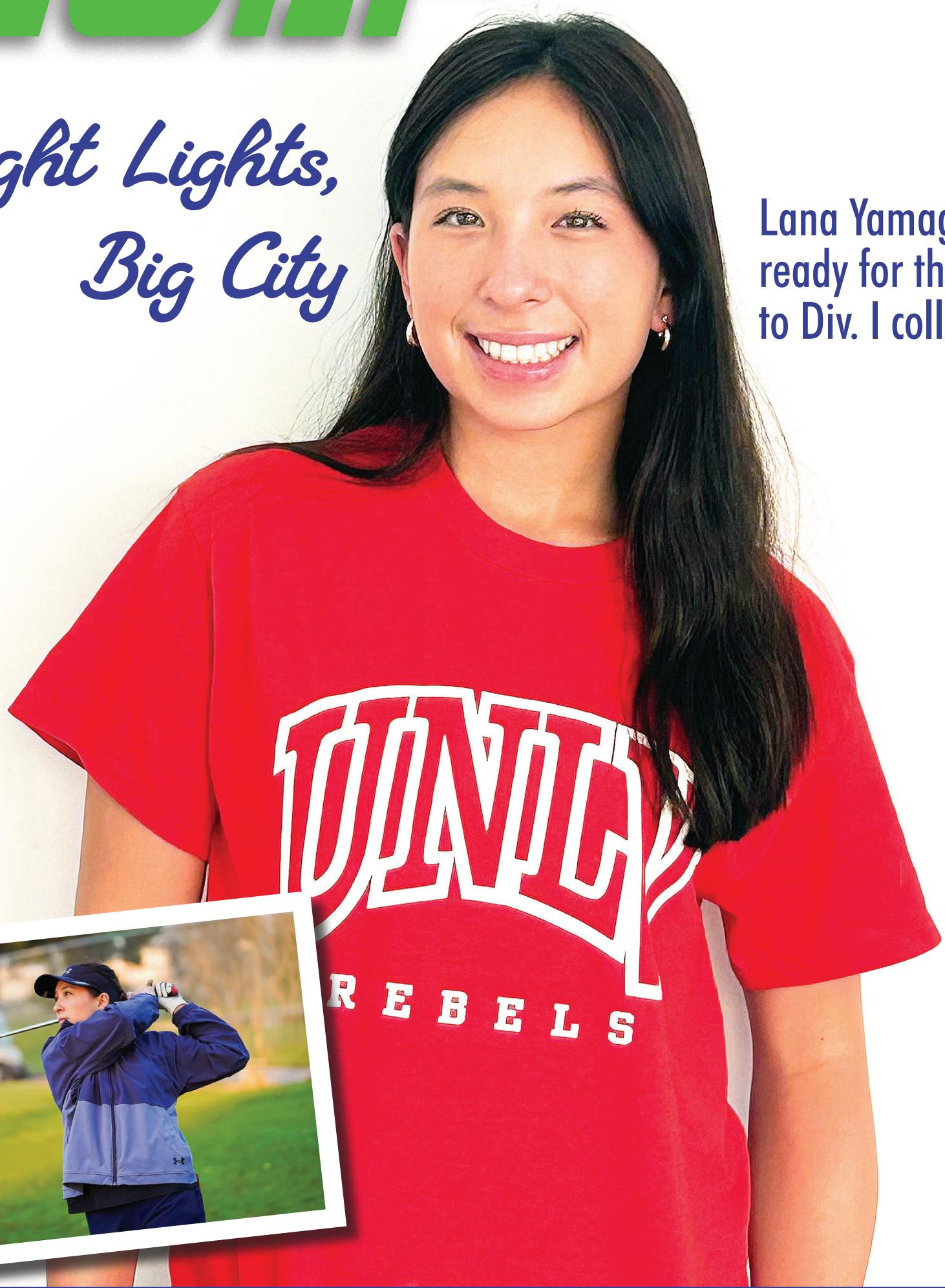


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On behalf of the Rafu Shimpo Foundation, we thank all the golfers, sponsors, donors, volunteers, and community members for joining us at this year's Charity Golf Classic. Your support plays a key role in the success of this event and helps us fulfill our mission to support and strengthen the Japanese American community.

Today is about more than just enjoying a day on the course; it's about coming together to make a difference. Thanks to your contributions, we are proud to support this year's grant recipients: the Gardena Buddhist Church, Southeast Japanese School and Community Center, Nikkei Games: Games for the Generations, Nisei Week Japanese Festival, Los Angeles Wildfire Relief, and the WWII Camp Wall preservation project. These organizations reflect the values of resilience, cultural preservation, and community service that are central to our heritage.

Your generosity helps us continue supporting these important causes. We truly appreciate your commitment to our mission.

Let's have a great day ahead filled with fun and camaraderie! Together, we are helping to build a brighter future.

With gratitude,

The Rafu Shimpo Foundation



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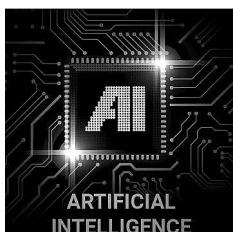
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Photos by MICHAEL KOMAI/Rafu Shimpo

Rising Stars Youth Leadership Program Alumni participate in the Buddy Program, which hosts members of Japanese-Speaking Parents Association of Children with Challenges.

Rising Stars 21 Hosts Miniature Golf Tournament

The Rising Stars Youth Leadership Program hosted its 21st Miniature Golf Tournament on March 1 to raise funds for its upcoming 2025-26 program.

Twenty-five high school students from the Greater Los Angeles area made up the field.

The organization received its initial startup funding from the Rafu Shimpo Foundation over 22 years ago to launch an innovative leadership program for high school students. The mission was to build tomorrow's leaders for Japanese American community nonprofit organizations, to provide information on cultural awareness and to introduce the students to Little Tokyo's JA organizations.

The tournament is planned and managed by the 25 high school participants of the current Rising Stars Leadership Program. They were responsible for raising the funds and providing the manpower to run the entire tournament.

