On Friday, October 13, Old Nihonmachi came roaring back. With 1920s music playing in the background, supporters and guests of the Japanese American Museum of Oregon got “duded up” and turned out for a great cause.

Money raised from the event supports the Japanese American Museum of Oregon’s mission for the coming year. In addition, donors supported two specific initiatives to make JAMO more accessible for all: monthly free days at the museum and scholarships for schools to tour the museum and Plaza. Guests were treated to a spread brought in by Bambuza Vietnam Kitchen while they perused the many raffle prizes including a hot air balloon ride for two and a three-night stay at the Zig Zag Zen Retreat. After a fast-paced paddle raise, the casino opened up, giving party goers more chances to win raffle tickets.

By the end of the night, nearly $29,000 was raised to further the accessibility goals of the museum. Thank you to all of our supporters as well as the many people and businesses that generously donated raffle prizes. You all are the “cat’s meow!”

Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are courtesy of Rich Iwasaki.
I cannot believe that it has already been six months since I joined the Japanese American Museum of Oregon in June! Every day, I am able to work with a fantastic team to fulfill my giri (obligation) to the Japanese American community to preserve and honor this history. The community here in Oregon is amazing, and I am excited to collaborate amongst such diverse groups.

My journey to becoming an Oregonian has been fast and furious. I purchased a home in North Portland, started remodeling it, and even got custom license plates! As a recovering federal employee, I could not shake off the National Park Service completely, so I bought personalized Smokey Bear plates with NIKKEI printed on them. I did, after all, wear a Smokey hat for the last 8 years. On a completely different note, how was NIKKEI not taken already?

Since starting at JAMO, I’ve seen the museum’s visitation numbers grow, getting us closer to pre-pandemic numbers. In 2023, we broke summer visitorship records during the hapa.me exhibition and look forward to welcoming even more folks to the museum in 2024, despite continuing challenges in Old Town. Our focus on accessibility should support that goal: JAMO has joined Museums for All to provide free admission for those receiving SNAP food benefits, monthly free days will start in 2024, and our new bus fund program will make it easier for students to visit the museum.

2023 was full of milestones. We launched the museum’s first major fundraiser since 2019 with Nobi’s Night Out, a 1920s speakeasy event honoring Nobi Masuoka. We successfully brought back the Matsutake Hunt in the fall and began a new teacher workshop at Minidoka over the summer. The events for Behind These Bars and A Sense of Place: The Art of George Tsutakawa were packed and had great participation.

I’ve had the chance to represent JAMO as a subject matter expert on Japanese American history to the National Endowment for the Humanities and Texas A&M University; next year I’ll be speaking at the National Council for Public History conference. I’m serving on the Executive Advisory Committee and the Historical Significance and Memorialization Committee for the development of the Portland Expo Center, where a few of the buildings held Japanese Americans during World War II in the so-called “assembly center.” I also recently joined the boards of two local nonprofits: Oregon Humanities and Make Us Visible.

As I reflect upon this past year, JAMO’s staff have been able to accomplish a lot. I am grateful to be here and honored to be seen as a successor to Lynn Fuchigami Parks. I am looking forward to the amazing work that this team has planned as we embark on this new year together!

— Hanako Wakatsuki-Chong

A MESSAGE FROM JAMO’S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MINORU YASUI STUDENT ART CONTEST

MINORU YASUI Legacy Project

2024 Theme: Advancing Democracy
Deadline: March 1, 2024

This art contest is open to middle and high school students ages 10–18 years old. Students can express their thoughts about the prompt in a visual art piece and artist’s statement. Technical arts background not required.

For contest details: minoruyasuilegacy.org/student-contest
In July 2023, six Oregon teachers traveled to Twin Falls, Idaho, to take part in the inaugural Minidoka Teacher Workshop. This multi-day learning experience was developed and led by Kurt Ikeda, Director of Interpretation and Education at the Minidoka National Historic Site; Robyn Achilles, Executive Director at Friends of Minidoka; and myself, with funding from the National Park Service. The workshop was designed to provide place-based learning about the Japanese American incarceration experience along with resources and best practices to use when teaching this complex, important topic in their classrooms. The attendees came from across the state—Springfield, Albany, Hermiston, Beaverton, and Portland—representing a wide range of grade levels from elementary to high school. Half of the group was made up of Nikkei, several with family members incarcerated during World War II.

