

# Nanka Yamaguchi Kenjinkai Newsletter



Volume I, Issue 2

2nd Quarter 2012

## Nanka Yamaguchi Kenjinkai Picnic—June 24, 2012

The annual Nanka Yamaguchi Kenjinkai picnic was held at Elysian Park's Leo Politi Picnic Ground on June 24. It is our biggest event each year for family and friends to gather and enjoy the beautiful day.

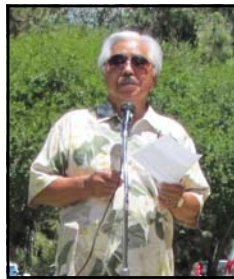
The picnic was kicked off by members of **Kokoro Taiko**, a Long Beach Taiko group founded by Kenjinkai member, **Victor Fukuhara**.



*Richard Fukuhara*

Nanka Yamaguchi Kenjinkai President, **Richard Fukuhara**, opened the day by greeting and welcoming everyone to the 107th picnic. He then turned the microphone over to Master of Ceremonies, **Kiyoshi Igawa**, who introduced special guests:

**Mr. Kazuhiko Nakanishi**, Nanka Kenjinkai Kyogikai Representative, and his wife; **Mr. Shigeo Watanabe** from Tottori Kenjinkai, **Mr. Toshiki Watanabe** from Fukuoka Kenjinkai, and **Junko Yoshida** from The Rafu Shippo. Nanka Yamaguchi Kenjinkai member, **Terry Hara**, Deputy Police Chief of the LAPD, addressed the crowd and asked for their support for his bid for the 9th District of the Los Angeles City Council.



*Kiyoshi Igawa*

**Arlene Nakamura**, Scholarship Chairperson, introduced this year's recipients: **Kirsten Lew**, **Annie Mitoma**, and **Kaitlin Shimizu** (see pg. 2).

Lunch was announced at 12:00 and those who had ordered bento lunches enjoyed delicious food from **Nijiya Market**. Others were treated to their family's potluck dishes; and all were invited to enjoy finger-licking hot dogs and sno-cones in sweet flavors and yummy *kintoki*.

**William Ford** entertained everyone with a classical Japanese dance. William will represent the Nanka Yamaguchi Kenjinkai at the Annual Kenjinkai Kyogikai "Talent Show" in October.

After lunch, everyone was called to the plaza area for the mochi toss. Bagged pink and white mochi were thrown out to the crowd to catch and it was every man, woman and child for himself!



Then it was time for everyone to don Yamaguchi happi coats and tackle the classical, "Tanko Bushi" and "Iwakuni Ondo" led by dance captains, **Yoshiko Kishimoto**, **Yasuko Katayama**, **Kaz Igawa**, and **Lea Hayashi**. **Arlene Nakamura** then taught everyone a line dance called, "Skinny Genes". It was loads of fun and everyone did very well!



*William Ford*

All picnic attendees were invited to the plaza for the official 2012 group photo that was taken by **Richard Fukuhara**.

Karaoke and the games were next on the agenda. Our ever dedicated member, talented vocalist and Karaoke master of ceremonies,

**Patrick Seki**, invited singers to share their talents and entertain us with Japanese and English songs. Special performances were given by our younger members: **Sean Collins**, who sang "Jingle Bell Rock"; **Kenny Okamoto** (with assist from his mom, **Dana**), dedicated "Over the Rainbow" to his late oji-chan, **Kosuke Okamoto**; and **Tricia Fukuhara**, sang "Call Me Maybe", accompanying herself on ukelele.

Infants to over-70s put on their game faces to vie for the many prizes that were gathered over the year by **Cindy Fukuhara**; and her uncle, **Larry Fukuhara**, emceed the games with his entertaining wit. The balloon games and the "atsui daikon" (see pictures on pg. 4) were big hits!