The students went through workshops, including:

Team Dynamics — Understanding who we are and how to work in groups;
Speak to Inspire — How to do powerful and persuasive public speaking;

Cultural Awareness — How Japanese values influence us and how we lead;
Assertiveness — How to be assertive, not passive or aggressive, in various real-life situations;

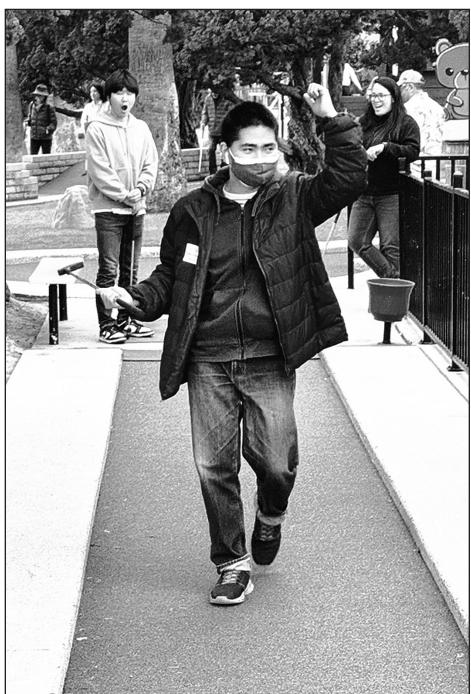
Networking — How to introduce ourselves to new people, talk with them, and develop a network;

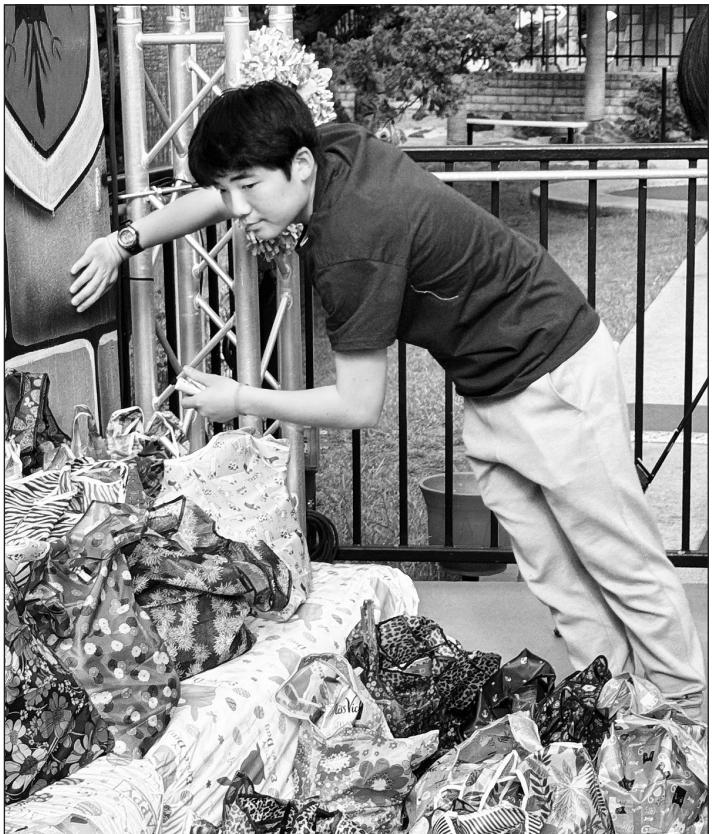
Japanese American Heritage — Understanding the history, culture, and community of Japanese Americans.

They also participate in such cultural activities as a Little Tokyo Scavenger Hunt and a tour of the Go For Broke National Education Center and the Japanese American National Museum. Participants then have the opportunity to apply their skills by completing a group project—the annual Rising Stars Miniature Golf Tournament at Camelot Golfland in Anaheim.

Put to the test, the Rising Stars 21 raised a net of \$29,183 and fielded 105 golfers. The funds will go to underwrite the 2025-56 program, which will start in the fall at Union Church in Little Tokyo.

For more information, visit: <https://www.risingstarsylp.org/>





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"If you watch a game, it's fun. If you play at it, it's recreation. If you work at it, it's golf"
—Bob Hope



Which country has the most golf courses per capita in the world?

Prior to 2016, when was the last time golf was played in the Olympics?

How old was Tiger Woods when he got his first hole in one?



Illustrations by Bridget Shinn



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"Golf is a good walk spoiled."
—Mark Twain

Answers to Trivia Questions

Scotland has the most golf courses.

In 1904, golf was played in the Olympics

Tiger was 6 when he got his first hole in one.



