

**Speech at the Reception for the 37th Annual
Seattle Cherry Blossom and Japanese Cultural Festival**

I. Welcome

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you very much for coming, and welcome to the reception. We feel most honored to have the Honorable Congressman Jim McDermott here. We are also fortunate to enjoy the company of astronaut Naoko Yamazaki and the Fujinomiya Yakisoba group, who have come all the way from Japan, to celebrate with us! Seattle is much closer than the International Space Station, but thank you and your daughter for making the long trip to join us in Seattle, Ms. Yamazaki! We have the Fujinomiya group to thank for the yakisoba we will eat this evening.



II. 100th Anniversary of the Gift of Cherry Trees

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the gift of cherry trees from Japan to the United States. 3,000 cherry trees were shipped from Yokohama to Seattle on February 14th, 1912, and then were transported by rail to Washington DC where they enjoy great popularity to this day. Cherry blossoms are a beautiful symbol of friendship between our peoples. To commemorate this centennial, we will have cherry planting ceremonies in 36 cities across the US, including, of course, Seattle!

III. Seattle's Cherry Tree History

Here in Seattle, we have our own history of cherry trees to be proud of. In 1929, a Japanese delegation arrived in Seattle on their way to a naval conference for peace in London, England. Partnered with the Japanese Association of North America, they planted 3,500 *Yoshino* cherry trees in Seward Park to represent peace between our countries and friendship between Japanese Americans and Americans during a period of rocky relations in Seattle.

In 1960, the then Crown Prince Akihito, now the Emperor, and Crown Princess Michiko, now Empress, took a tour around the United States to celebrate the centennial of Japan-American relations. In Seattle, the Crown Prince planted a *Mt. Fuji* cherry tree. That tree was first planted in the Japanese Garden and then transplanted here at Seattle Center next to the Kobe bell in 1975. It saw the Seattleites share their grief by striking the bell for the victims of their sister city in the Kobe Earthquake of 1995 and again for the victims of the Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami of 2011.

In 1976, Prime Minister Miki, who studied in Seattle in his youth, gifted 1,000 *Yae-Kanzan* cherry trees to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the formation of the United States. Many of those trees were placed in Seward Park and along Lake Washington Boulevard. May 8th the same year, marked the first year of the Seattle Cherry Blossom Festival, originally held at Seward Park, and relocated to its present location at Seattle Center in 1979.

In 2010, Seattle sent cherry blossoms to the international space station with astronauts Naoko Yamazaki and Soichi Noguchi for zero-gravity cherry blossom viewing. This was a symbol of international friendship between the United States and Japan, especially because 2010 was the 150th anniversary of US-Japan relations. "I Love Sushi on Lake Bellevue," prepared the pickled cherry blossoms for space travel. Tonight, we have sushi from "I Love Sushi, Bellevue," and as I mentioned before, we have the pleasure of Ms. Yamazaki's company.



IV. CG Commendation

In closing, I would like to mention four people who have been honored this year for their achievements in bringing together our people and cultures. Mr. Ichiro Yamamoto, calligrapher, Ms. Norigiku Horikawa, Ikebana instructor, Mr. Shiro Kashiba, Japanese sushi chef and Ms. Bonnie Mitchell, tea ceremony instructor. Thank you for your many years of dedicated service!



V. Closing

I wish great success for the 37th Sakura Matsuri, and a smooth weekend for Mrs. Sasaki well as the other organizers, volunteers and participants. Let's make the festival even more exciting than before. *Gambaro!*

