



PRESS RELEASE

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2018 NISEI WEEK JAPANESE FESTIVAL GRAND PARADE

78th Annual Parade to be Led by Grand Marshal Vincent Okamoto, LA County Superior Court Judge, Decorated Vietnam Vet and Community Leader, and Parade Marshal Aaron Takahashi, Comedic Actor and Community Volunteer

LOS ANGELES – July 15, 2018 – The Nisei Week Foundation proudly hosts its 78th annual summer event with free cultural activities for all ages. The Nisei Week Japanese Festival features a Grand Parade as part of its first weekend of events, which will make its way through the streets of Little Tokyo on Sunday, August 12, starting at 4 p.m. The parade will be led by the 2018 Grand Marshal, Vincent Okamoto, Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge, Decorated Vietnam Vet and Community Leader, and Parade Marshal, Aaron Takahashi, comedic actor and long-time volunteer. The parade procession will start at Central Avenue and head west on 2nd Street, turning north on San Pedro Street, turning east on 1st Street, then turning south and ending on Central Avenue.

The Nisei Week Grand Parade will feature traditional Japanese taiko drum performers, local community groups, high schools, elected officials and representatives from Nagoya, Japan, Los Angeles' sister city, and the newly crowned 2018 Nisei Week queen and court.

Grand Marshal – The Honorable Vincent Okamoto

Vincent H. Okamoto was born in a federal internment camp during World War II; the 10th child and the seventh son born to Japanese immigrants. All six of his older brothers served in the U.S. military. The eldest two fought in Europe during World War II with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a racially segregated unit of Japanese Americans that went on to become the most decorated unit in the annals of US military history for its size and length of service. Another brother volunteered for the Marines and fought in the Korean War.

Okamoto graduated from the University of Southern California's School of International Relations in 1967. He received his commission as a 2nd Lieutenant of Infantry from UCLA ROTC, where he rose to the rank of Cadet Colonel, was the first Japanese American to command the Bruin Rangers and was designated Distinguished Military Graduate in 1967.

He completed officer infantry school, ranger school and airborne training at Fort Benning, Georgia, and served with the 82nd Airborne Division before volunteering for duty in the Republic of South Vietnam.

In Vietnam he served as an infantry platoon leader, company commander and intelligence officer. Wounded in action three times, he received 14 combat decorations that included the

Distinguished Service Cross, our nation's second highest award for valor in combat. His other decorations include the Silver Star, Bronze Star, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, Army Commendation and three Purple Hearts.

After three years of active duty, Okamoto left the Army with the rank of captain. He attended the University of Southern California School of Law and served as a Los Angeles County deputy district attorney for five years before entering private practice. Okamoto has been active in community and served on various boards and government. He was elected to the Gardena City Council, was on the founding board of the Japanese American Bar Association and served on the board of directors for the California Veterans Affairs Commission.

In addition, Okamoto was chairman of the budget and finance committee for Blue Cross of California, and a member of the Los Angeles County Vietnam Veterans Affairs Board. In 2000, he was selected as the Japanese Cultural Institute "Man of the Year."

In 2002 he was appointed by the governor to the California Superior Court. Judge Okamoto was designated UCLA ROTC Alumni Veteran of the Year in 2006. In 2007, he was inducted into the Army "Ranger Hall of Fame," the first Japanese American so honored since World War II.

In 2016, Judge Okamoto was named "Hero of America" by the American Veterans Center in Washington, DC. In 2017, he was featured in the Ken Burns documentary on the Vietnam War. He authored a novel about the Vietnam War, "Wolfhound Samurai," and wrote "Forged in Fire," a biography about Japanese American Medal of Honor recipient Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura. Judge Okamoto resides in Torrance, California.

Parade Marshal – Aaron Takahashi

Aaron Takahashi is a comedic actor. He is a former instructor, writer, core performing member, and current board of director of Cold Tofu, the nation's first Asian American improv and sketch comedy troupe. He was a Main Company member at ACME Comedy Theatre in Hollywood for sketch and improv, and has appeared on stage at several venues such as East West Players, GTC Burbank, and Fremont Centre Theatre.

Along with his multiple appearances as a featured player in comedic sketch segments on Conan O'Brien's late night shows, Takahashi has amassed numerous co-starring, guest starring and recurring roles on popular shows for CBS, NBC, ABC, FOX, Comedy Central, Netflix, TBS, and IFC, with perhaps his most notable credit being a recurring role on the award-winning USA Network series "Mr. Robot."

Takahashi is featured as a supporting lead actor in comedy blockbusters such as *Yes Man* (2008) opposite Jim Carrey, *Welcome to the Jungle* (2013) opposite Jean-Claude Van Damme, and *The Wedding Ringer* (2015) opposite Kevin Hart. He also appears in the critically acclaimed Asian American crime-drama *Better Luck Tomorrow* (2002), directed by Justin Lin.

However, Takahashi has arguably enjoyed the most success as a commercial actor, appearing in nearly 100 commercials, including multiple spots for Toyota, Dunkin' Donuts, Wendy's, McDonald's, Snapple, State Farm, Esurance, and Ebates. He occasionally teaches a commercial audition techniques workshop in the Los Angeles area.

Takahashi was born and raised in Gardena and Torrance. He is an Eagle Scout, and a graduate of the University of Southern California. He is proud of his heritage as a yonsei, or 4th generation Japanese American. His great-grandfather landed in San Francisco in 1896 and survived both the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and the Stock Market Crash of 1929. During World War II, Takahashi's father's family was incarcerated at the Tule Lake segregation center, and

eventually Heart Mountain relocation center, while his mother's family relocated to Salt Lake City, Utah, to live with a sympathetic sharecrop farmer.

Inspired by fellow Japanese American entertainers such as Tamlyn Tomita and Rodney Kageyama, who have always been so generous with their time when it comes to the community, Takahashi has emceed, hosted, or made guest appearances at several events for Asian American organizations such as East West Players, Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival, Project by Project, So-Phis, A3M, Japanese Chamber of Commerce of Southern California (JCCSC), The Asian Professional Exchange (APEX), Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment (CAPE), Kollaboration, Straight Outta Little Tokyo (benefiting the Terasaki Budokan), LA Chinatown Firecracker Run/Walk & Bike Ride, USC Asian Pacific Alumni Association, Asian Pacific Alumni of UCLA, My Wish List Foundation, Go For Broke National Education Center, and, of course, the Nisei Week Foundation.

Takahashi's involvement with Nisei Week began in the early 1990s, when his fraternity sold teriyaki chicken at the Nisei Week Carnival. Since 2002, he has been involved with Nisei Week Coronation, either as a performer or backstage assistant. He was one of the first to bring life to Aki the Akita, Nisei Week's official mascot, in its inaugural year, 2005. In 2007, Takahashi participated as a judge for the Nisei Week Baby Pageant. The following year, he assumed the duties of Master of Ceremonies, and has emceed every Baby Show since. He has also served as emcee for the Nisei Week Hospitality Committee Luau and the Tanabata Festival, co-chaired the Karaoke Contest, and on numerous occasions been an announcer for the Grand Parade.

The 2018 Nisei Week Japanese Festival is a nine-day event first held in 1934, and is recognized today as one of the longest running ethnic festivals in the United States. This event will take place in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo district from August 11-19. For a calendar of events, log on to www.NiseiWeek.org, call the Nisei Week Foundation office at 213.687.7193 or email info@niseiweek.org. The Nisei Week office is located at 244 South San Pedro Street, Suite 303, Los Angeles, CA 90012.

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