



A Little History, A Little Her Story

On June 18, local historian Erik Matsunaga led USJCers and Japan Consuls on a tour of one of the two main areas Japanese Americans settled in Chicago during and immediately after World War II, centered on Clark and Division streets in Chicago's near north side.

Besides relating the resettlement history of Japanese Americans, Erik compared the existing/historic buildings to those used in Naomi Hirahara's novel *Clark and Division*. Erik (far right in photo) and **Bob Kumaki** (at left in photo) helped Naomi learn about the people and places of resettlement-era Chicago for her well-received book.

This special tour was occasioned by the visit of USJC President & CEO **Audrey Yamamoto**. Everyone learned more about this era of Chicago Japanese American history from Erik's tour.

Then we all headed to Konbini & Kanpai to learn more about Audrey.

Imbibing from the amazing selection of Japanese sake, beer and soft drinks curated by **Naomi Hattori** and her husband Jun-Jun Vichaikul, we listened as Audrey talked about the importance of regional programming in building and maintaining member engagement, as well as contributing to the organization's overall mission of strengthening the U.S.-Japan relationship.

During and after a wonderful dinner crafted by **Eric Hattori**, we were able to socialize with Audrey (and each other) and hone our skills at building person-to-person relationships.



photo by Stephen Toyoda



photo by Michael Tanimura



The tour group outside the historic LaSalle Mansion, home to many JAs during the resettlement period, including the fictional Ito family (top).

Midwest Chairperson **Anna Ninoyu** and **Audrey Yamamoto** at Konbini & Kanpai (above).

Audrey with some of the jovial Midwest group at K&K (left).

From Anna Ninoyu: Sound Bytes



Summer is in full swing with festivities, the viewing of the total solar eclipse, and an aurora borealis visible below the 60th latitude, accompanied by sweltering hot and humid days. Adding to this, the rare simultaneous emergence of cicada broods XIII and XIX in parts of Illinois brought rock concert-level cries and sci-fi-worthy invasions. These rarities remind us to appreciate, adapt, and be resilient to nature's forces.

As Chair, I am excited about our growing, diverse membership and eager to meet each of you to learn about your stories and aspirations. I am also inspired by our CEO, **Audrey Yamamoto**, whose steadfast leadership, clear vision, and pragmatism exemplify the power of cultivating strong, meaningful relationships.

The Midwest Region members continue to thrive through diverse cross-generational and cross-organizational collaborations. Here are a few highlights from this quarter:

- Let's celebrate another successful showing at Japan Fest in Chicago's Millennium Park for the third year. USJC-Midwest was well-represented as a sponsor with member volunteers and with **Mike Takada** (JALD '17) as co-chair for the free and public event. This event was organized and supported by the Consulate General of Japan in Chicago, Chicago Japanese American

Council and the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Chicago. Despite the sauna-level heat, many of the local Japanese and Japanese-American restaurants, martial arts dojos and cultural demonstrations were well represented and appreciated by all.

- The Midwest Forum is held once a year where the Consulate invites a wide range of people involved in Japan-U.S. relations from the ten Midwestern states under its jurisdiction for a two-day conference. Participants include honorary consuls general and executives of Japan-America Societies from each Midwestern state, the Chicago Chamber of Commerce, the U.S.-Japan Council Midwest Region, JETRO Chicago Office, The Japan Foundation (LA and NY offices), and JETAA Chicago. We discussed issues on how to strengthen partnerships to promote strategic and effective public diplomacy in the Midwest and ensuring the participation of the Japanese American community and ways to effectively work and collaborate together. Thank you, **Joe Galligan** (ELP '23) for emceeding and organizing the program, **Bob Kumaki** (JALD '09),

Dave Yoshimura (JALD '24), **Stephen Toyoda**, **Megan Nakano** and **Mike Takada** for all your contributions to these key conversations that continue to enrich and affirm the people-to-people connections and strengthen the sub-national level relationships.

- I had the rare honor of meeting the 2024 Laureate of the Pritzker Architecture Prize, Riken Yamamoto, his family and staff at the Consul General's Residence during his stay for the awards ceremony at the Art Institute of Chicago. He is the ninth Japanese architect to receive this accolade whose portfolio exemplifies the transformative power of architecture in society. It was a remarkable evening among distinguished laureates and dignitaries, sharing our passions for architecture as a catalyst to change in communities.