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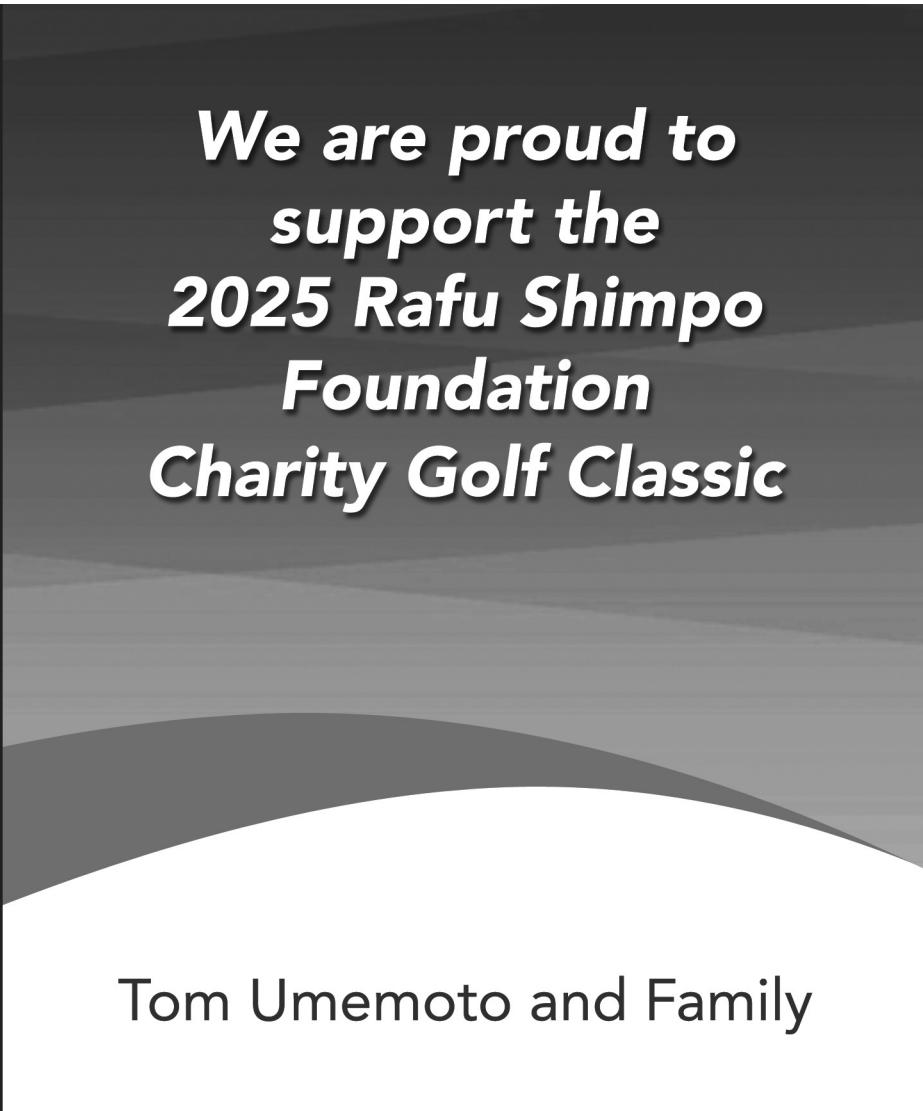
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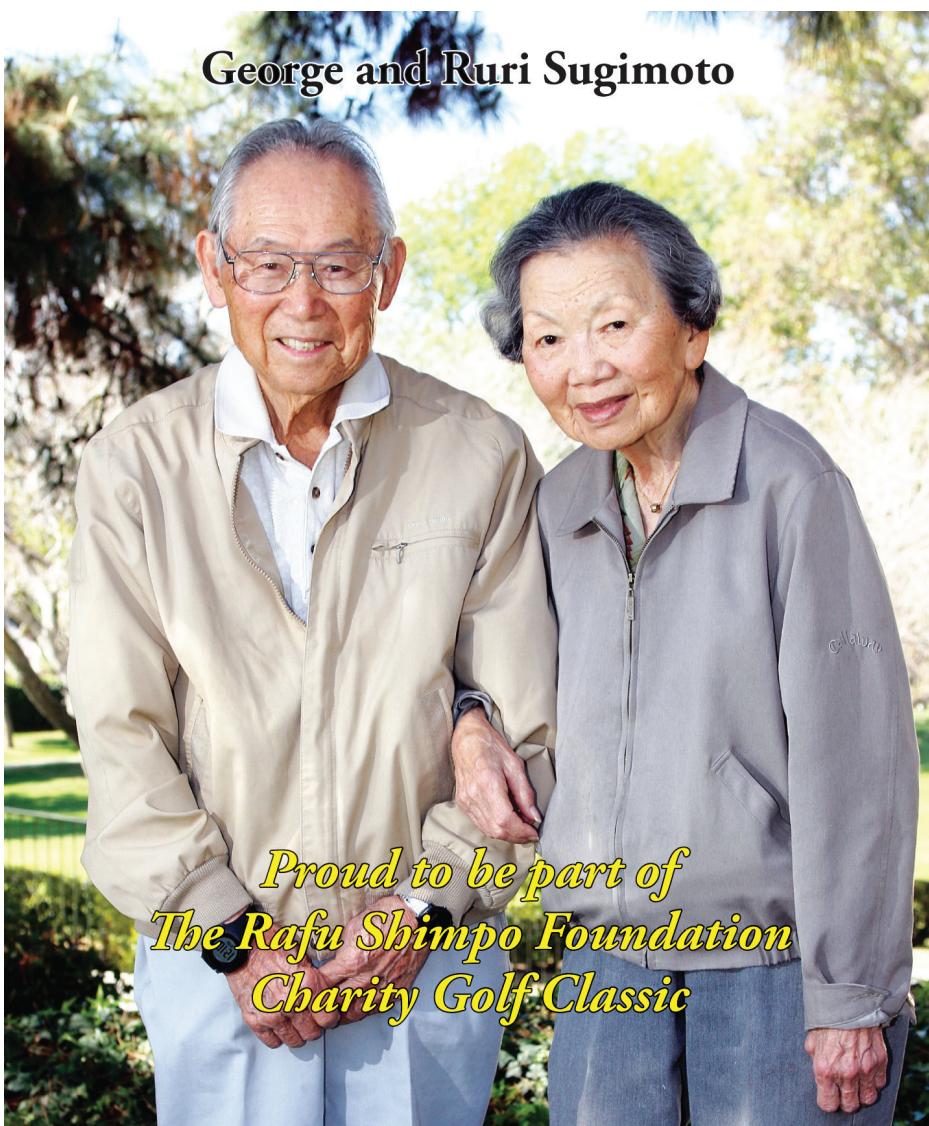


