

RICE PAPER



A newsletter of the Twin Cities chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League

FEBRUARY 2006



President's Message by Gloria Kumagai

Omedetogosaimasu! Happy New Year! Greetings from the 2006 Twin Board! The board's most difficult question at the annual meeting in December was "Who will be president?" Since no one was willing to take on that office, the members decided that there would be a rotating presidency, with board members taking turns running the meetings, etc., each month. The rotation is: January – John Nakasone, February – Rachel Matsumoto, March – Joyce Miyamoto, April – no meeting due to the Festival of Nations, May – Les Suzukamo, June – Joanne Kumagai, July – Jamie Cork, August – Lisa Shakerin, September – Cary Yamanaka, October – Carly Miyamoto Faber, November – Peter Yamashiro, December – no meeting. Gloria Kumagai will be the main contact for the National and Midwest Regional Offices. John chaired the board meeting the other night where we planned this year's activities. We are all looking forward to the Chrysanthemum Banquet as this will be a special one celebrating our 60th year!

Please join us in welcoming three new board members: Carly Miyamoto Faber and Peter Yamashiro – both Yonsei, who grew up participating in many Festival of Nations' dance programs. Jamie Cork has rejoined the board after taking a few years off.

If any of you have ideas for us, please do not hesitate to contact one of the board members. Better yet, if you want to be a really active member, let us know so that you can become a board member!

Additional Silent Auction Donors:

Thank you to the following, who donated to the silent auction after the Chrysanthemum Banquet program had been printed:

Jan and Mitch Monson
Mary and Bud Nakasone
Marriott Minneapolis West
Peter Kiriara
Lucy and Mikio Kiriara
Connie Fukuda
Marcia Tani Paul
Brett Akagi
Minnesota Twins

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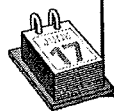
612-812-0653

Scholarship Committee holds one seat

TC JACL WEBSITE:

www.twincitiesjacl.org

Rice Paper



JACL Calendar of Events

Feb 17 - March 5, 2006

"Cowboy Vs. Samurai" by Mu Performing Arts (details inside)

Feb 24 - March 26, 2006

"GOTAMA: A Journey to the Buddha" by Heart of the Beast Puppet Theater (details inside)

March 31, 2006

JACL Scholarship Applications due (see scholarships inside)

April 30, 2006, 5:00 pm

"San Jose Taiko" at the Ordway Center for Performing Arts (details inside)



Kogen Taiko Calendar

Feb 16, 2006, 7:30 pm

"Night of Taiko" at Bloomington Kennedy High School

\$10 adults, \$5 students and seniors

July 6, 2006, 5:00 pm

City of Plymouth (tentative)*

July 20, 2006, 7:00 pm

City of Coon Rapids, Dam Regional Park
1 hour free outdoor performance

August 6, 2006

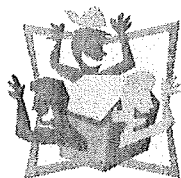
City of Roseville (tentative)*

August 19-20, 2006

Midwest Buddhist Temple Ginza Festival
Chicago, IL

**Please consult www.kogentaiko.org for up-to-date Kogen Taiko performance and contact information.*

Memberships



TC JACL welcomes new members:

Mark and Sheila LeGeros and their son Benjamin

Dani Tanaka (Student/Youth)



