



A captivating fusion of traditional Japanese taiko and modern rock 'n' roll sounds marked Tsukasa Taiko and AIRMW's 10th anniversary Reduction concert, led by the talented Tatsu Aoki, as depicted in the right photo. The left image showcases a dazzling Christmas tree that in Chicago I saw on my way home.

---

### *Japan America Society of Chicago Fundraising Bonen-kai*

---



*Former Consul-General Malott (on right)*



*Mr. Fujita*

The Japan America Society of Chicago's biggest event of the year is the Holiday Fundraise and Bōnen-kai (year-end party). This year's theme celebrated Osaka, Chicago's sister city and the upcoming host of EXPO 2025. From the photo booth to the auctions and souvenirs, every aspect of the event showcased Osaka's vibrant culture. The guest of honor, Former Ambassador John Malott (also former U.S. Consul General to Osaka), captivated the audience with his speech. "After traveling the world and being away for over 50 years, it's good to be back home. Tonight, we celebrate Chicago's ties to Osaka and that has its special meaning for me," Mr. Malott remarked. The crowd cheered when he playfully compared Japan's two major cities: "Unlike Tokyo, where everyone is expressionless like *Noh* mask,

Osaka is expressive like *Kabuki*. While in Tokyo people tend to hide their emotions, Osaka is a place where people express their true feelings.”

The night's keynote speaker was industrialist Hiroyuki Fujita, who shared some inspiring words of wisdom. In his speech, Mr Fujita explains the importance of challenging oneself, stating how we should give it a try even if it's something we don't know. Mr. Fujita advised that time will just pass you by if you aim to be perfect. First, we should give it a try, get feedbacks, and then make improvements as you go along. He also stressed the importance of keeping up the dialogue with each other even in the society which is increasingly become divided. Mr. Fujita was the first Japanese person invited to give a State of the Union address by President Obama. In his book *Michinaki Michi wo Ike* (Go Your Own Way), Mr. Fujita recounts his journey of moving to the United States at 22 and offers encouragement to Japan's youth. We're the same age, and he's always brimming with curiosity and ambition. This was my fourth time meeting him, and as always, I left feeling inspired and energized by his presence.

---

### *December 7<sup>th</sup>, 83 Years from Pearl Harbor*

---



*Memorial Ceremony*



*Reception with U.S. Veterans*

On December 7<sup>th</sup>, I attended Pearl Harbor 83<sup>rd</sup> Remembrance, co-hosted by Chicago Marines and the Chicago Nightingales. The event emphasizes historical remembrance, reconciliation, and friendship, cooperation and partnership between Japan and the United States. In the welcoming and calm atmosphere, I delivered a speech paying tribute to the victims and reaffirming Japan's commitment to peace, pledging to not repeat the horrors of war. I highlighted the symbolic Pearl Harbor visits by Prime Minister Abe and President Obama eight years ago, emphasizing Japan's appreciation for America's tolerance and the transformative power of reconciliation.

On December 13<sup>th</sup>, we hosted a reception at the Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago to honor U.S. veterans who were stationed in Japan. These veterans embody the strong bond of trust and friendship



between our two nations. The evening provided a wonderful opportunity to hear firsthand accounts from these servicemen and women. One memorable story came from Illinois State Representative and Marine veteran Stephanie Kifowit, who had been stationed in Okinawa. She shared that her son is now following in her footsteps, currently serving with the Navy in Yokosuka.

---

### *“Forever Home” for the Japanese American Service Committee*

---



*Ribbon Cutting*



*Mike Tanimura and Kei Kawaguchi*

The Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) has been a cornerstone of Chicago's Japanese American community since 1946. Initially founded to help Japanese Americans resettle in Chicago after their release from internment in camps, the JASC's mission has evolved over the decades. Today, it offers a wide range of services, including senior housing, Japanese language and cultural education, and programs dedicated to preserving Japanese American history and heritage. As a crucial pillar of support, the JASC continues to play an indispensable role in nurturing and sustaining the Japanese American community.

JASC recently celebrated a major milestone with the completion of their building's full renovation, establishing what they're calling their “Forever Home.” On December 12<sup>th</sup>, approximately 250 guests gathered for the Ribbon Cutting ceremony at the new facility. The event marked a significant transition for the organization, as Mike Takada stepped down as CEO after a decade of dedicated service, having fulfilled his mission to “create a home for *Nikkei* people.” Ms. Courtney Sakai was introduced as the new CEO, ready to lead JASC into its next chapter. Adding to the occasion's significance, a special message from President Biden was shared with the attendees.

On the 14th, JASC's new building hosted their annual "Holiday Delight & Kodomo Matsuri" event. The event drew people from diverse communities, spanning generations and backgrounds. This

celebration showcased how the new facility will truly serve as a "Forever Home" for years to come, not just a hub for the Japanese American community, but also a welcoming space for anyone interested in connecting with the community.

I had the honor of presenting the Foreign Minister's Commendation to Mr. Mike Tanimura and Ms. Kei Kawaguchi, two long-standing pillars of support in the Japanese American community. Both recipients were incredibly humble about the honor, insisting they had simply done what was necessary and were accepting the award on behalf of the entire community. It was heartwarming to see many participants celebrate this recognition from bottom of their hearts.

On the 15th, I visited the Holocaust Museum in suburban Chicago for the opening of “Resilience - A Sansei Sense of Legacy.” This museum, the third largest of its kind globally and second largest in the U.S. after Washington D.C., is showcasing works by eight Japanese American *Sansei* artists. The exhibition draws inspiration from the forced internment of Japanese Americans following Executive Order 9066 in February 1942, with artworks capturing the moments of deeply felt pain and reluctant acceptance, emotions which were often withheld by their elders. At the opening, artist Christine Yuki Aono and Mike Takada, former CEO of the Japanese American Service Committee, gave an insightful talk. They discussed the artwork and explored how the history of internment has influenced Japanese American identity.

The exhibition included words of Japanese Americans of the era:

*Shikata ga nai* - it cannot be helped

*Gaman* - enduring the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity