

Tom Tomeo Ohno

1927 – 2002

Tom T. Ohno Memorial Scholarship
Twin Cities JACL

Tom Tomeo Ohno was a teacher, coach, sports enthusiast, and an advocate for Asian-American rights.

Tom was born December 20, 1927, in Seattle, Washington. He was the 6th of 11 children in the family of Yosaji Ohno and Saki Hazemoto of Japan. In May of 1942, the family was relocated, as a part of the wartime internment of Japanese-Americans, to the Minedoka Relocation Center in Idaho.

Tom moved to Minneapolis in 1944. He worked as a houseboy while attending Minneapolis West High School. After graduation, he enlisted in the Army. He served in the military after World War II in Japan in 1946 and 1947 and during the Korean War in 1950 and 1951. In 1953, he received a teaching degree in mathematics and physical education from Augsburg College. He received a master's degree in school administration from the University of St. Thomas in 1971.

Tom was married Reiko Honda in 1959. They have a daughter, Pam Ohno Dagoberg, who lives in Plymouth; and a son, Rob, who lives in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida.

Tom taught math at Lincoln Jr. High School for 4 years and at Roosevelt High School for 26 years. At Roosevelt, he mentored Laotian students, coached boys baseball, girls' softball, soccer, and a variety of other sports. Tom coached Edina Youth Baseball, Bloomington Athletic Association baseball and soccer, Beltline hockey, Babe Ruth baseball and umpired BASA girls' softball. He was an assistant baseball coach at Jefferson High School in Bloomington in the early 1980's. After retiring from the Minneapolis public school system, he taught math part time for five years at Cretin Derham Hall High School in St. Paul.

Tom was involved extensively in the Japanese community. He helped found the bi-lingual Twin Cities Independent Church, served on the church board and sponsored fund raising activities. He served as chapter president of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) in the 1950s; he founded the Twin Cities JACL golf tournament, and co-chaired the Scholarship Committee for over 30 years. As a member of the JACL Education Committee, he spoke frequently at area schools and community functions on the internment experience and wanted to make sure it was not a forgotten moment in American history. In 1996, he received the Asian Pacific Leadership Award.

Tom was passionate about numerous hobbies including golf, photography, gardening, bridge, ballroom dancing, fitness, travel, computers, music, cooking, and loved and enjoyed his 4 grandsons. He was a consummate teacher, a deeply genuine and giving person.

Tom was a teacher, coach, sports enthusiast and an advocate for Asian American rights. He was also a loving husband, father and grandfather. He loved people and he loved working with kids. He wanted to help the community. He never pursued anything without giving 100%. He was very generous and believed in giving back. He was witty and had a great sense of humor. He was enthusiastic and optimistic.

He positively impacted the lives of many people that he will never know about. Kids he taught. Kids he coached. There were many that were impacted in a positive way. Tom had an uncanny knack of remembering people's names. He seemed to know everyone and everyone seemed to know him. If there was someone he didn't know, he always made an effort to meet him or her.

Tom took a crash course one summer to learn the Japanese language at the University of Minnesota and mastered the language enough to be able to communicate with his sister and other relatives in Japan.

He represented the word "love" incredibly well ... love is defined as a sacrificial act for the benefit of another. He continuously did sacrificial acts that benefited others ... helping students get better, helping athletes to improve, doing things that aren't noticed (e.g., taking care of the ball fields without anyone knowing), helping others that were in financial need, providing his kids with opportunities to play sports and get involved in various activities.

He always had a soft spot for kids who were in danger of losing their way. He reached out to them and tried to make a difference. He influenced many lives and inspired kids to do amazing things.

It was his message to others that it is important to always strive for excellence in whatever you do. Always do your best. Always give your best effort; approach things with enthusiasm and sense of commitment. And, always give back. He measured success by dedication and work ethic. He was inspired by examples of people that work hard.

He always provided people with a sense of hope. Hope to get better. Hope to improve. Hope that life can be better.