Nak Nak News by John Nakasone

For as many years as I can remember, the Twin Cities chapter of the Japanese Americans Citizens League has held a summer picnic for its members at a local public park. In the early days, we often met at Lake Phalen in St. Paul, but more recently, Lake Carnelia by Southdale shopping center, has been our preferred get together site. The format for our picnic is always centered around a massive lunch. Everybody brings a favorite dish, with lots of sushi and shoyu chicken and other scrumptious Japanese ethnic specialties to share and the grill chef cooks a main course meat. Over the years, we have had deep fried turkeys, dry rub seasoned pork shoulders, beer can chickens, grilled turkeys and hamburgers, hotdogs, and many, many pig roasts. While the food is cooking, people have a chance to visit and catch up with what is happening in people's busy lives. Sam Honda springs into action at his snow cone booth, seeing if he can get anybody to try their snowcones Japanese style with Adzuki beans. After lunch, the kids climb into gunny sacks, get tied together for three legged races, run around with beans and balls in spoons, paint their faces, and hunt for prizes and candy. Then we have our annual tug o'war contest, pitting dads against the kids, which the kids have always managed to win. But in fact, for many years the outcome of this event has been surrounded by controversy. Who can forget the year that the Yamanaka boys secretly tied their end of the rope to a big tree? And just this past year, the dad's came dangerously close, taking the event to a two out of three, before vigilant mothers stepped in, reminding the combatants of the ramifications of a "dad's win." Luckily, the dads were able to contain their competitive instincts and narrowly avert a major catastrophe, by losing a very close one. All joking aside, the kids must be able to feel the tremendous power they are able to generate on their own by working together for a common purpose. By this time the bingo game has been passed out and is being played by the "big kids" and their children and grandchildren. Little kids are helping grandparents to cover numbers they are missing and parents are helping toddlers. Make no mistake, this bingo and the accompanying prize picking by winners is serious business. Then people begin to gather up their prizes and leftovers, cleanup, and head home. Although the format doesn't change much from year to year, the picnic is always an eagerly anticipated event on my summer calendar and is filled with cherished memories. Having been the grill chef for the last 15 years or so, most of my remembrances have to do with the food preparation. Those of you who have made it to the summer picnic know that I like to cook on my modified grill on wheels which was made out of an old fuel oil storage tank, and cut down the middle lengthwise, with charcoal trays running down the sides in order to provide a beautiful, indirectly heated, 5' long cooking surface. This is an ideal device for cooking a small to medium pig, and under the watchful eye of the great Hawaiian pig roasting expert

Clarence Ikeda, we did many. While Clarence would have preferred that we cook the pig "Imu" style, or underground and with fire heated volcanic rocks and pig wrapped in Ti leaves, we had to settle for Minnesota style. In order to cook a pig, you have to find just the right butcher. Because you are cooking the pig whole, you want somebody who will do a good job of cleaning up the body, and shaving off all the hair so that you have a clean and good looking pig to work with. Clarence had found just such a butcher at the old South St. Paul stockyards, a Vietnamese family run operation who knew exactly what Clarence wanted. Clarence would go visit the butcher a couple of days ahead of the picnic, picking a pig, and reminding them that he had to have a just the right sized pig, freshly killed because we had to lay out the pig on its haunches before rigor mortis set in, or we couldn't get it to fit in the roaster. The night before, Clarence and I and Jacob would meet at the butcher, observe the killing operation, (that's worth a trip in itself) and carefully lift and place the pig on the roaster. Then we took it home, and carefully basted the pig by hand inside and out, with a secret soy sauce and Hawaiian rock salt mixture prepared previously by Clarence and laid ice on top of the carcass so it wouldn't spoil and covered the roaster with tarps to slow the melting. The cooking of a pig this size requires about 8 hours of undisturbed cooking time, so in order for the feast to begin at noon, we had to meet around 3am to remove the ice from the pig, and lift the racked pig off the grill in order to fill the charcoal trays and light the fire. On many of these occasions, I enlisted the help of Clarence, Bud Nakasone, and Cary Yamanaka in order to have enough muscle to lift the pig off and on. As was our practice we doused the charcoal heavily with lighter fluid and soon, in the dark of the night, the grill which was parked in my driveway was engulfed in flames shooting up 5' in the air because once you close the lid on the pig, you don't want to lift it up again as it adds an extra half hour of time every time you open the lid and lose the heat. Having run out of one can of lighter fluid, I journeyed back into the house to get another can, to make sure that things were really lit. I was gone about three minutes and when I came out, there was a couple of police cars with red flashing lights shining flashlights on the pig and talking to Clarence and Cary. It seems that a well wishing neighbor thought my garage was on fire so he had called the police. The police seemed especially interested in what we were cooking and I'm sure that when they pulled up and saw three asian looking men, standing over a big fire, they figured they had stumbled onto some sort of dog roast or pagan ritual going on right in their own back yard. And that kind of thing just wasn't going to happen on their watch! But after seeing for themselves that the laid out animal was indeed a pig, and not somebody's pet dog, they grudgingly got back into their cars and drove off into the night, convinced that St. Paul was once again a safe place for man and beast.