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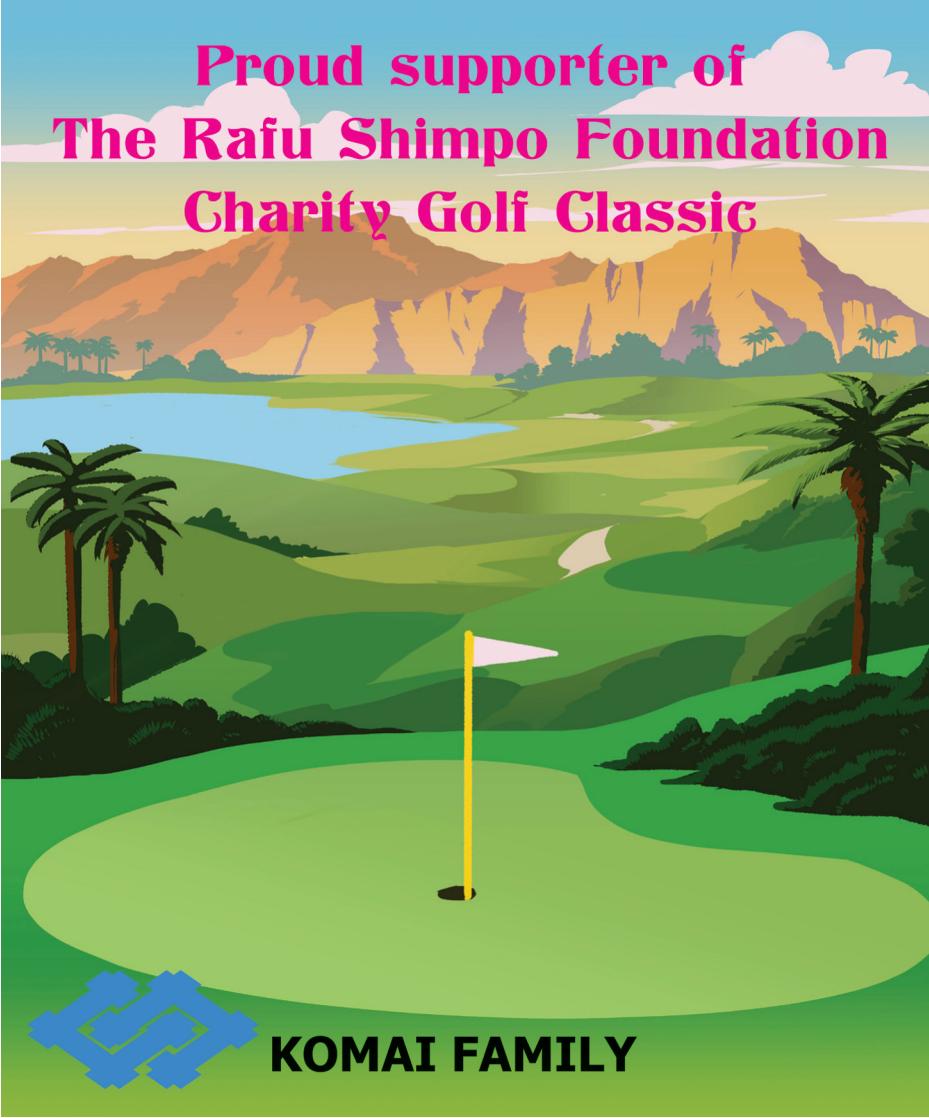
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A Century of Service and Resilience

Gardena Buddhist Church prepares to mark 100 years as a faithful steward of the community.

By MICHELLE TIO

In honor of Gardena Buddhist Church's 100th anniversary next year, the *Rafu Shimpo* Foundation is proud to announce that GBC is a recipient of grant funding from the 2025 Charity Golf Classic.

Perhaps best known for its annual Obon Festival, Gardena Buddhist Church also has a rich history of resilience and service to the greater Japanese American community.

In January 2025, the world watched as massive fires enveloped Los Angeles. More than 28 individuals died, hundreds of thousands were evacuated, and thousands lost their homes. In response to these tragedies, Gardena Buddhist Church head minister Rev. John Iwohara told his congregation:

"Needless to say, it was a scary time. Throughout it all, however, we were told of the courage and bravery of many, and the thoughtfulness and kindness of many more. Whereas what occurred was tragic, and this should never be underestimated, this was also a time when the kindness and beauty of the Sangha also revealed itself. Just like the pain and loss endured due to the fire should not be downplayed, the kindness and strength of our Sangha should also not be taken for granted."

Two church members, Terri Mitani and her husband Dave Mitani, exemplify the kindness and strength of the Gardena Buddhist Church Sangha. While the church was not directly affected by the Los Angeles fires, their sister church — Pasadena Buddhist Temple — barely escaped destruction. Many temple members had to evacuate their homes, and sadly, some lost their homes entirely.

In late 1925, a group of Japanese residents from Gardena Valley met to discuss their



Last Dec. 31, GBC held its annual temple bell-ringing, a New Year's Eve tradition in Japan. The bell is struck 108 times to remove earthly desires in the new year.

12



Above, dedication and opening of the new social hall in 1978.

Language School reopened.

After the closure of the incarceration camps, evacuees flocked to Gardena Buddhist Church, which became a hub of social activity yet again. Church clubs restarted, and church members became involved with the broader community, helping at the annual festivals, visiting the Keiro Nursing Home, participating in sports, and strengthening ties with fellow Buddhists in the area. By the 1960s, church membership is believed to have reached more than a thousand, and a fourth church was built.

In 1968, Gardena's sister city in Japan, Ichikawa, donated a beautiful temple bell that is still used today. Every Dec. 31 since its donation, the temple bell has been rung 108 times in a New Year's Eve Buddhist tradition that symbolizes the cleansing of suffering.

From 1980 to 1982, Gardena Buddhist Church was beset by three arsonist fires later learned to be motivated by anti-Buddhist sentiment. Yet the strength of the Sangha revealed itself yet again.

The first arson fire completely destroyed the fourth church building, and church members immediately began to plan and fundraise to build a replacement church. The second

desire to open a Sunday school in Gardena and raise their children in the principles of Buddhism. 270 Japanese and Japanese Americans were involved in the grassroots effort to build their own church, leading to the establishment of Gardena Buddhist Church in 1926.

The church members also wanted a Japanese language school for their children. In 1928, just two years after the opening of Gardena Buddhist Church, the Japanese Language School was established. In the 1930s, membership continued to grow, and the church held its first Obon Festival.

Unfortunately, these auspicious times did not last. When World War II broke out, the Japanese Language School ceased its operations. During this time of increased hostility against Japanese and Japanese Americans, Buddhists — and Buddhist priests, especially — were particularly targeted. Buddhist priests, along with Japanese language schoolteachers, were classified by the FBI as "known dangerous Group A aliens."