(Continued on page 4)

## 2012 Scholarship Recipients



Each year scholarships are awarded to graduating seniors who are descendants of Yamaguchi, Japan. Applications were received and reviewed by a committee. This year's awards were announced at our annual picnic. Congratulations go to the following recipients:

### Kirsten Haruyo Lew:

Kirsten graduated from Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies (LACES) with a 4.454 GPA. She will be attending Duke University in the fall. When asked how our kenjinkai could become more pertinent to her generation, Kirsten wrote: "I think the best way to get (my generation) involved and even bring friends in is to plan monthly events. These events could range from simple luncheons to group sporting events or even camping trips. These events would allow my generation of Yamaguchi Kenjinkai to socialize with each other and the older generations who can get us more acquainted with its history and role in our lives, all while having fun." Besides her stellar academic achievements, Kirsten was on LACES Varsity Swim Team and a starter for LACES Varsity Basketball Team. Her parents are **Eric Lew** and **Mary Murakawa**. Her maternal grandparents are **Shizuko** and the late **Kiyoshi Murakawa**, longtime kenjinkai members and Nikkei Parents of the Year in 1999.



### Ann Akiko Mitoma:

Kudos to Annie for flying in from Colorado to be at our picnic!! Annie graduated from Cherry Creek High School with a 4.1 GPA. She will be attending Pepperdine University in the fall. Of the Yamaguchi Kenjinkai, Annie wrote: "Togetherness, community, and connection embody the spirit of the Yamaguchi Kenjinkai... (In the past) Yamaguchi Kenjinkai was a way to help people feel comforted in a foreign world; but now, the Kenjinkai serves as teachers of the Japanese culture and values to the younger generations. In a progressing world, it is important for younger generations to be reminded of the key values of honor, respect, and family from the Kenjinkai." An accomplished gymnast, Annie was honored to be named Colorado State All



Around Gymnast Champion. She is the daughter of **Robert** and **Janice Mitoma**. Her maternal grandparents are **Henry** and **Helen Yasuda**, the first Nikkei Parents of the Year in 1996. Henry was also our 49th Kenjinkai President and Helen was Fujinkai President from 2005 - 2011.

### Kaitlin Natsumi Shimizu:

Kaitlin was an All League Golfer in her junior and senior year at El Toro High School where she graduated with a 3.09 GPA. She will be attending San Jose State University majoring in Graphic Design. When asked what she could do to help the kenjinkai continue on, Kaitlin wrote, "Getting the message out there and talking to teens about this topic could be hard...but I believe that it is possible. Personally, I would make a club of some sort and try to get as many people as I can to join...I would try to hold events...I would also make something like a short film based on the Kenjinkai and show people what it is that they do. Our families went through a lot to get to where we are today...I truly think that it is important to learn the history of your heritage and keep it alive." Kaitlin is the daughter of **Cary** and **Linda Shimizu**. Her paternal grandparents are **Masao** and the late **Mitsue Shimizu**. Masao and Mitsue were also Nikkei Parents of the Year in 1998. Masao was recently awarded the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor from President Barack Obama. Masao Shimizu's biography is featured in this issue's "Glad to Meet You" section.

—Submitted by Arlene Nakamura



*Scholarship winners and families with Scholarship Chairperson, Arlene Nakamura (1st row on left) and Yamaguchi President, Richard Fukuhara (1st row, far right).*





## In Memoriam

**Kosuke Okamoto**  
September 1, 1933—April 20, 2012

The unexpected passing on April 20, 2012 of our dear friend and dedicated member of Nanka Yamaguchi Kenjinkai, Kosuke Okamoto, has left all of us shocked and saddened.

He lived a good life and had many, many friends who cared for him. For those who were not able to attend his funeral services on April 27, we are printing a brief personal history that was presented by **Henry Yasuda**.

### Brief Personal History of Kosuke Okamoto

Kosuke Okamoto was born on September 1, 1933 in Yamaguchi City, Japan, to Kichisuke and Fusayo Okamoto. He always had an interest in horticulture and attended the Yamaguchi Agriculture High School.

Upon graduation, Mr. Okamoto, an ambitious young man of 20, made the decision to immigrate to the United States in quest of more opportunities.

As he started a new life in the United States, like many postwar immigrants from Japan, Mr. Okamoto faced many hardships and challenges that he had to overcome, such as language and cultural differences, diversity in population and economic transitions.

He was determined to pursue a career in horticulture. He enrolled at Pasadena City College, Mt. San Antonio College and then went on to receive his Bachelor's degree in Horticulture from Cal State Polytechnic University, Pomona. While attending college, he worked as a live-in "school boy" to support himself. He also had the support of **Mr. Waichi Yoshimura**, the founder and owner of San Gabriel Nursery.