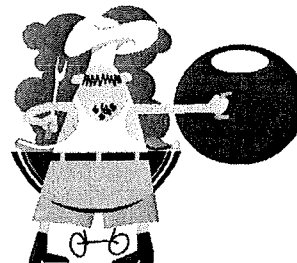
Another "funny" episode happened to me the year I forgot to bring the rope for the tug o' war. Convinced that a picnic wouldn't be the same without tug o war, I took Jacqueline's Mercedes sport utility vehicle, since my truck was hooked up to the roaster, and headed home. She of course neglected to tell me that she had an empty tank. I got about as far as Hiawatha off Crosstown and the car started to sputter, I looked down and saw the fuel light blinking. I exited onto Hiawatha and got about a block north before I ran out of gas. Knowing that I didn't have a lot of time, I frantically started running up Hiawatha, not really knowing where a gas station was, but convinced that it wouldn't be far. About five miles later, and sweating profusely, I stumbled on a small gas station. Luckily there was an East Indian taxi cab driver who couldn't speak much English filling up his taxi at this same moment, he looked at me dubiously as I approached on foot, as I was sweaty and greasy from cooking, but successfully explained my plight and negotiated a ride back to the car with a gallon can of gas. He didn't say much and I wasn't in the mood for light conversation. When we got to the parked car, he said in an incredulous sing-song voice, "That is your car? You drive a Mercedes? People with Mercedes do not run out of gas. You should not run out of gas if you drive a Mercedes". His accent was beginning to get to me, and I wanted to choke him and tell him that indeed people in Mercedes do run out of gas, because I obviously just had, and that the only reason I owned a Mercedes was because it was cheaper than the Chevy Suburban we had looked at, and used a lot less gas, and that it really was a prudent purchase because I planned on running it for another two hundred thousand miles. But all I could mumble was something about my wife having done this to me. His eyes immediately and knowingly lit up, as this of course was the perfect answer, and the only believable explanation for this ridiculous situation. He smiled sympathetically, his world view again restored, "Yes, yes. Of course," he said in a guy to guy sort of way, knowing full well that a man driving a Mercedes could only run out of gas because of a woman's stupidity.

Then there was the time I was running late and decided to transport the grill with live coals in order to save time, as the seniors get a little cranky when they can't eat at 12:00 exactly. It seemed like a good idea to me, since having hot coals would save a good hour of charcoal prep time. Things were going smoothly as I headed down the freeway with my son Jacob following me from a distance in another truck in order to haul some other supplies. I had the radio cranked up and was lost in song as people were driving by and pointing and gesturing to me as they passed by. Lost in my own little world, I just wasn't concerned about people staring at me. Yes, yes everybody, I know that I have a grill behind me...Get over it!! I'm on a mission. JACL seniors have to eat!! Finally, I had this feeling that some body was trying to get my attention as they were pulled up alongside me and not trying to pass or slow down... I reluctantly looked over to find Jacob, urgently pointing at the trailer behind me. I nodded and looked in my rear view mirror.

Unbeknownst to me, the ventilating doors of the grill that are on either ends of the charcoal trays had swung open and were releasing hot coals. I watched in horror as a couple of 3" glowing red hot charcoal briquettes dropped lazily out of the grill, and bounced twice, the second bounce taking them just high enough to clear the top of a top down red convertible Mazda Miata, which was following me just a little too closely. The funny thing about this totally unfunny event was that driving the car was this overweight, overage, Casanova with a funny looking hairpiece. The kind of guy who was 20 years past the sports car age, and was so busy making goo goo eyes at the hot young chicky, that he had no idea how close he and I had just come to sharing a major league bad day. I quickly pulled off the road and let him go stupidly past me. Lucky and prayerful that it was my time to get off on the France Avenue exit.