The first portion of the workshop consisted of a film screening and discussion of Betrayed: Surviving An American Concentration Camp, a guided tour of the historic site, and classes on curriculum and teaching strategies. For the second portion, educators attended the Minidoka Pilgrimage, learning from and connecting with incarceration survivors, their descendants, and allies. By the end, this group of Oregon teachers had become a tight-knit community (with their own group chat to stay in touch after the workshop ended). It was clear this experience had been deeply meaningful to each of them. Jen Winchell, a teacher from Albany said:

One question that has stuck with me is: When is the first time a Japanese American student sees themselves/their community in our classrooms? And I realized that in my class it was incarceration. But it won't be in the future. Because in addition to teaching the truth of the incarceration and the history of camps like Minidoka, I will bring in the voices and history of Japanese Americans outside of this horrific injustice.

Portland teacher Ashley Hayes also reflected on her experience:

When I found out about this workshop, I knew that this experience would teach me so much, but I also understood that it would be incredibly challenging. While I have worked through complex emotions connected to my ancestors’ incarceration throughout this workshop and pilgrimage, I am walking away feeling connected to community (both the Japanese American community and Oregon educator community), a sense of release and healing, a renewed interest in learning about Japanese American history, and a determination to ensure that, as an educator, this moment in history is portrayed accurately and understood by all generations so that history does not repeat itself.

Thank you to everyone who has donated to continue this program in 2024! If you know any teachers that may be interested, have them email elissa@jamo.org.

—Elissa Dingus, Director of Education and Engagement
On November 4, the Living Arts program brought several communities together to honor our legacies, ancestors, and connections to each other at the Behind These Bars gathering, with close to 60 in attendance. A collaboration among the Japanese American Museum of Oregon, Soul Restoration Center, Vanport Mosaic, Oregon Black Pioneers, and Hacienda CDC, we sought to find intersections through poetry, film, and cultural stories. Taking Minoru Yasui and his role in the Japanese American community as an example, we learned of other important local figures that should be known by all.

Jennifer Luevano-Brummett and Fedora Copley from Hacienda CDC shared the story of Cully District activist and community advocate Amelia Calderon, whose mother was in attendance. Mariah Rocker, Public Programs Manager of Oregon Black Pioneers, shared the story of McCants Stewart, one of the first African American attorneys in Oregon. We also shared portions of the film Behind These Bars, created for the 2023 Minoru Yasui celebration. Actor Heath Hyun read selections of Min's poetry, and a bilingual poem for Holly Yasui, “To Holly,” was read by Juanito Cervantes and author Chisao Hata.

During the program, attendees wrote down their families’ countries of origins and their reflections, which were hung on a tree while Gerardo Calderon played beautiful healing music. It was a moment of connection, meeting new friends, and sharing bread/pan, rice cakes/mochi, and Joe Brown’s popcorn.

Peggy Nagae wrote of her experience: “Behind These Bars brought together communities to celebrate our leaders, share stories, write reflections, listen to music, and gather in community. It was a special time to acknowledge Holly and Min Yasui and in the spirit of who they are, to build relationships across communities and work toward a multi-racial inclusive democracy.”

Thank you to the Soul Restoration Center for providing the beautiful space and being such great partners for this program.

The next public Living Arts program will be Gathering the Circle on January 13 from 4 to 6pm at the Japanese American Museum of Oregon. Spencer Uemura from Portland JACL will co-facilitate this group dialogue on Culture and Identity with Chisao Hata. Check jamo.org for details and registration instructions. Also look for InterAct! creative workshops exploring the same topic.

The Living Arts program continues to offer MOVE ON, a creative movement class for all ages, every first and third Thursday at Ikoi no Kai from 10:45 to 11:30am. Come as you are, move with each other and help us grow our class! As one student said, “Movement is medicine, motion is lotion, expressive and very healing.” We’ve also started to bring Ikoi no Kai attendees to tour JAMO; our first group visited on November 16 to see A Sense of Place: The Art of George Tsutakawa.

