participate in a “do it yourself” sake cup marble dye activity, where they will design and take home their own uniquely decorated set of “ochoko” sake cups. We are excited to raise our glasses with you, KANPAI!
Friday, May 27, 6-8 p.m.
the Center (in-person event)
$40 Members | $50 General
A year before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Center launched its inaugural Hidden Treasures event. The event was created as a way to honor the donations from many Nisei who had treasured items in their homes that were given to them by relatives and their parents from Japan. As we continue to see this generation age, we have been presented with a unique challenge in finding a way to pass on and care for these precious items.

“Over the years, we’ve received a number of phone calls from our Nisei members who were planning to sell their home and move into an assisted living facility or go live with their children,” said Paul Osaki, Executive Director. “They were concerned they could not take those items that have been in their homes their entire lives.”

Sadly, we are now receiving calls from Sansei children telling us that their parents have passed away and they need to find a place for their belongings. The Center staff wanted to find a way to share their items with new owners who would treasure and safeguard them just as their first owners did, and thus Hidden Treasures was born.

This is also an event that provides individuals with an opportunity to learn about various Japanese cultural artifacts. For example, the event will provide a great way to learn about the origins of a hagoita (a decorated paddle that is used for a game similar to badminton during the New Year) or a kotatsu (a portable heater used in the main room of a house during cold winter days).

Everyday items such as ceramic tea sets and appetizer plates will also be available to purchase. We welcome and look forward to your participation! Center Members will have special pre-event access before doors open to the public, stay tuned for details at jccnc.org or on our Facebook page.
Center Class Spotlight

Karate with Craig Hamakawa

Craig Hamakawa is a 7th degree black belt and has practiced karate for more than 45 years. He attained Shodan in 1973 and has taught in Hilo, Honolulu, Oregon, San Bruno, Millbrae and San Francisco. He is an instructor of the International Karate League (IKL), a non profit organization based out of Honolulu, Hawaii. The IKL instructors encourage the development of the character of their students. The school motto is, "Through honesty and sincerity you are free." In this Center Class Spotlight, get to know more about Craig’s long career in the art and practice of karate and his core teaching philosophies.

Why was karate the passion you followed and what drove you to want to teach?
The honest answer is it got me away from having to do yard work in Hawai‘i. In Hilo, there’s no such thing as boundaries so when mom tells you to clean to the guava tree and you do it, she’ll say, “I meant the other guava tree.” So I’m six, seven, I didn’t know what karate was but it couldn’t have been worse than having to clean the yard on the weekends. And my sensei was my elementary school teacher.

So I started in ’67. This was before the Bruce Lee craze hit in the early ’70s. We had a dojo of 10, 12. But once the Bruce Lee craze thing hit, it boomed to 120. At that time, I was a brown belt heading toward my black belt. That kind of helped formulate my thinking but once I got to a black belt in ’73, I was still in high school. I was 17 and that was too young. You can do everything physically but your mind is still immature.

How would you describe your teaching style?
I always tell my students that my primary goal in teaching is to develop character, seikaku, the inner person. And second to that, you’re learning a self-defense martial art. That’s the one thing I’ve always told my students who go through the rigorous training. I’ve been teaching since I got the black belt, ’73. Character is way more important than anything else that people will see. Once they see their character, see how they behave, I’m not impressed. The people I’m way impressed with are the ones who stay quiet and keep their head down. And over time, you see how people move and how they walk and carry themselves, they likely know how to take of themselves. I know certain of my mannerisms are straight out of martial art.

I always tell my students that I don’t see people in the here and now. I see them in five years, ten years down the road. I’ve been fortunate to be able to see them in the here and now and to see what they can become. For many of the students, I’m not wrong. And the ones that have stayed with me are loyal. Loyal to a fault loyal. And without question, whenever I ask them to do something, done.

Why do you enjoy teaching here at the Center?
I’m very grateful to be here with the Center. The Center is non profit, and our school is non profit. Every instructor in our system works for a living. I used to tell my new students, “I’m not after your wallet.” I’ve always felt this is a great merge, a great synergy. It’s never about the money.

If there is a student of any age that has thought about the practice, what would you say to convince them to try karate?
One of the things I tell people is that although I’m teaching karate, I’m really teaching you a way of life. And I tell them when you go through the training, it’s martial arts. It’s militaristic, it’s rigorous. Very bushido.