Besides the funny memories I have, are many happy memories of my kids and family having fun on this simple but special occasion. When I first decided to get involved in JACL, my desire for involvement came from a social and cultural perspective, as I wanted my children to appreciate their Japanese heritage and learn more about it, and be surrounded by people who worked hard, had a clear set of values and principles and were able to achieve success despite adversity. While I have come to realize how important the work of the JACL has been in defining our position within American society, it is still the friendships and food and fun that I have shared with my JACL friends that I find most gratifying and keep me involved. Having watched my kids grow from being little participants in the games to helping run the games and preparing the meals for others gives me great personal satisfaction knowing that the reason why I joined JACL in the first place, has been rewarded.

Look for an "Aussie-some" BBQ this summer as Jacqueline and I do shrimp and chicken skewers "on the Barby", Aus-anese style. Hope to see you there... jn



Twin Cities JACL Afternoon at the Theater

On November 13, the Education Committee organized a "Twin Cities JACL Afternoon at the Theater" at the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre for a performance of "The Pink Dress." Written by Leslie Kitashima Gray, the script is based on an after-dinner story her mother told seven years ago in a rare exchange about her mother's internment experience. The play centered around Tsuki, a young Japanese American girl living in the Amache concentration camp during World War II, and her decision to wear her sister's polka dot pink dress to her junior high school graduation rather than the drab olive green camp uniform that the students are told to wear.

The music was composed by husband, Michael A. Gray and Japanese-style bunraku puppets were designed by Beth Peterson. JACLers, young and old, enjoyed the colorful costumes, creative sets, expressive puppets, narration by Kitashima Gray and original live music. After the performance, Sally Sudo and Lucy Kirihaara answered questions from the audience about their internment experiences, and refreshments were served in the lobby.

In addition to Sudo and Kirihaara, Kiyo Kumagai, Yoshi Tani and Mary Yoshida volunteered to attend the performances for school children to answer questions after each presentation. The performances for school groups were sold out and extra ones were added to accommodate all the classes that wanted to attend. This gave the JACL the opportunity to reach over 1,000 school-aged children with the story of the internment. The Twin Cities JACL also loaned about 80 internment photographs from the resources collection, and they were displayed on the walls in the halls and foyer area.

On Nov. 4, the Star Tribune published an article about Leslie Kitashima Gray and the play in the Source section. WCCO-TV reporter Maya Nishikawa presented a news story on Nov. 5 about "The Pink Dress" that featured Kitashima Gray and Sally Sudo. With the play opening on Nov. 5, Kitashima Gray, her husband, Michael, her mother, Moonza Tsukiko (Maruyama) Kitashima, and Beth Peterson were in town from California where the play originally premiered, and were guests at the TC JACL banquet.

Organizers and helpers from the Twin Cities JACL Education Committee were:

Sally Sudo, Chair, Lucy Kirihaara, Rachel Matsumoto, Lil Grothe, Sylvia Farrells, Susan Fink, Gloria Kumagai, Jan Kirihaara Monson, and Cheryl Hirata-Dulas.

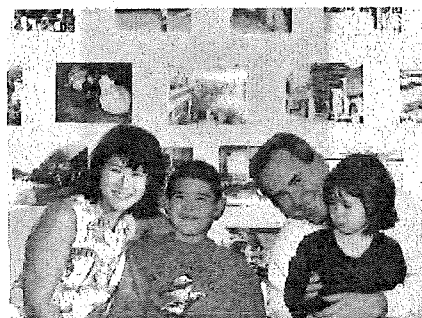


Leslie Kitashima Gray and Sally Sudo

Stephanie, Chris and Kylie Noonan



Cheryl Hirata-Dulas, Matthew, Daniel and Marissa Dulas



*Puppet theater intern, Leslie Kitashima Gray
Lolita Hollenbeck, Masanari Kawahara, Laurie
Witkowski and Beth Peterson*

