



PRESS RELEASE

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JILL KAORI HIRAIZUMI CROWNED 2008 NISEI WEEK QUEEN

(Los Angeles – August 17, 2008) – The Nisei Week Foundation, producers of Los Angeles’ Nisei Week Japanese Festival, is pleased to announce Jill Kaori Haraizumi, a resident of Gardena, Calif., was crowned the 68th Nisei Week Queen on Saturday, August 16 at the George & Sakaye Aratani Japan America Theatre in Little Tokyo. Hiraizumi, who represents the Loft Hawaiian Restaurant and the Gardena Evening Optimist, broke into tears as she heard Master of Ceremonies David Ono, KABC-TV news anchor, and Mistress of Ceremonies Tamlyn Tomita, actor, announce her name. Kimberly Midori Kitaura, the East San Gabriel Valley Japanese Community Center representative, was crowned First Princess and Lindy Sumiko Fujimoto, the San Fernando Valley Japanese American Community Center and Coordinating Council representative, was voted Miss Tomodachi (Congeniality) by the five other candidates.

Hiraizumi, 22, said she is looking forward to the year ahead with the Nisei Week court and is excited to experience all of the Nisei Week festivities in the coming week and represent the community in 2008/2009. Her parents Gary and Kumiko Hiraizumi, and the many friends and sponsors who were there to support her, were very pleased by her being crowned. Hiraizumi is a recent graduate of the University of California, San Diego with a double major in Japanese studies and political science. She plans to attend law school in 2009 and aspires to become a lawyer with a practice in international law. Hiraizumi enjoys reading biographies of inspirational leaders, traveling and training for marathons. She has chosen to support the Advancement Via Individual Determination as her Nisei Week platform during her reign.

The 2008 coronation was a spectacular show that was attended by more than 500 guests, who were on hand to cheer for their favorite candidates. The six candidates opened up the evening with a Japanese dance performance choreographed by Sumako Azuma. They followed this by singing “Sakura Iro Mau Koro” in Japanese. The candidates also performed a “fun” dance number to “FEROSH. FAB. Fierce!” choreographed by Leslie Kawai. The candidates then came

out in beautiful white evening gowns designed especially for them by Tadashi for the question and answer and final glimpse.

The group Minyo Station performed Japanese folk songs. 2007 Nisei Week Queen Monika Taniguchi Teuffel gave a fond farewell speech thanking the community and Nisei Week for their support during the past year and presented a video which provided a snapshot of the court's memorable year. The 2008 Nisei Week Coronation was presented by chairperson Mike Hirahara, co-chairpersons Jerry Fukui and Keith Inatomi, director/producer Steve Kikuchi and musical director Scott Nagatani.

The Nisei Week Queen and Court Program Director Michelle Suzuki coordinated the candidates' four months of training and will oversee the 2008 Nisei Week Queen and Court during the upcoming year as they represent the Nisei Week Festival in Los Angeles' sister city, Nagoya, as a part of a goodwill tour that includes the Nagoya Festival, the Honolulu Cherry Blossom Festival, the San Francisco Cherry Blossom Festival and the Seattle Cherry Blossom Festival, among other events. The Nisei Week Queen and Court Program committee members include co-chairs Tiffany Hattori, Jill Nakata, Naomi Ono Sognefest, Diane Tanaka, and Jennifer Ahn Yoshitake, and committee members Kristi Higa, Nikki Kodama, Heather Nagano, Jenni Okamura and Jennifer Yoshida. The hair stylists for the 2008 Nisei Week Queen and Court were Carol Ishida and Michie Sujishi and the kimono artists were Cathy Gali and Michie Sujishi.

The first Nisei Week queen's contest was held in 1935 when patrons of Little Tokyo businesses voted for candidates. The young woman with the most votes was crowned queen. In its day, the contest generated interest and revenue for Little Tokyo. Though the coronation has changed enormously over the seven decades since the first queen, its purpose has endured. Nisei Week continues this tradition to generate awareness about the festival and bring people to Little Tokyo – providing a destination for which multi-generations and diverse backgrounds can experience the Japanese culture.

The members of the 2008 Nisei Week Court are:

First Princess - Kimberly Midori Kitaura (East San Gabriel Valley Japanese Community Center)

Kimberly Midori Kitaura is 25 years old and a graduate of the University of California, Irvine with a bachelor's degree in applied ecology. Kimberly is currently employed by Broadcom and attends school in the evening to pursue her goal of becoming a nurse practitioner. In her spare time, Kimberly enjoys playing basketball, singing karaoke, going out to eat, and solving sudoku puzzles. The platform that Kimberly has decided to support this year is the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Miss Tomodachi - Lindy Sumiko Fujimoto (San Fernando Valley Japanese American Community Center & Coordinating Council)

Lindy Sumiko Fujimoto is 24 years old and received her bachelor's degree in Asian American studies from California State University, Northridge. Lindy is currently attending classes at East West Players to develop her performance skills in the hopes it will help her become a professional actor. Her favorite pastimes include reading historical novels, drawing, baking, watching epic movies, and ice-skating. She has chosen the Ronald McDonald House Charities as her platform.

Princess - Marissa Asako Ishii (Orange County Nikkei Coordinating Council)

Marissa Asako Ishii is 24 years old and graduated from the University of the Pacific with a doctor of pharmacy degree. Currently, Marissa works as a pharmacist at Kaiser Permanente Orange County and-RX Relief. When she is not working, Marissa enjoys playing most sports, including basketball, swimming, surfing, and running. She also spends time reading and watching anime. She has chosen the American Diabetes Association as her platform this year.

Princess - Kie Flora Ito (West Los Angeles Japanese American Citizen League & Auxiliary & Venice Japanese Community Center)

Kie Flora Ito is 21 years old and currently attends California State Polytechnic University, Pomona where she is studying broadcast journalism and communications. Her goal is to work in the media and entertainment industry. Kie is a private language tutor and volunteers in her spare time at Keiro Intermediate Care facility. Kie enjoys visual arts and music, caring for her pets, and cooking. The platform Kie has decided to support this year is the American Liver Foundation.

Princess - Lisa Takehana (Japanese Restaurant Association of Southern California)

Lisa Takehana is 21 years old and attends the University of Southern California where she studies fine art, specializing in drawing and graphic design. She also studies video game design

and management and hopes to pursue a career as an illustrator and graphic designer in the entertainment industry. Lisa enjoys traveling to foreign countries and visiting museums and galleries. Lisa has chosen the United Services Organizations as the platform she plans to support this year.

The Nisei Week Festival, one of the longest running ethnic festivals in the United States., has been attracting hundreds of thousands of people each year since its inception in 1934 (except during World War II from 1942 – 1948) to Little Tokyo to enjoy a Japanese American arts and cultural experience, and this year, Nisei Week organizers, who are all volunteers, hope to draw even more people to the community. The Festival is produced by the Nisei Week Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, whose mission is to promote Japanese and Japanese American heritage and traditions while bringing together the diverse communities of Southern California through arts and cultural education.

The 2008 Nisei Week Japanese Festival takes place in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo District from August 16-24. For calendar of events and volunteer information on the 68th Nisei Week Festival, please log onto www.NiseiWeek.org or call the Nisei Week Foundation office at 213-687-7193. The Nisei Week office is located at 244 South San Pedro Street, Suite 303, Los Angeles, California, 90012.

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