In closing, I want to thank all the members for your tireless engagement and passion for creating a supportive community of friends. Your dedication is the foundation of our collective success and growth. Together, we are building a vibrant, resilient network that drives our endeavors forward.



Happily, we have been seeing many new faces at our monthly meetings, like this one at Saigon Sisters in May. Let's keep this trend going!

Meet Our Newest Midwest USJC Members

Dee Dee Ohara Blizzard

Dee Dee Ohara Blizzard is a seasoned real estate professional with over 27 years of experience, serving as the Broker and Owner of Global Real Estate Consulting in Novi, Michigan. Known for her expertise in cross-border real estate transactions, Dee Dee has dedicated many years to fostering business relationships between the USA and Japan. She actively participates in organizations that support the same and hosts Japanese students for home-stay programs. As a Certified International Property Specialist (CIPS®), she specializes in international relocation

and global investment projects, particularly in hospitality and mixed-use developments.

Dee Dee's leadership extends to her roles in major real estate associations. She serves on the Board of Directors for the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR) and is the current President of the Greater Metropolitan Association of REALTORS® (GMAR). An accomplished keynote speaker and trainer, Dee Dee co-founded the Global Girls Collaboration (GCC), where she leads webinars and training sessions for real estate professionals.



Maximilian Ibata-Arens

Max Ibata-Arens focuses on multiple areas within Logisyn. His primary role is working with executives at the major logistics software providers, both on the buy-side and sell-side. He specializes in analyzing the market to evaluate the right strategic partners to create an optimal long-term partnership.

Max also leads market research and reports for Logisyn, including the publication of multiple reports on mergers and acquisitions activity and trends in logistics technology. He also works closely with Logisyn's global network of companies in Europe and Asia, including buy-side searches in this region and assisting

company owners as they consider selling the businesses that they've built.

Max has a passion for technology, with a special focus on logistics technologies, and is the co-founder of a tech start-up focused on helping people record their life stories.

Max is an avid traveler and does so whenever the opportunity presents itself. He has lived abroad in both Italy and Japan, often for more than a year at a time, and prides himself on being fluent in the Italian language. Max is an avid surfer and snowboarder.

Miyabi Kogure

Miyabi Kogure is a recent graduate of Chuo University in Tokyo, Japan, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology. She specializes in qualitative research and has conducted various field studies, including participatory action research in Knoxville, Tennessee, documenting the experiences of Latinx immigrants. Miyabi is set to begin her PhD at the University of Kansas, focusing on the cultural integration processes of immigrants, with a particular emphasis on the cultural adaptation of Asian Americans. Her accolades include the Best Paper Award from Chuo University and the TOMODACHI Sumitomo Corporation Scholarship Program.



Meet Our Newest Midwest USJC Members

Emma Takahashi

Emma Takahashi was born and raised in Chicago and loves visiting family in Japan. She graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign with a bachelors in International Studies and a minor in Global Markets. Her concentration was in Western Europe and she studied in Paris, France for half a year. She is fluent in Japanese and English and conversational in French. She likes traveling and her favorite activity is skiing in Hokkaido.



Akira Yamamoto

Akira Yamamoto is a Partner at Deloitte and the leader of the US and Americas Japanese Services Group (JSG), a specialized team that serves clients across various industries. With 36+ years of experience in working with Japanese/US multinational companies, he has developed a deep expertise in facilitating cross-border business opportunities and collaborations.

Akira's mission is to drive public-private collaboration, connecting key stakeholders to foster innovation, growth, and social impact. He also leads Deloitte's US and Japan strategic collaborations and strategies, which aim to enhance their global capabilities and deliver value to the clients and society. As a trusted business advisor, he helps his clients navigate a highly disruptive and changing environment and address strategic and operational challenges. (Akira is above with his wife Shinyong.)

Motoyuki Hayama



Moto Hayama is a Partner at Deloitte & Touche LLP, practicing audit and assurance services. His main responsibility is to serve Japanese-owned companies operating in North America. He is also leading the audit practice for Japanese Services Group at Deloitte for the central region.