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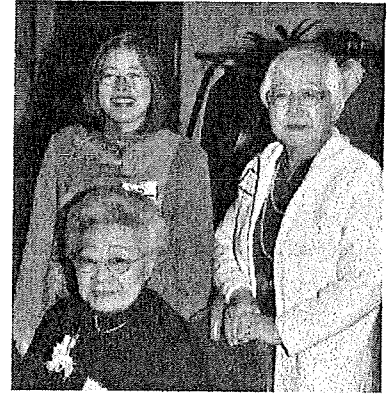


*Service Honoree Sam Shimada, Speaker
Senator Mee Moua and Banquet
Chairman Les Suzukamo*

Chrysanthemum Banquet



*Lucy Kiriara, May Tanaka, Andrey Oye and
Jan Kiriara Monson*



*Judy Moriguchi and Tayeko
Moriguchi with Service Honoree May
Tanaka*



*Standing: Shirley Huskins, Sally Sudo, Todd Tsuchiya,
Beth Peterson, Connie Tsuchiya, Pam Ohno Dagoberg and
Reiko Ohno*

*Seated: Moonza Kitashima, Leslie Kitashima Gray and
Mike Gray*



Wells Fargo Corporate Table



*Judy and George Murakami with
Terry and Chris Noonan*

Photos courtesy of Cheryl Hirata-Dulas

Rice Paper

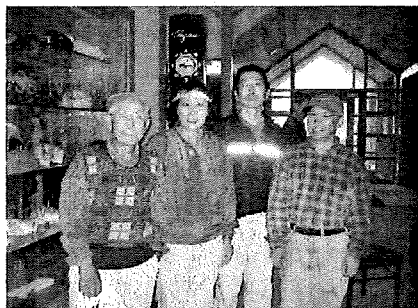


*Ben Wong with tournament planner
Jay Yamashiro*

JACL Golf Tournament



*Sue Takekawa, Helen Tsuchiya
and Phyllis Takekawa*



*George Nishida, Emi and Eugene
Sako and Dennis Nishida*



*George Fujimoto, George Murakami
and Sam Honda tally the scores*

*Prizes! Lucky winners take
home rice...*



Photos courtesy of Connie Tsuchiya

Midwest District Council Meeting



Midwest District Council Reception
Hilton Garden Hotel
Bloomington, MN
October 14, 2005

Rice Paper



Education Committee Update

For the seventh year in a row, the Twin Cities JACL will participate in the annual Minnesota Council for the Social Studies spring conference, attended by social studies teachers from around the state. On March 9 and 10, education committee members will man a display table at the Thunderbird Hotel, where they will distribute resource materials and information about the Japanese American World War II experience, including the internment, military contributions, and impact on Minnesota's history.

The Twin Cities JACL Education Committee is currently working on developing curriculum materials for teachers to enable them to meet one of the objectives in the new Minnesota Academic Standards for History and Social Studies, that took effect in the 2005/6 school year.

One of the standards in the middle school grades under Minnesota History is: "The students will know and understand the impact on Minnesota of these major national and international events: World War I and World War II, the social and economic changes of the 1920's and the Great Depression." A benchmark under this standard is "Students will describe Minnesota's contributions to World War II and analyze its impact on Minnesota." The Education Committee will be creating lesson plans for teachers to teach about "the Fort Snelling (and Camp Savage) [Military Intelligence Service] Language School." The generous memorial donated by family of the late Toshio Abe will be used to fund this project. In addition to lesson plans, which include putting together a comprehensive history of the MISLS, which students will read and answer questions about, the committee is developing lessons around personal stories of local MIS veterans, highlighting different locations in the world where the MIS served. MIS veterans who would like to participate, please contact Sally Sudo at 952/835-7374 or ssudo@mn.rr.com. Also, if there are any resource materials that JACL members may have that may be helpful to the project, please contact Sally.

