

Japan America Society Annual Dinner

Good evening, everyone. As we are gathered here at the annual JAS dinner together, I would like to share my own retrospection and hopes for the future with you.

I. In Retrospect

The last year was very much colored by the March 11th disasters in Japan. JAS was ready to help right away, co-founding SeattleJapanRelief.org. Governor Gregoire, the honorary vice chair, expressed her sympathy and offered help at last year's annual dinner. In October, she even visited Sendai and met with the afflicted.

Also in October, the JAS co-organized a business roundtable with the JBA at the University of Washington, focused on March 11th and the aftermath.

Around the same time, Executive Director Carie Cable fell seriously ill, but she had been farsighted. She had already successfully booked the Seattle Center for our March 11th community event this year. We are very glad that she is on her way to recovery.

Our March 11th event was meaningful for the whole community including educational presentations and a memorial service.



Later that evening, JAS co-organized a beautiful “Winds for Hope” concert at Benaroya Hall to benefit Fukushima high schools.

Over the last year, Japan suffered from disaster and difficulty, but we saw even more sympathy and assistance from Americans. We are very thankful.

II. Seeing the Light of Goodness

I have been fortunate to be engaged in many activities with JAS, and through this association, I have come to know that there are many good things in this world. For example, partnered with Megumi, I made a successful eagle pat of 25 feet down the green at the July golf tournament!



We celebrated the 88th anniversary of the JAS and had the opportunity to look back on its long and glorious past. At the holiday dinner, I gave a presentation with a slideshow about Operation Tomodachi and the Special Kids Flight on the Boeing 787 Dreamliner. I believe the audience enjoyed the pictures more than my words!



I gave a talk on “Light and Shadows in Europe,” in light of the European financial crisis, and enjoyed chatting with young professionals at the New Year Party.

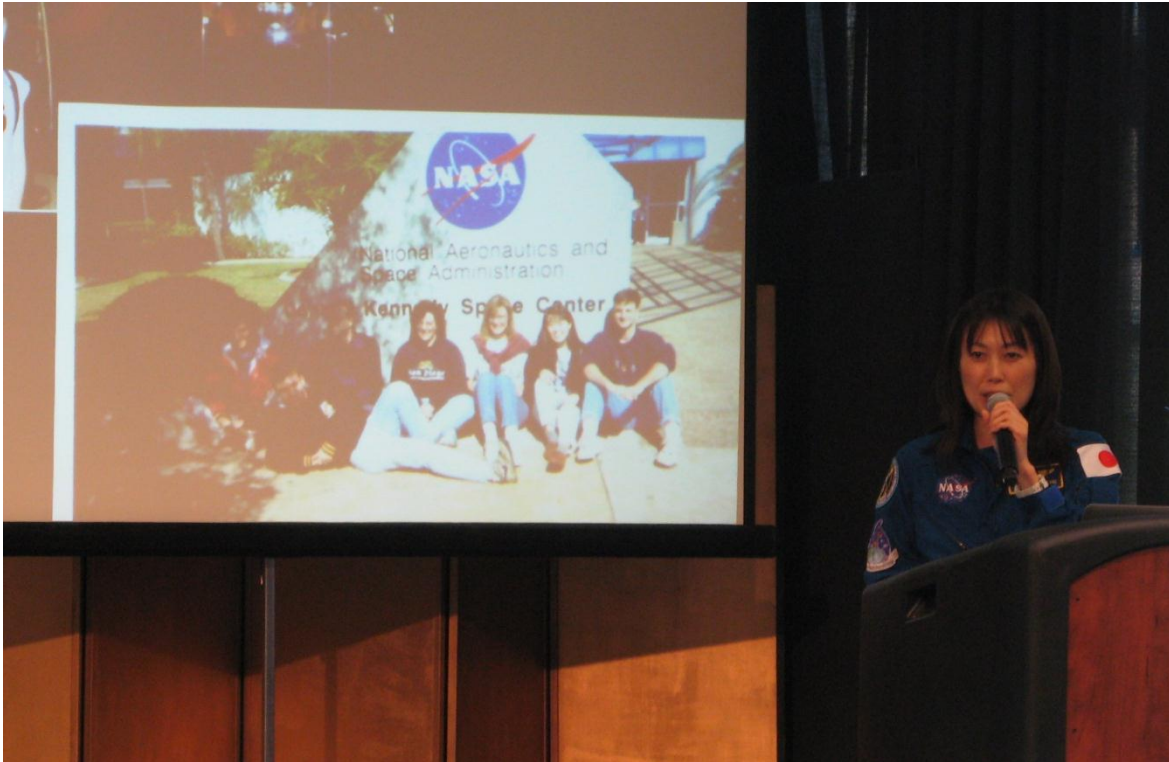
III. The Year Ahead

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the gift of cherry trees from Japan to the United States. 3,000 cherry trees were transported from Yokohama to Seattle on February 14th, 1912. In Seattle, they were transferred onto train cars to continue their journey to Washington DC. I am glad Seattle’s connection with *sakura* did not end there.

I enjoyed Sakura-con with my staff, where we participated in cosplay and NicoNicoDouga.



At Sakura Matsuri, we heard a talk by astronaut Naoko Yamazaki, who took sakura blossoms from Seattle to the International Space Station.



There will be a ceremonial planting of cherry trees in 36 cities across the United States, including, of course, Seattle. It will be on July 14th at Jefferson Park on Beacon Hill, which has had connections to the Japanese American community for the last 100 years.

IV. JAS: Sowing the Seeds of the Future

JAS has had a variety of events and activities. For example, it has worked together with the Japan Business Association, which is accepting the 7th annual Thomas S. Foley Award on behalf of local Japanese businesses.

Over the past several years, JAS has placed more emphasis on Japan in the Schools. You must be proud of your unique programs, which give a glimpse of Japanese life and culture to American school children from elementary to high school. Seeing the excitement of the children in reaction to the visits would touch anyone's heart.



This is an investment in the future. You know well, that there is no immediate return on a truly good investment. Japan in the Schools volunteers are like farmers sowing seeds of crops they might never personally see harvested, but they look after them with the utmost care and devotion. Cultivating an initial interest in Japan can lead students to become interested in Japanese language, culture and cuisine, and eventually travel to and business with Japan.



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Finally, I would like to express my appreciation of the officers, chaired by Ms. Megumi Kobayashi for the last year. Thank you, and I look forward to a successful year with the new chair, Mr. Mark Calhoun. Remember that the Consulate General of Japan office is always here for you.