The strive for perfection may not be attained but it’s the process of striving for perfection and that’s what I find so fascinating to teach and to practice. What I do in teaching is very philosophical. I’m going to work your mind more than the physical aspect.
After 116 years of business in Japantown, Ricky and Bobby Okamura, third-generation owners of Benkyodo, closed San Francisco’s beloved manju shop for good on March 31. Their farewell drew a crowd of more than 150 well-wishers along the Buchanan Mall, while hopeful customers, already in line for hours, continued to wait patiently for the last pieces of manju and mochi to ever be sold from this legacy business. In the crowd, people held signs of gratitude for the Okamura family: “Thank you very mochi” to poignant messages of “Ba-chan, Ji-chan, Mom and Dad would be so proud of you guys. Great job!”

As Ricky and Glenda, Bobby and Terry ended their shift around 2 p.m. and came to greet the crowd, cheers and applause echoed through the mall. Lori Matoba, the Center’s Deputy Director and fourth-generation Okamura descendant, kicked off the first speech. “I wanted to do this to let Rick and Bob know and understand the reach and influence of their hard work and how important Benkyodo and the manju that they hand make every day is to so many.” She went on to share just a few of the sacrifices that were made for the business, like missing gatherings with family and friends, holidays and precious sleep.

Benh Nakajo, longtime Benkyodo worker since the 1970s, also said a few words to his colleagues and friends of 50 years. “The day has finally come, when Benkyodo closes its doors forever. Benkyodo is not just a business. Benkyodo is an institution. It has become for us, a way of life. In my mind’s eye, I can see Jichan and Bachan, I can see Dad and I can see Mom. I can see Sue and Hippo, standing over there looking at each other and looking around at all of you, and shaking their head in complete disbelief. But afterwards, smiling and nodding to one another. They understand the outpouring of gratitude and loyalty that you have all expressed. And then they turn around and look at these two, Rick and Bob, and they bow their heads and they say, ‘Good job. Well done.”’ Eryn Kimura, cultural worker,
artist and family friend of the Okamuras, gave a powerful and poetic speech about the power of place, people and the heritage of San Francisco Japantown.

This moment to say a collective goodbye was undeniably emotional, as Ricky and Bobby wiped tears during the remarks. At the end, both brothers got an opportunity to say a few words to the community. "I'm a man of few words. I just want to thank every one of you for your support all these years, and always seeing a smiling face because I'm unapproachable," said Rick, which got a laugh from the crowd. Bobby then spoke. "I just want to thank everyone for coming out for this occasion. Just thank you to everybody for coming out and supporting us all these years. It's been our pleasure and we hope we did a good enough job. I think we did."

Goodbye and thank you signs now cover the windows of the store. The last line for Benkyodo's manju.

Japantown Legacy Merchandise

We are proud to launch our first Japantown Legacy Merchandise, featuring Benkyodo. As an ongoing fundraiser to the Center, the Okamura Family has allowed us to sell t-shirts, crewnecks and tote bags featuring the legacy business's logo.

- T-shirts $15
- Crewnecks $25
- Totebags $15
- Caps $30

Purchase online at bit.ly/jcccnmerch
Meet Chef David Yoshimura and his highly anticipated restaurant, Nisei, which opened in Russian Hill last summer. Drawing from his own Japanese American heritage and an eclectic experience of cooking around the world under chefs with modern, avant-garde sensibilities, Nisei leans into washoku-style cooking, integrating traditional Japanese techniques that highlight seasonability, balance and harmony. The goal, and Chef Yoshimura’s main mission with Nisei, is to provide a dining experience for guests to enjoy a different kind of Japanese cuisine than what is typically found all over San Francisco. Inside, Nisei’s clean, sparse aesthetic brings to mind classic Japanese style and a modern restaurant atmosphere. Dining here is truly a special experience.

Chef Yoshimura has joined Nisei as our newest Member Benefit Partner, where Center members (all levels) can receive 15% off their meal at Nisei. Get to know him more in our Partner Spotlight, and the inspiration behind his highly creative menu.

Can you share a little bit of your background?
I grew up in Houston, Texas originally. I’m half Japanese, my dad is Japanese. I grew up in Houston until I was 18 and then I went to culinary school in New York and worked at wd-50 for quite a bit. I also did stints in Japan at Kagurazaka Ishikawa and Nihonryori Ryugin, based in Tokyo. I’ve kind of been all over, as well as Asador Extebarri in Spain. It’s given me a wide skill set.

While you were growing up, did food and cooking play a big role?
Both of my parents worked and I’m an only child. So when I would come home from school, if my mom didn’t have anything pre-made for me, she would just say, “You can just cook for yourself, if you’re hungry.” And so it was a lot of time spent at home making food and getting curious about food because I was in charge of feeding myself most of the time. So it kind of created this desire to make decent tasting food for myself. I also started to work as a dishwasher, when I was like 15 or 16, and eventually I became a waiter, then a prep cook and it kind of fostered the idea of making cooking a career.

Was there anything you remember eating that was really influential to starting your culinary career, or was it an accumulation of eating experiences?
I think it was more an accumulation of being exposed to a lot of restaurants when I was younger, working in restaurants, constantly cooking at home and cooking for my friends as well. I think I was just surrounded by a lot of cooking. It was a revelation at the time,
realizing that I could have a good time and could also make a living off of it.

What was it that you enjoyed the most about cooking for other people?

I think the act of cooking for somebody and seeing the reaction after they try something is very rewarding for me. I think it’s an instant gratification, when I can see their reaction after they try my food. That’s kind of the joy I get out of cooking.

How does your Japanese American heritage and experience of cooking in Japan influence your restaurant, Nisei, today?

The way I like to describe my cuisine is not traditional Japanese, it’s Japanese Californian. I like to recreate the dishes that I grew up eating and dishes that I enjoy eating with family and friends and when I was in Japan and recreating them with local ingredients coming from California. I draw a lot of inspiration from what I like to eat at home or family gatherings or what I’ve eaten growing up as a Japanese American.

Is there one dish in particular that you’d say is your comfort food or that you would point to as your best food memory?

I think one of my favorites that I draw a lot from is and make is Japanese black curry. Usually I serve it with sweetbreads, sometimes with wagyu katsu curry, as well as morel mushrooms and fermented hakusai, fermented cabbage. I think that one is very representative of me because katsu curry is very Japanese American. A lot of us grew up eating packaged curry and I think that it speaks a lot to who I am. We’re also using high-end wagyu from Japan and then we make it into katsu style. The morel mushrooms are from California, so they’re local. And the fermented cabbage speaks to my training in Japan where I learned a lot about fermentation and pickling, so you can see a lot of the different aspects of who I am in this dish.

What are your favorite dishes on your menu?

I think one of my favorites, which we’ve taken off of the menu but we might be bringing back is our American unagi. It’s unagi that’s grown in Maine and we get it in live so it’s very fresh. That one is always just served with daikon oroshi and maybe some lotus root or whatever’s in season. Right now we’re serving katsuo, or skipjack tuna, that we smoke and it’s served with ramps, marinated daikon and myoga. I think those are some of my favorites because I tend to like more simple dishes.

One of the other things about the menu is we push a lot of wine rather than sake, which is different than a lot of Japanese restaurants. I’m a certified sommelier so I’ve always tried to push wine pairings rather than sake pairings.

Why did you want to become a Member Benefit Partner with the Center?

I’ve always really liked giving back to the community when I was growing up, and it was always instilled in me to give back in some way. So I wanted to give back to a community that I can resonate with and I wanted to show a lot of other Japanese Americans to be prideful of what our heritage is. I thought that the JCCNC was a great way to do that. Growing up in Texas, there aren’t a lot of other Japanese Americans or Japanese people in general. When I moved to San Francisco, I was very excited to see Japantown and to see the Center and so I wanted to be more involved. I wanted to help promote general education about Japanese cuisine and heritage. Anything I can do to help other Japanese Americans and promote the culture is very rewarding for me.

The main message I’m trying to get across is that this restaurant is a representation of Japanese American culture and cuisine — it is not exactly traditional kaiseki and it’s not exactly a fusion of any kind. I think it’s very transparent of who I am and what the strength of being Japanese American represents.
Obon: Remembering our Ancestors

For more than 500 years, people in Japan have dedicated time out of their busy lives to take a few days off to go back to their ancestral homes to remember and thank the family members who have passed before them. This takes place in mid-July and mid-August of each year, depending on the region of ancestral origin, and is known as Obon.