1989 Nanka Yamaguchi Kenjinkai Board  
Kosuke Okamoto, President (center).  
(from left to right: Shigemichi Ota, Kiyoshi Fukuhara,  
Nobuichi Wada, Kosuke Okamoto, Hideo Itagaki,  
Susumi Shoda and Hiroshi Isomoto.)

Upon graduation, Mr. Okamoto began working at the San Gabriel Nursery and faithfully continued to do so through-

out his life. His knowledge, combined with his dedication and hard work ethics to the nursery business, contributed to the growth and prosperity of the present San Gabriel Nursery, the most successful Nikkei retail and wholesale business in Southern California.

In spite of the long hours and hard work at the nursery, Mr. Okamoto managed to find time to become involved in the Nikkei community. He freely gave his time and energy to community activities by serving in various organizations, in leadership roles, such as:

- Nanka Yamaguchi Kenjinkai—President, 1988-1991
- Nanka Kenjinkai Kyogikai—President, 2003
- Nishimura Kai—President, past 9 years
- Taisho Club—Current Vice President
- Nikkei Pioneer Center Member
- Served on Board of Directors at Homba Honganji Buddhist Temple

Mr. Okamoto served these organizations with much dedication over a span of decades. He was always willing to be a friend, advisor, mentor and father figure to so many young Nikkeis who were fortunate to encounter him.

His tireless commitment earned him numerous honors, one of which was the August 2010, Nikkei Pioneer Award for his contributions to the Nikkei Community and working to build U.S.-Japan relations.

Our condolences to Mr. Okamoto's family: His wife, **Takako**; son, **Yoshio (Dana) Okamoto**; daughters, **Sachiko (Jim) Devito**, **Tomoko (Stanley) Arai**, **Yasuko (Scott) Kujiraoka**; and 7 grandchildren and many relatives.



*He loved to travel all over the world. At the Great Wall of China, September 2011.*

*Photo by Naomi Suenaka.*



*"He was a loving grandfather. He will always be in our hearts."*

Mr. Okamoto's kindness, generosity and ever smiling face will be sorely missed.

## Annual Picnic—*Cont'd from pg. 1*

The final event was the popular raffle drawing; and no one went home empty handed!

In closing, **Richard Fukuhara**, thanked everyone for attending and wished them a safe drive home. The 2012 Yamaguchi Kenjinkai picnic was once again a day chock-full of events and a great time was had by all!

## Acknowledgements

The success of our annual picnic takes a tremendous amount of planning, time and hard work. Recognition and a special *arigato* must be given to the following for a job well done:

9:00 am Setup..... **Board Members & Advisors**  
 Master of Ceremonies..... **Kiyoshi Igawa**  
 Kokoro Taiko..... **Victor Fukuhara, Nancy Kimm, Patrick Khensovan, Kenn Kono, Lloyd Nakano, & Darren Yomogida.**  
 Hot Dogs Station..... **The Hayashi / Yoshimoto Family: Arturo, Lea, Manami, Kysa & Remi.**  
 Sno-Cone Station..... **Gary & Kiyoko Chew; Tony & Paige Fukuhara; Trace & JoAnn Fukuhara; Noreen Miura; France Wong; and Mark, Clark & Caroline Yoshida.**  
 Azuki Beans..... **Yasuko Katayama & Yoshiko Kishimoto**  
 Sno-Cone Flavors Pick-up ..... **Richard Fukuhara**  
 Drinks & Ice Pick-up ..... **Kiyoshi Igawa & Mark Yoshida**  
 Bento order & pick-up ..... **Patrick Seki & Arlene Nakamura**  
 Mochi..... **Richard Fukuhara, Arlene Nakamura, Naomi Suenaka, and Candace Watase.**  
 Group Photographer..... **Richard Fukuhara**  
 Donations table ..... **Naomi Suenaka, Michi Ota, & Candace Watase**  
 Ondo Dance Captains..... **Lea Hayashi, Kaz Igawa, Yasuko Katayama & Yoshiko Kishimoto.**  
 Line Dance Instructor ..... **Arlene Nakamura**  
 Happi Coat Caretakers ..... **Yoshiko Kishimoto & Naomi Suenaka.**  
 Karaoke MC and Karaoke System..... **Patrick Seki**  
 Sound System..... **Aki Fukuhara-Vaughn**  
 Singers ..... **To all our talented members—Thank you!**  
 Special Dance Performance ..... **William Ford**  
 Games..... **The Fukuhara Family: Carol, Cindy, JoAnn, Larry, Masako, Paige, Richard, Tony, Trace, Tricia, .. Victor, Aki Fukuhara-Vaughn & Erin Masuda.**  
 Raffle (prize purchases) ..... **Richard Fukuhara, Naomi Suenaka & Candace Watase.**  
 Raffle Donations ..... **Thank you to all members for their donations of money and gifts!**  
 VIP Hospitality ..... **Richard Fukuhara, Arlene Nakamura, Naomi Suenaka & Candace Watase.**

