



PRESS RELEASE

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DANA FUJIKO HEATHERTON CROWNED 2009 NISEI WEEK QUEEN

(Los Angeles – August 16, 2009) – The Nisei Week Foundation, one of the longest running ethnic festivals in the U.S., is excited to announce Dana Fujiko Heatherton, 24, was crowned the 69th Nisei Week Queen on Saturday, August 15 at the George & Sakaye Aratani Japan America Theatre in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo district. Heatherton, who represents the Pasadena Japanese Cultural Institute, was taken by surprise as she heard Master of Ceremonies David Ono, KABC-TV news anchor, and Mistress of Ceremonies Tamlyn Tomita, actor, announce her name. Marisa Saori Tamaru, West Los Angeles JACL and Venice Japanese Community Center representative, was crowned First Princess; and Nicole Kiyomi Masuda, Japanese American Living Legacy and The Loft Hawaiian Restaurant representative, was voted Miss Tomodachi (congeniality) by the six other candidates.

Her parents Linda Inouye and Dick Heatherton, in addition to the more than 100 friends and sponsors who were there to support her, were very excited and pleased by her being crowned. Heatherton is a compliance associate with The Capital Group, an investment management firm in Los Angeles. A graduate of the University of California, Los Angeles with a bachelor's degree in American literature and culture, Heatherton aspires to establish and run a Los Angeles history museum. She enjoys a variety of activities and hobbies including playing basketball, learning about Los Angeles history, traveling, and cooking. Already active in the Asian American community, she sits on the board of directors of the Little Tokyo Service Center and Asian Pacific Alumni of UCLA. The platform she has chosen this year is the LA84 Foundation.

In her speech, Heatherton spoke about her interest for the preservation of the Japanese American community, though she joked about her mixed race looking more "hakujiin" (Caucasian) like Conan O'Brien than Japanese like Kristi Yamaguchi. She believes the history of Little Tokyo is an integral part of Los Angeles history and one of the factors that led her to run for Nisei Week Queen. During the question and answer portion, when asked what attribute is important to be a member of the Nisei Week court, she stated that it's important to bring divergent groups of people together.

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HEATHERTON CROWNED 2009 QUEEN/2-2-2

The 2009 coronation was a spectacular show that was attended by more than 650 guests, who were on hand to cheer their favorite candidates. A Japanese dance performance by the candidates in kimono opened up the evening. They followed this by singing “Nada Sou Sou” in Japanese. The candidates also performed a “fun” dance number to “This is It!” and accompanied by Kaba Modern with guest appearances by Nisei Week President Terry Hara and other board of directors. The production was choreographed by Leslie Kawai and Tara Kawai. The candidates then came out in beautiful white evening gowns designed by Tadashi for the question and answer and final glimpse.

Singer Keiko Kawashima, who also was the candidates’ Japanese voice instructor, performed “Human Nature” and “I’ll Be There.” Additionally, 2008 Nisei Week Queen Jill Hiraizumi gave a fond farewell speech thanking all the community and Nisei Week support during the court’s most memorable year – through a special video presentation. The 2009 Nisei Week Coronation was presented by Keith Inatomi chair, Jerry Fukui and Mike Hirahara co-chairs, Steve Kikuchi, producer, Sumako Azuma, kimono number choreographer, Anjyu Azuma and Suzuyuri Azuma, assistant Kimono number choreographers, and Scott Nagatani, musical producer.

The Nisei Week’s queen committee director Michelle Suzuki coordinated the candidates’ three months of training and will oversee the next 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; Honolulu Cherry Blossom Festival; San Francisco Cherry Blossom Festival, and the Seattle Cherry Blossom Festival, among other events. Queen committee members include: co-chairs Helen Ota, Jennifer Ahn Yoshitake, Jennifer Yoshida, and Nikki Kodama. The 2009 Nisei Week court stylists were: hair styles provided by Michie Sujishi, make-up by Jennifer Yoshida, and coronation gown and another outfit created especially by fashion designer Tadashi. Michie Sujishi and Cathy Gali are the court’s kimono stylists.

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 to Little Tokyo. Though the coronation has changed enormously over the nearly seven decades since the first queen (during WWII, the festival did not take place), 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.

HEATHERTON CROWNED 2009 QUEEN/3-3-3

The 2009 Nisei Week court members are:

First Princess - Marisa Saori Tamaru (West Los Angeles Japanese American Citizens League and Venice Japanese Community Center)

Marisa Saori Tamaru is 25 years old and graduated from the University of Southern California with a bachelor's degree in psychology and East Asian languages and cultures. She enjoys running, sampling different cuisines, hiking with her dog, and spending time with her family and friends. Tamaru has chosen the Alzheimer's Association to support as her platform.

Miss Tomodachi - Nicole Kiyomi Masuda (Japanese American Living Legacy and The Loft Hawaiian Restaurant)

Nicole Kiyomi Masuda is 22 years old and received her bachelor's degree in mathematics from California State University, Channel Islands. In her spare time she enjoys playing and watching sports, especially the Dodgers, camping, shopping, solving sudoku puzzles and spending time with family and friends. She has selected the Children's Cancer Research Fund as her platform.

Jennifer Yoko Akamine (East San Gabriel Valley Japanese Community Center)

Jennifer Yoko Akamine is 24 years old and received her bachelor's degree in organizational communication from Pepperdine University in 2006. She is currently pursuing a double master's degree at Azusa Pacific University in college counseling and student development and violin performance. Her favorite pastimes include surfing, beach volleyball, running, attending operas and musicals, playing violin, reading, cooking, and international travel. She has selected the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking as her platform.

Michelle Yukari Hirose (Japanese Restaurant Association of America)

Michelle Yukari Hirose is 24 years old and currently attends California State Poly Polytechnic University, Pomona where she is studying communications. Some of Hirose's leisure activities and hobbies include watching movies, baking, volunteering at various community nonprofit organizations, educating people on the importance of the Japanese American community, trying new restaurants and spending time with family and friends. Her platform is Friends of TOMS.

Whitney Lee Itano (Orange County Nikkei Coordinating Council)

Whitney Lee Itano is 22 years old and recently graduated from the University of Hawaii of Manoa with a bachelor's degree in business administration. Born in Pasadena, Calif., she spends her free time playing basketball, going to the beach, reading, traveling, eating and shopping. Her platform is Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

Aimee Teruko Machida (Gardena Evening Optimist)

Aimee Teruko Machida is 22 years old and received her bachelor's degree in public health from the University of California, Irvine. Some of Machida's favorite pastimes include vocal and musical theater, dancing, playing the piano and the guitar, playing basketball and working with children. The platform Machida has chosen to support this year is the J.F. Shea Therapeutic Riding Center.

The 2009 Nisei Week Japanese Festival, a nine-day event first held in 1934 and is today one of the longest running ethnic festivals in the United States, will take place in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo district from August 15-23. For a calendar of events and volunteer information, log on to 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, CA 90012.

The Nisei Week Foundation was established in 1999 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to oversee and organize the Nisei Week Japanese Festival. The Foundation's 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.

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