In March 1942, the FBI arrested Gardena Buddhist Church's Japanese Language School teachers. Soon after, head minister Rev. Shingetsu Akahoshi was also arrested. His son, Masato Akahoshi, later recalled:

"The most unforgettable time came when my father was arrested by the FBI. It was the last time we saw my father as he was arrested and taken to Los Angeles County jail, and later to other detention centers, eventually settling in Santa Fe, New Mexico. We did not see him [again] until we were on the way to Japan, crossing the Pacific Ocean on a ship."

Like the Japanese Language School, Gardena Buddhist Church was also forced to close temporarily during World War II. During this time, GBC and the school served as property storage for those incarcerated.

Due to anti-Japanese sentiment, Gardena Buddhist Church faced imminent closure. The War Relocation Authority used the excuse of the church's "non-payment of property taxes" in its plan to convert the church into

In July 2023, George Takei answers questions from a Wisteria Chugakko student about his life as a young boy living in a World War II concentration camp.

a home for the Japanese elderly. Thankfully, a prominent church member paid the back taxes, and the church reopened in September 1947 as a combination church-hostel.

Despite the setbacks of World War II, Gardena Buddhist Church was able to not only survive but thrive. In 1948, it regained church-only status. In 1949, the Japanese

and third arson fires were quickly put out, and the dedication ceremony of the fifth Gardena Buddhist Church was held in August 1982.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic reached the U.S. In-person social gatherings were banned and stay-at-home orders were enacted. Times were hard, yet Gardena Buddhist Church adapted. The GBC's formerly printed and hand-collated monthly newsletter went online. Church members became Zoom experts overnight!

Gardena Buddhist Church swiftly switched its services and meetings from in-person formats to online to ensure that its members could remain connected emotionally. While the GBC could no longer hold its annual in-person Obon Festivals during this time, it held a virtual Obon in 2021.

In 2022, with COVID-19 cases dwindling, Gardena Buddhist Church decided to have its first in-person Obon since the start of the pandemic. GBC member Sharyl Yamada-Oda remembers this historic Obon, stating:

"Since the 2022 Obon was going to be so different from our other Obons, we were unsure as to how many people would attend. But people came. In fact, our Obon dance circle was just as full as a pre-pandemic Obon with well over 1,000 dancers!"

"After being separated for two years, our 2022 'Welcome Back' Obon was something that was needed, something that united us together again, and gave us back a sense of community and a sense of belonging. Obon 2022, the first post-pandemic Obon, will always be remembered because it reconnected us to each other and to the Church."

A Tradition of Service and Community
Since its inception, Gardena Buddhist

Church has focused on serving the Japanese American community. It has been a place of gathering in times of both joy and sorrow. Its Japanese Language School ensures that generations of Japanese Americans have access to their heritage language.

It keeps tradition alive, with weekly tea ceremony sessions, ikebana (flower arranging) classes, an ondo (dance) exercise class, a taiko drumming group, and an annual Seijinshiki (coming of age) ceremony.

The GBC's Obon Festival both honors Buddhist tradition and serves as a gathering space for the greater Japanese American community. This is the biggest event the



Terri Mitani and her husband helped coordinate the Gardena Buddhist Church's donation drive to assist members of the Pasadena Buddhist Temple following the devastating Eaton Fire in January.

GBC puts on, with an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 people gathering each day. For Buddhists, the Obon holiday serves as a tribute to loved ones who have passed and a special time for gathering.

Wisteria Chugakko, Gardena Buddhist Church's summer program for middle school students, serves as a way for youth to learn more about their history, heritage, and culture. In 2023, actor George Takei of "Star Trek" fame shared his personal history with the students of Wisteria Chugakko, describing his memories as a 5-year-old incarcerated Japanese American, the impact incarceration had on him, and his involvement in the political fight for restitution and redress.

Members of Gardena Buddhist Church volunteer with the Gardena Valley Japanese Cultural Institute, host food drives and holiday toy donations, and participate annually in the Little Tokyo Service's Ripple Effect: Walk for Suicide Prevention. In 2023, the GBC raised \$20,000 for the Lāhainā Jodo Mission, a historic Buddhist temple that was devastated by the 2023 Hawaii fires.

The Centennial

When asked about the significance of the Gardena Buddhist Church's upcoming 100th anniversary, Alan Kita replied, "I am honored to serve as the Centennial Committee chair. My family has been a part of the temple community since 1928. It is a wonderful tradition to be a part of the South Bay Japanese American community, and every year diverse people from all over Southern California come together for our Obon Festival. It is amazing."

For more information, call (310) 327-9400 or visit www.gardenabuddhistchurch.org.



Photo courtesy Isaac Yamagata

After a stellar high school career that saw her win tournaments across the country, Lana Yamagata will take her game to the Div. I program at UNLV.

Viva LANA Vegas!

South Pasadena's Lana Yamagata swings into the elite NCAA Div. I program at UNLV this fall.

By MIKEY HIRANO CULROSS

It's amazing where the game can take you. Just ask Lana Yamagata.

"My younger self definitely would not have thought I would be here, where I am now, or gone the places I've been able to see," she said. "When I started, it was more about just wanting to win at the game, but then it just got deeper than that throughout the years."

All of 17 years old, Yamagata's younger self isn't far removed. She was nine or 10 when a chance viewing of a golf tournament on TV led

her to quip to her dad, "That looks like fun."

That must have been music to the ears of her father, Isaac, who was well-established as a golf coach. Soon thereafter, he made coaching his full-time gig, with the added motivation of having his daughter as a pupil.

The timing worked out nicely a few years later, as beloved South Pasadena High School coach Richard Goto was retiring and the school needed a new skipper.

"I thought if Lana's going to play high school golf for four years, I wanted to be sure she has fun and has the opportunity to improve her game," Isaac said in 2022.

In her first year of prep play, Lana announced her arrival on the links with a stellar season that saw her come to within just one stroke of the CIF State Championships.

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As a sophomore, Lana continued as one of the top players in high school competition as well as on the Southern California PGA Junior Tour. Following eight wins in 2022, she captured the championship at the 2023 SCPGA Two-Day Fall Series at Rancho California, the 2023 Walnut High School Invitational and won co-champion honors at the 2023 Southern California Junior Girls & Collegiate Partners Championship.