Moto was born and raised in Tokyo, and finished his undergraduate at Meiji Gakuin University. He then moved to New York in 1999 to earn a Master's degree in accounting from University of New York at Albany before joining Deloitte.

Moto acquired cooking skills during the COVID pandemic: a source of his well-being, as well as occasional appreciation from his family members. Moto also likes to travel with his family, plays various board games with his daughter, and plays tennis, whenever his neighbor has spare time.

Kent Yamamoto

Kent Yamamoto, born to Japanese immigrants, hails from Orange County, California. His early years were marked by competitive travel baseball across Southern California. After graduating from high school, he decided to hang up his cleats and accepted an academic scholarship to study at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas as a Pre-Law Sport Management major.

He interned for the Texas Rangers Baseball Club and was offered a full time job after graduation. He worked in the Rangers front office for three seasons and was part of the 2023 World Series Champion Rangers, earning him a championship ring (pictured at right).

Kent has taken on a role at ISE Baseball, a prominent agency representing over 250 professional baseball players. Fluent in Japanese, he aspires to leverage his language skills to one day represent elite baseball talent from Japan in the United States as an agent.



Advanced Leaders Collective Apps Due July 28

Designed for mid-career professionals, the USJC Advanced Leadership Collective (ALC) is a cohort-based program launched at last year's Annual Conference. Its goal is to foster authentic connections and empower the exploration of members' professional and personal journeys, and the balance between the two.

"Participating in the USJC Advanced Leaders Collective has been a hugely impactful experience," said **Andrea Sugano**. "Engaging with experienced, community-oriented individuals has broadened my perspective and deepened my understanding of what is both 'common' and 'possible' in our mid-career stage. The thought-provoking discussions and immediate sense of connection and trust the program facilitated have not only reassured me that 'we can do this together' but also reaffirmed my commitment to fostering US-Japan relations."

About 20 ALCs will be selected this year to participate in workshop-based programming at the Annual Conference, which will emphasize the career journey's dynamic nature,

evolving alongside life and career goals. Through interactive workshops, participants will actively engage in discussions, exercises, and networking opportunities, ensuring a dynamic and personalized learning experience to enhance their career development.

"The inaugural ALC program allowed me to reflect on meaningful questions often overlooked amidst the busyness of life," said Midwest Vice Chairperson **Daniela One**. "The workshop equipped us with valuable tools to appreciate our identities as mid-career professionals, partners, parents, and soon, caregivers to our aging parents. We brought our whole selves to each conversation, spoke candidly, and cultivated a safe space where we could embrace and value our vulnerabilities. And as with every USJC initiative, we focused on creating a lasting kizuna within our cohort."

ALC is open to English-proficient USJC members in good standing who are 35 and older. For more info go to <https://www.usjapanCouncil.org/advanced-leaders-collective/>. The link to the ALC application is on that page.



photo by Andrea Sugano

Midwest USJC members **Andrea Sugano** and **Daniela One** were part of the inaugural ALC cohort, which also included **George Kobayashi**.

2024 JALDs Report Out to Community



photo by Kathryn Iyata-Arens

On May 13 at the Japan Information Center, **Anna Ninoyu** and **David Yoshimura**, the Midwest's two 2024 Japanese American Leadership Delegates, gave a report to the community about their recent trip to Japan. They presented highlights – both professional and personal – from their meetings with leaders in government, business and civil society. The audience, composed of folks from all parts of the Japanese community here in the Midwest, was very appreciative. They asked many questions of the delegates, then stayed for refreshments provided by the Japan Consulate.



A wide-ranging group came out to Torino Ramen in Wilmette to fete **Rob Ohno** (way down at the head of the table), Southeast region chairman and our third JALD this year. Talk was far-ranging in subject matter, but definitely included discussion of more Midwest/Southeast collaborative programs.

MEMBER NEWS



photos courtesy of Vickie Sakurada Schaepler, Mark Nakagawa, Kyle Nakamoto & Kirk Zeller



Twelve years of hard work and dedication culminated for **Vickie Sakurada Schaepler** this June at the grand opening of the Japanese Hall at the Legacy of the Plains Museum in Gering, Nebraska. Vickie, with Consul General Jun Yanagi and Governor Jim Pillen (upper left).