Are you interested in helping with the picnic next year? We are always looking for volunteers or any constructive comments / suggestions on making improvements to our picnic. Please let us know by contacting any of your Board members (see page 6 for contact info). Thank you.

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## 4th Annual Tanabata Festival



“Spirit of Kizuna” (*bond/family tie*) is the theme for this year’s 2012 Tanabata Festival in Little Tokyo.

The “tanabata kazari” is a colorful paper decoration with streamers. Imagine the walkway in front of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) strung with nearly 200 “kazari” created by many kenjinkai members and other various organizations. It’s a beautiful sight!

At the Tanabata Festival will be wish trees. People are encouraged to buy special strips of colorful paper on which to write wishes or poems, that are then folded and tied around bamboo trees.

Below are Tanabata Festival dates:

**Where:** Little Tokyo 1st St. & Central Ave (in front of MOCA)

**When:** Aug 10-13, 2012

**Opening Ceremony:** Fri, Aug 10 @ 5:00pm



There will be Japanese foods, games, entertainment, and the winning “kazari” will be on display.

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*The “Atsui daikon” (hot daikon) game. Photos by Richard Fukuhara.*







# "Glad to Meet You"

## Member Profiles

はじめまして

### Masao Shimizu



*Masao Shimizu with sons, Gary and Cary, when he received the Congressional Gold Medal from President Obama.*

**Where and when were you born?** I was born in Yuba City, CA, on January 2, 1917. From 1924-1931 I attended school in Japan. Upon returning to the U.S. in 1931, I was a student at Yuba City Elementary School.

**What kind of work did you do?** At the age of 17, I worked with my father as a contract/migrant worker finding work wherever we could. In 1940, my mother, father, sister and brothers returned to Japan. I chose to stay in the U.S. and work with a friend's family. That family, the Manjis, owned a 2,000 acre rice farm in Marysville. I took care of 600 acres there.

**Where were you during WWII?** I was drafted into the U.S. Army on July 27, 1941. In December of that year, I was assigned to guard a bridge on the California/Arizona border. Later, all Asian soldiers were sent to Ft. Bliss, Texas. In 1944, I was assigned to Camp Maxie, Texas, then to Camp Shelby for combat training. In December 1944, I was sent to England and then to France to join the 100th Battalion. I joined the 442nd Combat Unit along the France/Italy border and was involved in the final push into Italy in April 1945. The War ended in May 1945 and I remained in Italy as a cook. I was discharged to Ft. Logan in Denver, CO, in December 1945.



1942

**Whom did you marry?** When I was on leave with a friend, we visited Camp Rohwer. It was there that I was introduced to my future wife, **Mitsue Kikawa**. We corre-

(Continued on page 6)

### Yoshiko (Muramoto) Kishimoto



**Where and when were you born?** I was born in Iwakuni, Japan, on August 21, 1930, the eldest of five children—4 girls and a boy.

**What kind of work did you do before you were married?** During my high school years, we had to contribute to the war effort. For three years, 6 days a week, my duty was to inspect paper to make sure that there

were no holes. The paper was used to make incendiary balloon bombs. The factory was 4km from my home and we had to walk home in the dark, in the rain and snow. We received little education during this time, but I did graduate at age 16.

**Whom did you marry and when?** The family of my future husband, Kiyoshi Kishimoto, lived behind my family in Iwakuni. He was born on 7/15/22 in the U.S., the youngest of 6 children, and returned to Japan when he was 3 years old. He was in the U.S. during the war at Tule Lake internment camp. After the war, he returned to Japan and we married on May 5, 1947 when I was 17. My husband worked as a cook and a year after we were married, we were able to build our own home in Iwakuni. We have been married for 65 years!



