

The 37th Annual Sakura Matsuri Cherry Blossom and Japanese Culture Festival was held from April 13 to 15 at the Seattle Center.

The 2012 Sakura Matsuri falls on the centennial anniversary of the gift of cherry trees from Japan to the United States given 1912 and the 50th anniversary of the Seattle World's Fair held in 1962. With both of these themes in mind the Sakura Matsuri was enjoyed great weather, and the many participants fully enjoyed the sunny matsuri weekend.



At the opening ceremony on April 13, the centennial anniversary of the gift of cherry trees from Japan to the United States was celebrated along with the 50th anniversary of the Seattle Center. Representing Japan, astronaut Naoko Yamazaki and Consul General Ota and Mrs. Ota presented a record of the commemorative sakura trees to the wife of Mayor Mike McGinn, Peggy Lynch, and Candice Inagi, the Chief Service Officer for the Office of the Mayor.

Later, the Consul General award was awarded to four citizens who have displayed extraordinary dedication to cultural exchange: Mr. Ichiro Yamamoto (Head of the Seattle Branch of the American Shodo Association) Ms. Norigiku Horikawa (Ryuseiha Ikebana Instructor and former President of the Seattle Japanese School Support Committee, Member of the Board of Directors, Seattle Japanese Community Service of Seattle) Mr. Shiro Kashiba (Restaurateur, Master of Japanese Cuisine), Bonnie Soshin Mitchell (Instructor at the East-West Chanoyu Center).



For this year's Sakura Matsuri, JAXA astronaut Yamazaki Naoko was invited from Japan, and gave two lectures at the main event stage. In her lectures, she talked about the reasons she chose to become an astronaut, the types of training she underwent, the experiments she performed in outer space, and also shared what daily life is like on the International Space Station. She even spoke about having brought a cherry blossom from Seattle to the ISS in 2010, and was able to experience *hanami* in space. Despite the lecture being held on a weekday the audience was packed and all seats were occupied for Yamazaki Naoko's fascinating discussion.

After delivering these talks at the Sakura Matsuri, further lectures were given at the Japanese Culture and Community Center of Washington, the Japanese Language School and Japanese School in Seattle.



Another special guest, the B-1 Grand Prix Gourmet Champions *Fujinomiya Yakisoba* participated in the Sakura Matsuri alongside local Seattle groups that provided *takoyaki*, *gyudon*, and other classic Japanese comfort food.

During this year's Sakura Matsuri festival a special performance was given by Tsugaru shamisen group, Abeya who had come to the U.S. on a special spring tour., approximately 300 people showed up for the event. Also, a special performance of the *Kugo* harp was given by Tomoko Sugawara at the Sakura Matsuri main stage.



At the booth of the Consulate-General of Japan in Seattle, a Haiku Contest was held to commemorate the centennial anniversary of the gift of cherry trees from Japan to the United States. Also, visitors were allowed to try on samurai armor, the *kabuto*, and could have their picture taken while wearing this uniform. 10 winners selected from the over 70 haiku contest entries will receive folk crafts. The winning entries are listed below:



Haiku Contest Winners and Their Haikus:

Snow of Pink comes, sings
Land of the Rising Sun, brings
Signaling the spring
-Francis N.

Delicate petals
Designed delicately bright
Beautiful looking
-Stefanie T.

Pink blossoms open
Like lovely petticoats
Japanese spring song
-Sharon H.

Beautiful smell of cherry blossoms
Ignite my senses of awe and amazement
Sacred it the color pink
-Iliana L.

At last, the cherry trees
Are freed. With a bring breeze, we
Follow the leaves' lead.
-Brett R.

Swing – I can jump off it
It feels like
I am flying
-Colson C.

Delightful sunshine
Opens the heart so wide
Yet closes at dark
-Asth T.

Flowering pearls
Studding branches of trees
Wisper in the breeze
-Mia K.

Blossoms bloom brightly
Pink and white dance in the wind
Sweetness fills the air
-Aaron T.

Born in spring season
Away from winter's ice rain
Souls connect again
-Kevin G.