Among the almost 500 attendees were three of Vickie's 2019 JALD cohort (above, from right): **Kyle Nakamoto**, **Mark Nakagawa**, **Kelly Yamasaki**, and her husband Kent. Also present from the Midwest USJC were **Dayne Kono** and **Kirk Zeller**.

(left) Governor Pillen made Vickie a Nebraska Admiral, the state's highest civic honor, in recognition of her achievements in saving, honoring and making visible the history of Japanese in Nebraska.

Also this June, Governor Pillen appointed 13 inaugural members to the state's new Commission on Asian American Affairs. Two Midwest USJC members, **Vickie Sakurada Schaepler**, Japanese Hall and History Project coordinator for the Legacy of the Plains Museum, and **Ryo Suzuki**, senior director for strategic marketing and external relations at the University of Nebraska at Kearney's College of Business and Technology and the Nebraska Safety Center, were selected. Congratulations!

MEMBER NEWS

In 2008, **Jean Fujii** (shorter woman, top row), the Midwest's first JALD (2005), was part of a delegation to initiate a Social Services Exchange (SSE) with Osaka. Osaka sent the first SSE delegation; that continued, with Chicago and Osaka sending delegations on alternate years until the exchanges were halted by the pandemic. This year, Chicago hosted the International Social Services Conference, held June 20 to June 22, 2024. This exchange brought together social service professionals from Chicago and eight sister cities - Casablanca, Durban, Galway, Hamburg, Kyiv, Paris, Shanghai, and Osaka. The conference, "Innovations in Social Services: Fostering Global Connections through New Ideas and Strategies," was focused on deepening cultural awareness, sharing best practices, expanding professional networks, and pushing forward initiatives that uplift human potential and well-being.



Marion Friebus-Flaman has retired from public school administration and is now focusing her energy on strengthening the connections between the U.S. and Japan. She has just assumed the role of Executive Director of the Japan America Society of Chicago. Marion cites her experiences with USJC, including being a JALD in 2013 and Midwest regional chair (2015-2018) as being foundational in preparing her for this role. As both USJC and Japan America Society work to strengthen the relationship between the U.S. and Japan at the people-to-people level, Marion says we can look forward to increased collaboration with JAS-Chicago.



On May 21, Midwest USJC members and friends attended a concert of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Japanese conductor Kazuki Yamada (center), featuring Takemitsu's shimmering "How Slow the Wind", Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 1, and Franck's Symphony in D Minor.

The after concert meeting with conductor Yamada was arranged by Council Leader **Stephen Toyoda** (behind Yamada-san's left shoulder), president of the Japanese Culture Center and Japanese Arts Foundation, which presented a Japanese culture exhibition, centered around the beauty of the cherry blossom, prior to the performance.

Tomoko Kizawa and her nephew Avery made it out to beautiful Wrigley Field for the Cubs Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Day May 19. They are wearing the commemorative Seiya Suzuki and Shota Imanaga t-shirt.



MEMBER NEWS



Dr. Kathryn Iбата-Arens, after hosting an international conference on innovations in health and medicines, achieves a life-long dream of having a draft of Guinness fresh poured (the correct way) in Ireland. *Sláinte! (Kanpai!)*



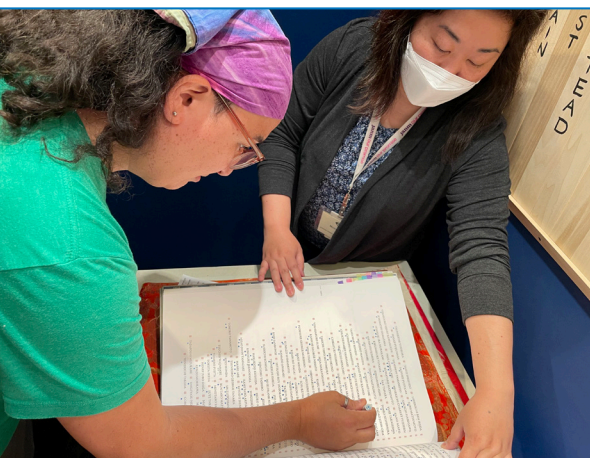
Aila Gomi's company, Advanced Drainage Systems, has opened an Engineering & Technology Center. "I am super excited to get out of our gloomy, windowless lab into a state of the art lab space I helped design to fit the needs of my team," she said. "This facility is the most advanced storm water engineering center, allowing us to develop new water management products, use more recycled plastics, and implement new manufacturing technologies."