We would also like to acknowledge George Suzuki for his generous donation to the Education Fund, and we welcome to our newest addition to the committee, Kathy Ohama Koch.

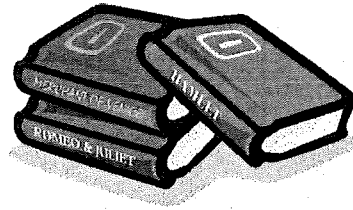
Rice Paper scholarships

2006 High School Graduate Scholarship Applications Available

Scholarship applications for 2006 high school graduates are now available. Please contact Pam Dagoberg at 763-557-2946 (dagob001@tc.umn.edu) if you are interested in obtaining a local chapter scholarship application or would like to recommend someone for a scholarship.

Applications have been sent to the following students:

Samantha Aisawa (Fridley High School)
Trenton Aoki (Eden Prairie High School)
Ryan Bissonette (Andover High School)
Matthew Carlson (Stillwater High School)
Cassandra Ann DuSold (Lakeville High School)
Alexandra Ezaki
Mara Fink (St. Louis Park High School)
Tyler Kempton (Minneapolis Southwest)
David Motoyoshi (Lakeville High School)
Natalie Nakasone (Visitation)
Mariko Rank (Moundsview High School)
Christine Sako
Connor Taketa (Eden Prairie High School)
Danielle Tanaka (Bloomington Jefferson High School)



In addition to completing the application form and submitting a transcript, students must write a short essay entitled "The Value of Further Education." Local scholarship applications are evaluated based on scholastic achievement, extra curricular activities, community service and the essay. Scholarship recipients are required to be current JACL members.

Completed applications for local scholarships must be mailed by March 31, 2006.

In addition to the local scholarships, National JACL scholarships for entering freshmen are also available. Decisions for awards will be made this summer. Applicants are judged on the basis of their scholastic achievement, extra-curricular activities, community involvement, personal statement and letter of recommendation. Information regarding National JACL scholarships can be found at www.jacl.org. Applications must be mailed by March 1, 2006.

Rice Paper upcoming events



Upcoming production of Heart of the Beast Puppet Theater: **"GOTAMA: A Journey to the Buddha"**, premieres Feb 24 - March 26, 2006.

This original play blends traditional Asian and cutting-edge puppetry, physical theater, dynamic scenery, and live, original music. A wealthy prince wanders outside his palace and meets, for the first time, the old, the sick and the dead. Moved by profound compassion, he decides to throw away his worldly ways to experience, understand and, ultimately, to overcome the curse of suffering. This production, directed by Andrew Kim and designed by Masanari Kawahara promises to be a bold, exciting and thought-provoking presentation of the young Buddha coming-of-age.

Heart of the Beast theater is located at 1500 East Lake Street, Minneapolis. For more information call 612-721-2535, or visit online at www.hobt.org



FESTIVAL OF NATIONS - VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

The Festival of Nations is May 4 - 7, 2006. We will need many volunteers to staff the bazaar booth and the demonstration book. The bazaar booth shifts will be the same as previous years:

Thursday, May 4: 9:00-12:30 and 12:30-3:30

Friday, May 5: 9:30-1:30, 1:30-5:30 and 5:30-10:00

Saturday, May 6: 10:00-2:00, 2:00-6:00 and 6:00-10:00

Sunday, May 7: 11:00-3:00 and 3:00-7:00

Please call Joyce Miyamoto (651-636-3222) to sign up for your choice of shifts in the bazaar booth, and Gloria Kumagai (763-377-5602) to sign up for the demonstration booth.

The Festival continues to be the major fundraising event for JACL and it is successful due to our many volunteers. It's fun, you get a ticket into the Festival, and you get to view all the things we have for sale!



HELP WANTED! TC JACL is looking for someone to disseminate news and event information to the membership via e-mail. The list is confidential, and is used only to relay relevant JACL, community news and events announcements. Cheryl Hirata-Dulas will assist in setting up the mailing list. Anyone interested in volunteering for this important post, please contact Gloria Kumagai at 763-377-5602.