There was no letting up last year, with top finishes at tournaments that included the 2024 FCG Washington Championship World Series at Chambers Bay and the 2024 AJGA Sacramento Junior Championship Qualifier at Haggin Oaks.

She had always been very athletic as a kid, but Lana said the turning point for her was balancing the mental part of the game.

"That's really what flipped the switch for me," she explained. "The big thing was learning how to control my emotions off and on the golf course. That was really important, and really catapulted my transformation from being a kind of player who would get upset after one [bad] hole – and then the rest of the tournament is completely shot."

"Now, I might have a bad hole, and then the next tee shot, I'm like, 'Okay, it is what it is, you know, I've got to focus up.' I think my mentality is now that it's not over until it's over. Keep working. And I think just having a more positive mindset from when I first started has really helped me today, and that's the kind of player that I am now versus when I started."

Lana's success has taken her to courses in more cities than she ever expected.

"I've been to more states than I can even imagine myself to be in. I went to Minnesota. I never thought I'd go to Minnesota," she said, marveling at the size of the sprawling Mall of America.

"That's impressive. Yeah, it was humongous."

Still, even with all the traveling she's done, Lana still prefers courses close to home.

"My favorite place is probably Monterey, because their golf courses. It's absolutely beautiful. I like Pebble Beach, and all the courses at Pacific Grove, they're very pristine and well kept. And I think the courses are challenging enough that it keeps me on my toes."

Predictably, her skills, mental maturity and competitive fire caught the eyes of college coaches around the nation. This coming fall, she will don the scarlet and grey of the Rebels at the University of Nevada Las Vegas, joining one of the top programs in the NCAA Division I.

"Lana is a perfect fit for our program. Her skills, work ethic and positive attitude will be a valuable asset to our team," said UNLV head coach Amy Bush-Herzer.

Yamagata will suit up for a squad that will trend much younger next season, after the graduation this spring of four seniors, including Hina Matsui, Mayumi Umezu and Toa Yokoyama.

UNLV is currently ranked at No. 33 in the nation.

Yamagata plans to major in hospitality



MIKEY HIRANO CULROSS / Rafu Shimpo
Yamagata gets in some putting practice at Arroyo Seco in 2022.

and hotel management, in the program considered to be the world's most comprehensive in that field. She also said living in Las Vegas was an easy choice because of the robust golf culture.

"Half the town plays golf, and there are lots and lots of people who support the school and support playing golf. So it's gonna be a really good time," she explained. "I was in Vegas during the winter, and it's a really great opportunity to get to play."

Being a native of California, Yamagata

said she has felt the differences in golf culture around the country. Her father grew up in Idaho, in a town where there weren't many Asian faces, and she has a deep appreciation for the lessons from his family.

Moreover, it wasn't too long ago that golf was overwhelmingly dominated by a male point of view. Some might say that's still the case, but the women's game has certainly earned increased levels of respect over the last generation.

"I think it's very empowering for girls like me to be able to compete," Yamagata said. "It's kind of like an 'in your face,' like we can do it too."

"And it kind of makes it so much more fun. Whenever I'm paired with random people in a practice ground or somewhere, and they see me hit the ball, and they'll say, 'Oh my God, did you just see that?' That makes you feel good, like, they might have doubted you, and now they're amazed by you. It's very empowering."

For the next couple of months, Yamagata will focus on completing her studies at South Pasadena – and stave off a bit of senioritis – and look toward a new world that awaits.

"To be honest, I kind of am excited to see what it is like to be on my own for the first time. Of course I'm going to feel like I miss my home and my family, but I've never actually been on my own and had to be self-sufficient. So I think I'm excited to kind of see how I am in that type of environment, especially having to juggle school

Please see "Yamagata," Page 17

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LPGA Rookie Rio Takeda Rolls to 6-Shot win at Blue Bay Tournament

KYODO NEWS

Japanese golfer Rio Takeda picked up her first win of her U.S. LPGA rookie season March 9, cruising to a six-shot victory at the Blue Bay LPGA tournament in China.

Takeda, who earned the right to play on the U.S. tour when she won the Japan Classic last November, an event co-sanctioned by both tours, had a 17-under 271 total at the Jian Lake Blue Bay Golf Course on Hainan Island.



Kyodo News

Rio Takeda with the Blue Bay trophy.

After taking a two-stroke lead into the final round, the long-hitting 21-year-old pulled away with three birdies in her first four holes and added five more on the back nine en route to a bogey-free 64, the best score of the day.

"On the final day I started at the top and I had a desire to win this tournament. I could win this tournament finally, so I feel really great now," she said.

Takeda had a dominant 2024 season in Japan, winning eight times, including two majors, and finishing as the tour's points leader.

"I'm really happy to win this tournament because the course layout, it's really, really different...compared to Japanese courses," she said. "I could win this tournament because my strongest point is driving distance, so it worked well."

Australia's Minjee Lee (67) finished alone in second, followed by Japan's Ayaka Furue (68) in third at 10-under.

Three other Japanese claimed top-10 finishes, with Mao Saigo tying for fifth at 6-under and Miyu Yamashita and Nasa Hataoka sharing eighth a shot further back.

Li Shuying's tie for fifth was the highest finish for host China.



MIKEY HIRANO CULROSS / Rafu Shimpo

Lana Yamagata and her father, Isaac, relaxing after a South Pasadena High School team practice at Alhambra Golf Course in 2022.

Yamagata

Continued from Page 15

and golf and traveling."

Yamagata said she's already had some valuable bonding with her future UNLV coaches and teammates, even attending a Rebels football game this past season.

She's as busy as ever with tournaments, of course. Last weekend, she earned a spot

in the San Francisco City Tournament, making the trip to NorCal with – as usual – her dad. After all the work and countless hours he put into her golf development, Lana said he might be even more excited than she is about going to UNLV.

"He works really hard to make my experience really good. I don't think I would have been anywhere without him. Honestly, I owe him a lot."

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Illustration by Brian Shin

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Major Milestone in Norwalk

For a century, the SEJSCC has been the center of togetherness for generations.