—Chisao Hata, Creative Director of Living Arts
A SENSE OF PLACE: THE ART OF GEORGE TSUTAKAWA

In fall 2023, the Japanese American Museum of Oregon proudly presented the first Oregon exhibition of legendary Seattle artist George Tsutakawa. Created in collaboration with the Tsutakawa family, the career-spanning exhibition explores the artists’ connections to the Northwest and Japan and includes examples of his work in watercolor, sumi, sculpture, and fountain design. Visitors get a sense of the breadth of his talent across media as well as the places and aesthetic sensibilities that inspired his paintings and sculptures.

George Tsutakawa (1910-1997) was born in Seattle but spent 10 years of his childhood in Japan before moving back to Washington to live with relatives. His work reveals a connection with the natural forms and aesthetics that he encountered in both environments. His early career was defined by an abstract modernist style in oil, prints, and watercolor, but he became more enamored with Japanese cultural sensibilities as time went on. The exhibition offers examples of this contrast, especially exemplified by his oil paintings of Fort Snelling, where he was stationed as a member of the U.S. Army during World War II, and his later sumi paintings, some of which depict the Oregon Coast.

Tsutakawa is most renowned for his metal fountains and public sculptures, which can be found in cities across the U.S., Canada, and Japan. A highlight of the exhibition is a large model for Fountain of Wisdom, Tsutakawa’s first fountain sculpture, created in 1960 for the Seattle Public Library. It is unfortunate that the fountains he designed for the Lloyd Center Mall in 1961 are no longer publicly viewable. During a reception at the Lan Su Chinese Garden, it was a pleasure to hear Vicki Nakashima’s memory of the dual fountains and her son’s fascination with them as a child.

At the exhibition opening in September, Friends of JAMO and other special guests mingled with members of the Tsutakawa family, including several who carry on George’s legacy in the arts: daughter and arts writer Mayumi Tsutakawa, son and sculptor Gerard Tsutakawa, grando and artist Kenzan Tsutakawa-Chinn, and many other members of the extended family.

Mayumi Tsutakawa returned in October for a lecture on her father, his life, his legacy, and the places that inspired his work. In November, local artist and JAMO museum store vendor Karen Fullerton taught a free workshop on Sumi painting, offering unique insight into Tsutakawa’s techniques.

We hope that Portland sees more of George Tsutakawa’s work in the future and that the connection between the Tsutakawa Family and our city are strengthened for the better.

A Sense of Place: The Art of George Tsutakawa will be on view through December 31, 2023.
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Please consider a tax-deductible donation to the Japanese American Museum of Oregon — together we can ensure this history is available to all.

Go to JAMO.org/donate or use the enclosed envelope to donate today.
Craft, Community, and Care: The Art and Legacy of Bob Shimabukuro

February 17–April 14, 2024 The Japanese American Museum of Oregon presents Craft, Community, and Care, an exhibition exploring the life of Okinawan American activist, artist, and writer Bob Shimabukuro. Instrumental in the Pacific Northwest’s Japanese American Redress Movement, Shimabukuro was also an acclaimed woodworker and furniture maker known for his design of the Portland restaurant Tanuki. He served as an editor and columnist for The Pacific Citizen, the official paper for the JACL, and Seattle’s International Examiner. Remembered by a friend as “a bit of a philosopher, a little bit of a dreamer, a social activist, a little bit of an artist, all wrapped up in one,” Shimabukuro imbued each of his many endeavors with deep care and dedication to social justice. He once wrote, “We must stand together, in struggle and in solidarity, whenever we can.”

From left to right: Lorie Millward, WMA President; Karen Kosasa, University of Hawai’i at Manoa; Lynn Fuchigami Parks; Judy Margles; Elizabeth Kapp, Arizona Historical Society; and Jason Jones, Executive Director, WMA at the Western Museums Association awards ceremony. Courtesy WMA

CONGRATULATIONS LYNN FUCHIGAMI PARKS AND JUDY MARGLES!