Bob Kumaki received a Certified Sake Professional Certificate from the Sake Education Council in Japan. According to Bob, "the Certification required 20 hours of class time, lots of reading, a two hour exam and tastings. Lots and lots of tastings." Congratulations on becoming a Kikisake-shi Bob!



For the same reasons but on different dates, **Michael Tanimura** and his daughter Danielle (below left) and **Bob Kumaki** and his daughter Elizabeth (below right) made the trip to the Japanese American National Museum recently to stamp relatives' names in the *Ireichō*, the first and only comprehensive listing of the over 125,000 persons of Japanese ancestry who were incarcerated during World War II.



Meredith Maiomi, **Andrea Sugano** and **Michael Tanimura** have joined **Marion Friebus-Flaman**, **Bob Kumaki** and President **Stacy Uchida Brown** on the JASC Board of Directors.

COMMUNITY EVENTS



photos courtesy of Michael Takada, Tina Kato Rohde & Bob Kumaki

(top) Consul General Jun Yanagi gets the festivities started.

(above, center) **Bob Kumaki** led the Chicago Kendo Dojo demonstration at the Japan Festival.



Japan Festival returned to Millennium Park on Father's Day, June 16, after a 5-year hiatus due to the Pandemic. An estimated 16,000 festival-goers experienced Japanese culture, food and arts over 6 hours in Chase Promenade North & South. This annual program is co-sponsored by the Chicago Japanese American Council, a consortium of Japanese and Japanese American organizations (USJC Midwest is a member), and the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago. **Michael Takada** once again served as Festival co-chairman.



Stephen Toyoda's Japanese Culture Center, in partnership with the Lakeview Roscoe Village Chamber of Commerce and Japanese Arts Foundation, is hosting a free Ikebana Walking Exhibition July 20 and 21 in the Southport Corridor in Lakeview (the historical Japanese and Japanese-American epicenter of Chicago). Ikebana instructors and artists from two different schools of Ikebana (Ikenobo and Ohara Ryu) will install flower arrangements in over a dozen locations. Go to <https://japaneseculturecenter.com/ikebanawalk/> for additional info.

Japanese Community Picnic

Saturday, August 3, 2024 – 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.
LaBagh Woods Grove #1, Chicago (see map on back)

The entire **Chicago Japanese community** and **Friends** are invited to share in a day of games, food, sports, sunshine, good times and more food!

Bring a dish that's big enough for your family (plus a little more) to share with everyone at our community food table buffet.

We'll supply roast pig, hotdogs, hamburgers and other great eats. Grills, charcoal and limited beverages will be provided. **BYOB** allowed (beer, wine, etc.) – but no glass containers.



The non-stop fun begins at 11 a.m. and includes:

- games for kids and adults
- Karaoke (11 a.m. - 4 p.m.)
- volleyball, softball and tug-of-war

This event is FREE!
Please join us and share in the fun!



Photos from the very rainy 2023 picnic courtesy of Felix Lanier, Tohkon Judo Academy.

Organized by the member organizations of the Chicago Japanese American Council, Tohkon Judo Academy and community friends.

LaBagh Woods

Picnic Groves

LaBagh Woods Grove #1, Chicago

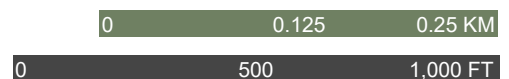
Entrance is on Cicero Ave. just north of Foster Ave. (circled in red below left). Go to [Google Maps](#) and type *LaBagh Woods* if you would like directions.

Grove has large parking lot and rest room building.



Picnic Grove

- Grove Number
- Capacity
- Parking Entrance
- Athletic Field
- Accessible Shelter*
- Picnic Shelter
- Paved Trail
- Unpaved Trail
- Comfort Station



REV 12/20

*Learn more about accessible picnic shelters at fpdcc.com/picnics