By J.K. YAMAMOTO

July 26, 2025, marks a historic milestone as the Southeast Japanese School and Community Center (SEJSCC) celebrates its 100th anniversary.

From its humble beginnings on Nawa Ranch in 1925, the center has evolved into a cornerstone of the community, fostering a legacy of cultural enrichment, education, and togetherness across generations.

Since its establishment, the SEJSCC has offered a diverse range of impactful programs. The Japanese language school has educated generations of students, preserved linguistic heritage, and instilled cultural pride. Programs such as ikebana, taiko and koto have created opportunities for artistic expression and deep cultural connection. Additionally, activities like ballroom dancing, hula, judo, kendo and basketball have promoted physical fitness, discipline, and camaraderie among participants.

"The Southeast Japanese School and



MARK KURODA

Smiles and sunny weather graced SEJSCC's 61st annual Cultural Festival and Ondo in July 2024. Top: the community gathered for a photo at their new center in 1930.

Community Center has made an indelible impact by promoting Japanese culture and fostering community bonds," said Dean Wada, SEJSCC board president.

Expanding the School

Kimie Matsumoto has been involved in SEJSCC since the late 1970s, when her children started going to the Japanese School. "As they got older, my children got involved with basketball program ... we used to have baseball, too ... My children grew up utilizing the Community Center," she said.

As a member of the school's PTA for over 20 years, Matsumoto had to deal with the need for more space. "Enrollment at the Japanese School became quite big. We didn't have enough room at the Community Center ... When we rebuilt, we added only enough room to put two rooms in ... One of the biggest rooms was split into two. At the time it was good enough but as enrollment got bigger, there was no way to teach that many children."

Matsumoto and others spearheaded a project to add more classrooms. "We had to get everybody else on board. You can only raise so much money just from Japanese School ... Judo, kendo, the taiko group ... we had to invite the others to give us their input."

The old building was in bad shape and was a target of vandalism. After four years of raising money and consulting architects, the new building was finished in 1994, featuring 10 additional rooms plus a multipurpose room.

The Board of Directors approved the project, but when the building was completed they asked the members of the Building Committee to become the new board. Matsumoto has been a board member ever since.

Although the school had over 100 students when the building project started, it went down by the time the new building opened. At the time, the school was part of the Kyodo System, also known as the Japanese Language School Unified System. Matsumoto, who was teaching high school Japanese, learned that the parents weren't happy with Kyodo. "So we decided we have to go independent. They asked me to be the director ... I started doing that in 1996 when we became independent from the Kyodo System."

Japanese was becoming a popular subject in high schools in the area, but the Norwalk school attracted people whose schools didn't offer Japanese. "From the 90th anniversary to the 100th, we had well over 100 students enrolled every year except for the pandemic," Matsumoto recalled. "One year we were online. During that time enrollment went down ... When we went back the following year to in-person teaching, everybody came back. It hasn't changed since then."

More students enrolled during the past year because Orange County Buddhist Church in Anaheim closed its Japanese school. Matsumoto found out that many people were aware of the Community Center in Norwalk but had never heard of the Japanese School until now.

Regarding anniversary events, Matsumoto noted, "The 90th was the first time we did any kind of celebration for the Community Center. Prior to that it was just the Japanese School ... The first time I was involved (in the celebration) was the 60th anniversary."

Matsumoto and board member Toshi Teramoto were instrumental in having



Breaking a sake cask to celebrate the opening of the new annex building in 1994.

another anniversary celebration for the school's 75th anniversary in 2000, involving past parents and students. They decided to make the 90th anniversary a celebration for the entire SEJSCC, and all affiliated groups were asked to be part of it. "It was good that we did a Community Center-wide celebration because that's what it's all about. It should be with everybody involved."

Since then, the board members have retired in order to let younger people take over, and "they're doing a terrific job," Matsumoto said.

She added, "The Japanese School is what started the Community Center. It's got to be protected and continue to thrive, beyond me and my children. My grandchildren have been going to the Japanese School, and it's gratifying that it is still there."

Remembering the Issei and Nisei

Linda Kusuda has been involved with SEJSCC since 1983, when she was recruited for the girls' basketball team. At the time, "basketball was the only thing in the world" for her, but eventually she volunteered to help organize the basketball group's booths for the annual festival. That proved to be too much work for one person, so two vice presidents were elected, one to do the games and one to do the food.

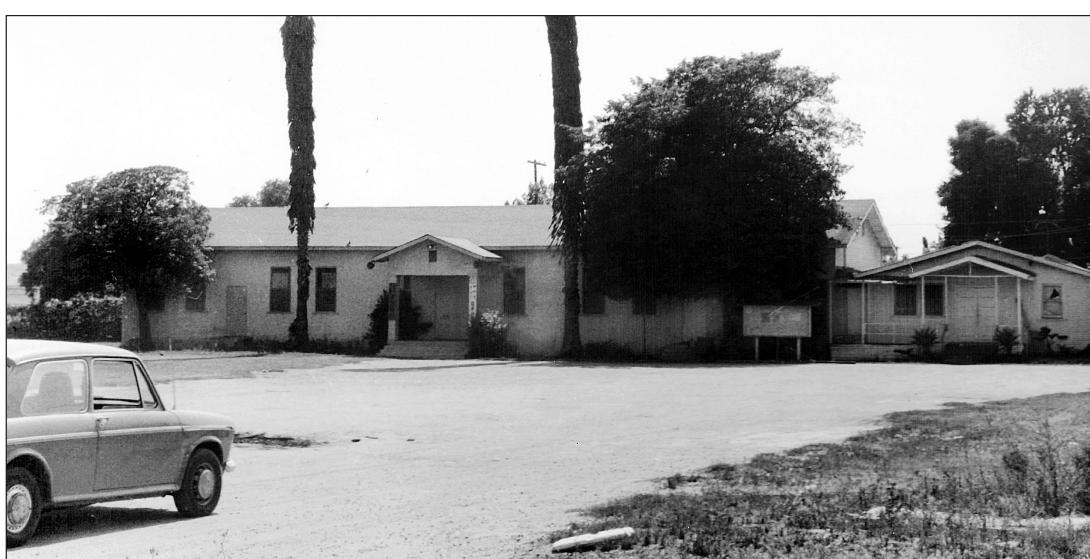
Kusuda did not want to be president of the board, but one day she missed a meeting because she went to Kaiser to see her husband, who had suffered a heart attack. "I found out the next day they elected me president because I wasn't there."