SAN JOSE TAIKO at the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts

San Jose Taiko was founded in 1973 by young Asian Americans searching for an outlet to convey their experiences as third generation Japanese Americans, or Sansei. Looking to Japan for inspiration, they were drawn to the empowering sounds of the taiko, the Japanese drum, an instrument that embodies the spiritual essence and heartbeat of Japan and its people.

With its roots in the folk tradition of Japan, the taiko has served many purposes. Priests used taiko to chase evil spirits and insects from the rice fields; samurai used taiko to bolster their courage and to instill fear in the enemy; villagers used taiko to pray for rain, to enliven festivals, and to give thanks for bountiful harvests.

The practice and performance of taiko requires selfless dedication, physical endurance, harmony and a collective spirit. The music of San Jose Taiko weaves traditional Japanese sounds with the beat of world rhythms. At San Jose Taiko, Japanese, African, Balinese, Latin, American rock and jazz merge to produce an innovative contemporary sound that bridges diverse styles and resonates with the Asian soul in America.

Sunday, April 30, 5:00 pm

World Party at 3:30 pm

Tickets must be reserved no later than March 29, 2006

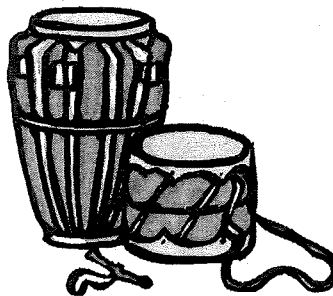
Price: Adults \$27.40, Children ages 4-17 \$17.00

Make Check Payable to: Twin Cities JACL

Send to Joanne Kumagai

14362-91st Place North

Maple Grove, MN 55369



Ticket Order Form

Name _____

Number of Adult Tickets _____

Number of Child Tickets _____

Mailing Address _____

Telephone _____

Rice Paper upcoming events

Mu Performig Arts presents

COWBOY VERSUS SAMURAI By Michael Golamco

A no-holds-barred romantic comedy, *Cowboy Versus Samurai* re-imagines the *Cyrano de Bergerac* story with an Asian twist. The lives of the only two Asian Americans in the tiny western hamlet of Breakneck, Wyoming are turned upside down when the beautiful Veronica Lee, a Korean American teacher from New York City moves to town. Through irony, humor, and social commentary, *Cowboy Versus Samurai* cleverly exposes the struggle of Asian Americans to find their place in the vast American landscape - and with each other. Contains some mature language. Best for audiences ages 16 and up.

"Golamco's script is a decided success... Neither a cautious update of *Cyrano* nor an earnest meditation on Asian American identity, the play instead offers a gentle, genial, and frequently rather wise comedy of character and race." - Village Voice

"Provocative and entertaining!" - NYTheatre.com

"With exquisite moments of truth, hilarity, and despair, the play is a thoughtful, thoroughly compelling piece of theater." - OffOffOnline.com



Dates: February 17 - March 5, 2006

Venue: Mixed Blood Theatre (1501 South Fourth St., Minneapolis)

Preview: Thurs., Feb. 16 at 8 pm, Tickets: \$8

Performances: Thurs., - Sat. at 8pm, Sun. at 2pm

AD/ASL: Sat., Feb. 25 at 8pm

An opening night reception follows the Feb. 17th performance.

A post-show discussion follows each Saturday performance.

Tickets: \$16

\$2 discount for students & seniors

\$4 off groups of 10 or more

MEMBERS OF JACL RECEIVE 2-4-1 TICKETS OPENING WEEKEND (FEB. 16-19, 2006) BY MENTIONING "MU COMMUNITY PARTNER" WHEN MAKING RESERVATIONS

Reservations: 612-824-4804 (before January 17, 2006), 612-338-6131 (January 17, 2006 and after)

More information is available at <http://www.muperformingarts.org>



Folk arts and community are core of Philadelphia Chinatown's historic new school

The Twin Cities has a connection to a historic first in Philadelphia - a new charter school in

Chinatown. Ellen Somekawa, a Twin Cities native and daughter of longtime TC JACL members Carl and Mari Somekawa, has served as executive director of Asian Americans United (AAU) since 1996. AAU, along with the Philadelphia Folklore Project, successfully led the multi-year effort behind the establishment of the Folk Arts - Cultural Treasures (FACTS) Charter School, now in its first year.