*Kiyoshi & Yoshiko's wedding photo. That is Yoshiko's own hair!*

**What kind of work did you do after the war?** My husband, a U.S. citizen, wanted to return to the U.S., and after 12 years of trying, we were able to come here in 1959 with our son, **Kazuto**, who was given U.S. citizenship status. I found a job as a seamstress in a Boyle Heights dress factory. I have worked in the garment industry, in a leather shop, and later as a caregiver until I was 75. My husband was a gardener and retired at age 76 after a serious fall.

**Do you have children / grandchildren?** My son, **Kazuto**, was born on 4/3/1950. He is an architect in Tustin (Kishimoto Architects, Inc.) and lives with his wife, **Linda**, who works with him in business. Their two sons / our grandsons are **Mark** (31) and **Mathew** (29). In 1999, Mark was selected as the Yamaguchi cultural exchange student.

(Continued on page 6)

## Masao Shimizu—*Cont'd from pg. 5*

sponded by mail so I knew that she had moved to Denver with her family after leaving Camp Rohwer in Arkansas. That's why, when the war ended, I requested to finish my tour of duty at Fort Logan near Denver. We were married on January 27, 1946.

**What kind of work did you do after the war?** In 1947, I moved to Wheatland, CA, and worked as a farmer on a fruit ranch. In 1958, I moved to Gardena, CA, and worked as a retail clerk in a small family-owned grocery store in Lincoln Heights. I retired after 20 years of service. After retirement from the retail clerk position, I worked for Hoya Lens in Gardena as a maintenance man until it closed in 1994. That's when I fully retired.

**Do you have children/grandchildren?** My wife and I enjoyed raising 4 children, all sons: **Stanley** (b. November 30, 1946), twins **Cary** and **Gary** (b. July 19, 1948) and **Kelvin** (b. September 2, 1952). Our family also includes 9 grandchildren and 1 great-grandchild.

**When did you join Nanka Yamaguchi-Kenjinkai?** I joined in 1979 with **Nobuichi Wada**.

**Do you have a special memory?** My greatest memory is being discharged from the Army at Fort Logan, CO, to be where my future bride had relocated.



*Mitsue, along with many other Japanese interned in the camps, is finally recognized for graduating from Compton College in 1941.*

*Pictured with all 4 sons on October 16, 2010.*

**Where have you traveled?** After retirement, Mitsue and I had the opportunity to travel to many places: Japan on many occasions, Europe, Canada, Mexico, Alaska, Hawaii, and New York to mention a few.

**What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?** Mitsue, my wife of 65 years, was diagnosed with bladder cancer in early August of 2011 and passed away soon after. Now that I'm 95 years old, I spend time being entertained by my sons, grandchildren, great-grandchild and my dog, Sakura. I enjoy working in my garden, and watching my favorite TV programs such as "Family Feud" and the L.A. Dodgers.

—Submitted by the Shimizu Family

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## Yoshiko Kishimoto—*Cont'd from pg. 5*

**When did you join Nanka Yamaguchi-Kenjinkai?** We joined around 1987.

**Where have you traveled?** We have been to Alaska on a cruise, Canada, traveled to Hawaii, Washington D.C., Pennsylvania, New York, Mexico, Las Vegas, and I have been to Japan 20 times.

**Do you have special or proud memories?** I am proud that I became a U.S. citizen in 1966 by studying at



*With son, Kazuto*



*Kiyoshi & Yoshiko*

night school. I was the Nanka Yamaguchi Kenjinkai Fujinkai President in 1996 and served for 4 years. We used to meet once a month at **Mrs. Okinaka's** house where we learned flower arranging, calligraphy and bon odori. Those were fun days. During the 100<sup>th</sup> Nanka Yamaguchi Kenjinkai Anniversary in 1999, I became ill and had to step

down as Fujinkai President. In 2005, I was diagnosed with cancer and my kidney was removed and I have been perfectly fine since. At the 2009 Kyogikai party, I won the door prize: a free trip to Japan!

**What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?** My husband and I enjoy watching NHK-TV and singing Karaoke. I enjoy doing aerobics, participating in Yamaguchi Kenjinkai events, and I love to cook Japanese food.

—Submitted by Aki Fukuhara-Vaughn



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