JAMO is proud to count among our own one of two Portland museum leaders who were recognized by the Western Museums Association in 2023. Lynn Fuchigami Parks, Executive Director Emeritus of the Japanese American Museum of Oregon, and Judy Margles, Director of the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education, were awarded the Western Museum Association Leadership Award on October 6 at the association’s conference in Pasadena, California.

Both Lynn and Judy accomplished much over their years of service, with both overseeing significant capital projects that established new facilities for their museums–JAMO’s permanent location on 4th and Flanders that opened in 2021 and OJMCHE’s flagship location on the North Park Blocks that opened in 2017 and expanded in 2023.

Congratulations to Lynn and Judy on being recognized for their outstanding efforts to bring their community museums to a wider audience and with it a greater understanding of the difficult histories that they tell. With the retirement of these two leaders, this award is a recognition of their many years of successful and devoted leadership in their respective communities, in Portland’s cultural landscape, and in the museum field.
CHRISTMAS IN MINIDOKA

Although the majority of Nikkei at Minidoka were not Christian, Christmas was celebrated with great enthusiasm. Exchanging gifts, decorating trees, visiting Santa, and sending Christmas cards were some of the customs incarcerees continued in camp, reminders of life before the grim realities of war and incarceration. Faced with more stringent war rationing than the rest of the country, incarcerees still created elaborate decorations using crepe paper, tinsel, and paint. Some even brought sage bushes into their barracks and decorated them like Christmas trees. Christian groups donated gifts for all the children, and the government supplied Christmas trees for every mess hall, classroom, religious hall, and hospital. One of the highlights was a competition among the mess halls for best decorations.

Christmas cards played an important part in the festivities. Family members were spread out in different camps, resettled to the Midwest, or fighting overseas; sending cards was a way to keep in touch and share major events. Cards could be purchased at the camp Cooperative or from mail-order catalogs, but many chose to send ones made by artists in camp. These were often somber and melancholy, reminders of the anguish of life imprisoned. The card by Yukio Morinaga shows an aerial view of an orderly grid of barracks devoid of human activity. The only Christmas references are a crucifix-like star and the white road in the foreground representing a cross. Another card shows shabby barracks separated by snow-covered pathways. Not the usual, joyful imagery found on Christmas cards, they are a reminder of what many may have been feeling while celebrating the holidays as prisoners. Reproductions of these cards are available for purchase in the JAMO store.

Top left: Children lining up to visit Santa at Minidoka, December 1942. The third child from left is Darlene Shigeno. Donated by Mark Sakagami

Images above, Christmas Cards made at Minidoka and donated to JAMO by Rose Niguma.

Top to bottom: Artwork by Yukio Morinaga; The Gateway, artist unknown; Artist unknown.
It was a record-breaking year for the return of JAMO’s annual Matsutake Hunt, the first since the start of the pandemic. Over 30 people registered and attended the successful foraging trip, which Amy Mishima Peterson called the “best harvest ever!” The hunt took place over the weekend of October 20 in Yachats on the Oregon Coast.

The weather was great as we did not have any rain. Even our youngest matsutake hunter gathered a great harvest! Other mushrooms were found as well making this an exciting time for many who were new to this activity.

Thank you so much to Amy and Hank Mishima for guiding the trip and ensuring its success.

If you are interested in attending next year, this is a Friends of JAMO exclusive trip, so be sure to join using the form in the back of the newsletter or by going to jamo.org/join.
YES, I WANT TO JOIN!

My support will help ensure that the history, art and culture of the Nikkei are preserved and shared with the community for generations to come.

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A Sense of Place: The Art of George Tsutakawa closes

January 13:
Gathering the Circle: Culture and Identity program

February 16:
Friends of JAMO preview for Craft, Community, and Care: The Art and Legacy of Bob Shimabukuro

February 17:
Craft, Community, and Care opens to the public
Portland JACL and JAMO Day of Remembrance Program: Threads of Remembrance

February 19:
Removed by Force film screening

February 24:
InterACT! Expressive Art Workshop