"Over the last twenty years, Asian Americans United has fought to address the many educational issues facing Asian communities in Philadelphia: the lack of bilingual/bicultural resources in the public schools, the lack of a culturally relevant curriculum, barriers to parental involvement, and racism and violence towards Asian students," Ellen explained. "Like many communities of color across the country who fight for self-determination, AAU decided that we should create a school that we design and for which we are accountable. By building a school that is reflective of the languages and cultures of Philadelphia's diverse communities, we can maximize the impact on children in our school; at the same time we can make an impact on the larger

public school system by demonstrating what is possible."

Folk arts - arts that come out of communities and are valued in communities - are a central part of the school, because they have the potential to strengthen children's spirits and their communities. These arts bring life, energy and excitement to the students' learning and give students a connection to history and to one another. At FACTS, which brings children and families of different races and nationalities together, both American-born and immigrant, students learn from family members, elders and artists who live in their communities.

According to founding member of FACTS Debbie Wei, AAU envisioned the school in Chinatown for several reasons. "Chinatown has about 4000 residents, a quarter of them children. The median income for Chinatown families is about \$8,000, and unemployment is double the city's average. Some 50 percent of the population has not finished high school. Yet, Chinatown does not have one single publicly funded institution within its borders - no public school, no library, no health center, no community center, recreation center or senior citizen center."

The school's mission is to provide



Ellen Somekawa, daughter of longtime Twin Cities JACL members Carl and Mari Somekawa, is executive director of Asian Americans United in Philadelphia.

children with an academically strong education that fosters a love of learning and that engages students with their own cultures and communities, as well as others in our city, country and world. FACTS gives children a joyful place for learning, a place to learn to think critically and deeply, and a place that respects culture and arts as powerful resources. As part of the Chinatown community, students learn what it means to be a part of a community - people who care for one another and for the environment they share - and they learn that being part of a community means being active, involved, responsible and supported.

Charter School, continued on next page.

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Charter School, continued.

In addition to developing the vision for the school, Asian Americans United applied for and received a planning grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Education. AAU then wrote the application for the charter and spearheaded a major endeavor to win approval for the school. Efforts included obtaining 1,200 petition signatures, pre-enrollment forms from 56 families, 30 local and national endorsements, hundreds of letters of support from parents, teachers, community groups, businesses and institutions, and organizing hundreds of people to attend public hearings and School District of Philadelphia School Reform Commission meetings. Leaders from the Fujianese community, which encompasses 20,000 people citywide - many of

whom are recent immigrants - played a particularly important role in fighting for the school.

AAU's role also included building a founding board, staffing the recruitment of students and teachers, community outreach, locating a site, and supporting the school up to its opening. The Philadelphia School Reform Commission unanimously approved the new charter school in March 2005, and the school opened on September 8, 2005, serving 272 students in kindergarten through 5th grade and may eventually expand to 8th grade. The student body is multiracial, with a majority being Asian and about 30% African American. The staff includes people who speak Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Indonesian,

Spanish and Tagalog. Among the students is Ellen's 2nd grade son, Tai. Her spouse, Eric Joselyn, is an art teacher at the school.

In addition to its support of FACTS, AAU, founded in 1985, seeks to build a broad base to support Asian American communities in Philadelphia. It works with some of the most disenfranchised sectors of the Asian American community in Philadelphia to organize around key issues of concern and develop leadership within the ranks of the Asian American community.

For more information about the Folk Arts - Cultural Treasures Charter School, visit its Web site: www.factsweb.org