During her one-year term in the early '90s, one of the changes she implemented was fundraising for basketball through a pancake breakfast. Although the board had no experience putting on such an event, a past president who was a chef showed them how to cook mass quantities of eggs, sausages and pancakes. A friend of the center sold jewelry at the event, and this in turn led to the annual craft fair. Around this time SEJSCC also launched its scholarship program, which

Please see "SEJSCC," Page 22



Above: Hikari Taiko entertains at last year's Cultural Festival and Ondo. *Photo by Mark Kuroda*



Left: By 1968, the center's growth led to plans for expansion of the school by adding a building that would house a gymnasium, a large kitchen, new bathrooms, and more classrooms. Soliciting for funds began in 1970.

Below: the Center marked its 60th anniversary in March 1985.

Photos courtesy SEJSCC, except where noted



Fundraisers such as Las Vegas Night (above in 1991), golf tournaments, reverse draws, dinners, fashion shows and craft boutiques fully paid off the loan for the annex by 1999.



Continued from Page 21

made people more likely to buy pancake tickets for the sake of the kids.

"My son joined judo, so I got involved with judo too, helped with judo functions like washing rice for mochi, helped judo sell cha siu bao, chirashi sushi," Kusuda said. Money raised from lunch sales was used to start a judo scholarship.

She stressed the importance of having enough volunteers to raise funds for and implement such projects as repairs, modernizing the bathrooms, getting surveillance cameras, and installing TVs to show videos.

As one of the historians of SEJSCC, Kusuda noted the contributions of Juichi Nawa. "The tenacity of just one man and a few farmers to continue teaching Japanese culture and language to their children started a church in Norwalk, continued to have school buildings built on his property and have it continue there, from 1925." In 1930, about two acres next to the Nawa farm were bought by Kinsu Nakatani, a U.S. citizen, who asked his father Takuichi, a shrine-builder in Japan, to design the new school. The elder Nakatani also helped build the famous Moon Bridge in San Francisco's Japanese Tea Garden.

Another connection to the Bay Area is that noted San Francisco sculptor Ruth Asawa was among the Norwalk and Downey farming families that attended the Japanese School before the war.



Courtesy Southeast Japanese School and Community Center

A scene from the 1993 Carnival. Many students enrolling at the school in the 1990s were Sansei, Yonsei, or non-Japanese, and did not speak Japanese at home. School enrollment dropped to 48 students, but after withdrawing from the Kyodo System in 1996, registrations increased. By 2015, more than 100 students were attending.

After the wartime incarceration, the Nawa — who owned their property because they had purchased it before the Alien Land Law of 1913 — provided a place to stay for returning Japanese Americans who did not yet have housing. Thereafter, SEJSCC "thrived as a community center where people could come watch movies ... Other clubs started opening up, ikebana, fishing, poker, too," Kusuda said. "And other Japanese activities like kimekomi, chigiri-e,

minyo, karaoke." Plus judo, kendo, and of course, basketball.

When funds needed to be raised for a new community center, the elders did whatever they had to do, including "looking to the White Pages for any Japanese names" and asking for money, Kusuda said. "Some people who recently passed were very influential in raising money."

Referring to the sports programs, she added, "With the passage of time, the sen-

seis who taught these activities got older and passed away."

Reflecting on this history, Kusuda is always amazed at what "a few people through their tenacity and endurance" were able to accomplish. "You have to have something bigger than yourself to be involved with ... It's the hardest thing to get people newly involved to realize the work that Issei and Nisei had to do for something they believed in."

For the Japanese American community of Southern California, SEJSCC is "really a gem," she said.

Centennial Celebrations

The SEJSCC kicked off centennial celebrations with the Reverse Draw on March 8, which will be followed by a dinner/dance on May 24. The grand finale will be a celebration dinner party on July 26.

To commemorate this milestone, the SEJSCC will also release an anniversary book chronicling the center's rich history from its early beginnings to the present day. This publication will highlight the evolution of the school, the stories behind its sports and cultural programs, and photographs from the anniversary celebration.

The SEJSCC invites everyone to join this historic events honoring 100 years of community, culture and heritage. Here's to another century of creating memories and enriching lives together.

For more information about the celebrations or the anniversary book, contact fundraiser@sejssc.org.

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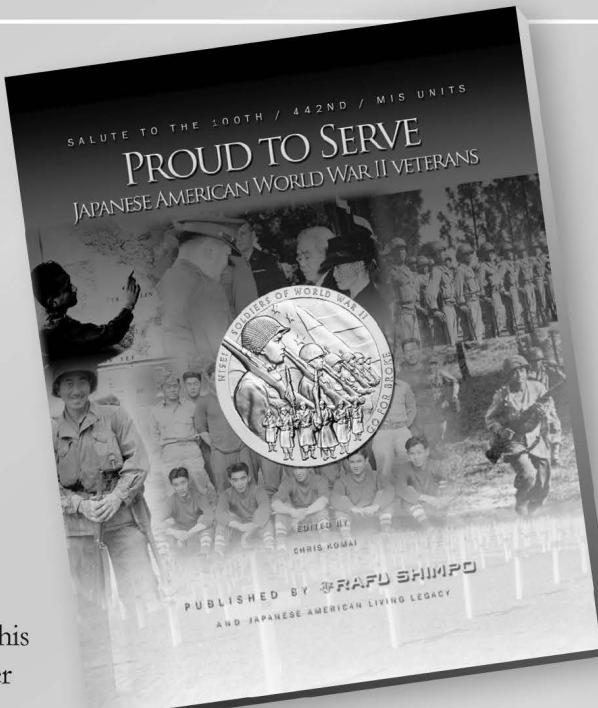
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