Historically, Obon was a three-day affair. On the first day, people lit a fire or placed a lantern in front of their homes to guide the spirits back. The second day commemorates the monk Mokuren’s (Mogallana) dancing for joy when his mother was released from her suffering. The third day requires you to launch paper lanterns into the river, sending the spirits on a safe journey back.

Although Obon has its roots in Buddhism, remembering loved ones who have passed before us is something that many faiths believe and practice.

In Brazil, where there are over 1.5 million people of Japanese ancestry, remembering ancestors takes place on November 2, a day reserved in the Catholic faith as All Souls Day. In Mexico, two days are dedicated in November called Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos) to remember family members.

Here in the United States, various temples and community centers sponsor Obon Odori (dance). According to Rev. Mas Kodani (retired) of the Senshin Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles, the history of Bon Odori on the mainland was introduced to us by Rev. Yoshio Iwanaga in 1937. Over the decades, many temples and dance groups have adapted traditional dance steps and songs to reflect their particular regions.

In Southern California, the Southern District of the Buddhist Churches of America come together every year before Obon Odori season to decide on eight core dances they will perform so that individuals from the various temples can easily participate in each other’s Obon Odori. Dancing in an Obon Odori should not be about how well one dances or judging another person’s style of dance. It’s about a time when you can be free of worry and forget about one’s self. It is a significant and special time of the year to think about those who have come before you, to thank them for being in your life and for offering you the precious opportunity to live in this world.

Living through an unprecedented moment such as COVID-19 re-affirmed to many of us how fragile life can be. Let us all take a moment this summer to honor our ancestors, our community and our loved ones who have gone before us.

Currently, only San Francisco Buddhist Temple and San Jose Buddhist Temple are scheduled to host in-person Obon Odori this summer. For a full schedule of tentative Obon celebrations around the Bay Area, please check each temple’s respective websites for updates.
On Saturday, May 7, 2022, the Center hosted its 30th annual Japantown Children’s Day Festival (Kodomo no Hi matsuri), the first in-person celebration since 2019. There are few Children’s Day holidays more well known than Japan’s Kodomo no Hi, celebrated every year on May 5. On this Japanese national holiday, children are respected and honored for their individual strengths, health and happiness. The Center staff were happy to see familiar faces in the crowd and thrilled to meet many new families, as they came out to celebrate the holiday and partake in games, crafts and performances.

Booths filled the Japantown Peace Plaza, with cultural games and craft activities for families to enjoy. Rosa Parks Japanese Bilingual Bicultural Program (JBBP), Clarendon JBBP, and Nihonmachi Little Friends hosted craft booths for children to make paper koinobori, fold origami kabuto hats, and decorate their own Kodomo no Hi badges to wear during the festival. Many Japantown organizations, including Japanese Community Youth Council (JCYC), Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), Japantown Task Force (JTF), and Japantown Community Benefit District (JCBD), were stationed at booths around the festival, helping children make Japanese stylized hachimaki and handing out complimentary hand sanitizer. In addition to games and crafts, young participants enjoyed balloon angel demonstrations, fishing for toys (somen nagashi style) and jumping in the bounce house.

Entertainers on the main stage included James Chan, a 14-year-old magician and juggler and cultural performances by the Ito Yosakoi dance group; Karate International League; Members Even after NICE (MEAN); San Francisco Kendo Dojo and Genryu Arts Taiko. The 2022 Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival Queen Court handed out prizes from Sakura Arts.

The Center would like to thank our sponsors, The Henri & Tomoye Takahashi Charitable Foundation, Japan Center Malls, San Francisco Japantown Foundation, JCYC, San Francisco Recreation & Parks Department, Japan Video & Media, Sanrio, GoGo Squeez and Sakura Arts. The Center is proud to continuously host its Children’s Day Festival for the sake of our community youth, cultural preservation and traditional educational experiences. We hope to see you all next year in Japantown to celebrate Kodomo no Hi together!
Community Donations

We would like to extend a special thank you to those who remember the Center when making unsolicited gifts, in memory of a loved one who recently passed away or including a donation with your membership. These gifts remind us how important the Center is to many in the community who appreciate the work that we do. We thank you for thinking of us and allowing us to share in paying tribute to the special people in your life. Gifts received from February 2, 2022 - April 30, 2022 are listed below.

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