



*PRESS RELEASE*

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**79th ANNUAL NISEI WEEK JAPANESE FESTIVAL  
FOUR PIONEER SPIRIT HONOREES ANNOUNCED**

**LOS ANGELES – July 14, 2019** – The Nisei Week Foundation is excited to announce the 2019 Nisei Week Pioneer Spirit honorees who will be recognized during the 79th annual Nisei Week Japanese Festival (August 10-18) in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo. The four Pioneer Spirit Award recipients are highly serving and are dedicated leaders of the greater Los Angeles Japanese American community. They will be honored at a special 2019 Pioneer Spirit Luncheon to be held at the Doubletree by Hilton Hotel (120 S. Los Angeles Street, Los Angeles) on Wednesday, August 14 at 12 noon. Tickets are \$70 per person or \$700 per table of 10 and can be obtained by calling the Nisei Week Foundation office at 213.687.7193 or by emailing [office@niseiweek.org](mailto:office@niseiweek.org).

The 2019 Nisei Week Pioneer Spirit Honorees are:

**Kenneth K. Inouye – Nominated by the Orange County Nikkei Coordinating Council**

Born in Alamosa, Colo., Kenneth K. Inouye is the only son of George Inouye and Betty (Coddington). Inouye moved to California at an early age with his family, including his older sister Marie (Petrie). He attended public schools in Los Angeles' Crenshaw district and graduated from California State University, Los Angeles with a degree in accounting.

Inouye's involvement in the Japanese American community spans more than four decades. He served as a member of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) at the national level (national president, vice president for public affairs, and Pacific Citizen editorial board chair), district level (district governor, treasurer, and board member) and chapter level (Southeast Los Angeles/North Orange County [SELANOCO] chapter president and board member). Inouye was volunteer chief financial officer of the Go For Broke National Education Center and board member of the Orange Coast Optimist Club (OCO), South East Youth Organization (SEYO), Orange County Nikkei Coordinating Council (OCNCC), and Orange County Japanese American Association (OCJAA). One of his favorite adventures was serving as co-coach of the "gritty" OCO girls basketball team, known as the "California Girls."

In addition, Inouye has had the privilege and honor of serving numerous community building and social justice organizations, including the Southern California affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). He is a co-founder of the Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance (OCAPICA), founding president of the Huntington Beach Human Relations Task Force, and

member/chair of the Orange County Human Relations Commission. Currently, he is president of the Orange County Human Relations Council. Inouye was also a member and president of the California Association of Human Relations Organizations (CAHRO) and member of the Orange County Sheriff's Community Advisory Board.

Inouye served on JACL's national board when the Japanese American community sought "redress" and reparations from the U.S. government for the illegal internment of 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry following the outbreak of World War II. The successful quest for redress taught him that you can campaign and secure victory for a just cause provided "justice is on your side." It was this success that motivated him to campaign for civil and human rights and social justice for other organizations and people.

His continued efforts in advocating for the human and civil rights of all the people living in the community is an acknowledgement that "freedom is not free." It takes many people to make sure America continues to live up to its promise of being the "greatest country in the history of the world," a country where all are welcomed and treated with respect.

He acknowledges his ability to spend time volunteering with various community groups was made possible by the unwavering support of his wife May (Kondo), three daughters, Nicole, Erin, and Shannon, and their families. He is very proud of their strong sense of community and he continually learns life lessons from all of them. Inouye hopes to help leave a legacy of a respectful Orange County and America to his community, including his grandchildren, Amelia, Grace, David, and Langston.

#### **Shinkichi Koyama - Nominated by the Southern California Gardeners' Federation, Inc.**

Shinkichi Koyama was born in Nihonmatsu City, Fukushima Prefecture, Japan, on December 7, 1934. He relocated to California with his wife, Fumiko and two children in 1968 to help his mother who was running a boarding house at the time. Shortly after, he became a landscaping gardener and still continues this work today. Throughout his 50-year career in landscaping and gardening, he has been very active with the Japanese American community, dedicating many hours volunteering for several organizations.

From 1983-1984, he was director of the Sawtelle Gakuen Japanese School and was president of the Bay City Gardeners Association from 1996-1997. He was president of the Southern California Fukushima Kenjinkai from 1996 - 1998 and helped organize a fundraiser to preserve the historical landmark, "Okei no Haka (Grave of Okei)." Okei, who was born in Aizu Wakamatsu City was the very first Japanese immigrant to the United States. Koyama also helped create a bond between the United States and Japan by escorting members of the Fukushima Kenjinkai to Aizu Wakamatsu to do a swordplay performance in front of the gravesite of the Byakko-tai Troop.

Koyama served as the president of the Southern California Gardeners' Federation from 2006-2008, spearheading many projects to assist the aging membership. He helped to increase the federation's income by renovating the federation building and conducting various seminars for the Japanese American community. He also helped publish the "Gardener Pioneer Story," which shares the stories and history of Japanese American gardeners.

In 2008, Koyama received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Fukushima Prefecture Governor Yuhei Sato, for his work and dedication to create a commemorative publication on the 100 year history (1908-2008) of the Fukushima Kenjinkai, and for his contributions to improve the welfare and development for those who immigrated from Fukushima to the United States.

He received the Ryoku Hakuju Yukou Sho Award in 2009 from Southern California Chapter of Japan Agriculture Society (Dai Nippon Nokai Nanka Shikai) for his dedication to the gardening industry, work with the Southern California Gardeners' Federation, contributions to strengthening US-Japan ties, and for his volunteer work within the Japanese American community.

The Consul General of Japan honored Koyama in 2014 for his dedication and support of the Japanese American community through his work with the Southern California Gardeners' Federation, preservation of historical cultural assets, and for his volunteerism with various Japanese American community organizations. He was president of the Southern California Showa-kai from 2013-2014.

In 2015, Koyama received the Kyoku Jitsu Soko Award (the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays Award) from the Emperor of Japan for his many years of service to the Japanese American community.

Koyama is still very involved with the Japanese American community and currently is the president of the Southern California Chapter of Japan Agriculture Society, and an advisor for the Southern California Gardeners' Federation and Southern California Fukushima Kenjinkai.

#### **Deen Matsuzawa - Nominated by the Orange County Nikkei Coordinating Council (posthumously)**

Deen Matsuzawa was born in Yamanishi ken, Japan, to Atsushi Thomas Matsuzawa and Kazue Matsuno. Immediately after Matsuzawa was born, the family moved to Tokyo, then Osaka and finally to Kobe before returning in 1930 to the United States. Upon returning, the family first moved to Oakland, Calif., then lived in Honeyville, Utah; Brawley, Calif., and finally settled in Gardena, Calif.

In 1942, during World War II, Matsuzawa and his family were evacuated to the Santa Anita Assembly Center, then sent to the Rohwer, Arkansas War Relocation Center. In the weeks before the family was sent to the relocation center, Matsuzawa remembered his father was taken from the family in Gardena by the FBI for questioning. During his internment in Rohwer, Matsuzawa completed middle school and graduated high school in Cincinnati.

Matsuzawa attended Northwestern University in Illinois for one year and then transferred to Miami University of Ohio where he completed a degree in business administration. Upon graduation, Matsuzawa moved back to Gardena and was drafted in the army during the Korean War. Matsuzawa completed his basic training at Fort Ord, Calif., then sent to Korea and participated in the Battle at Inchon, which resulted in the recapture of the capital of Seoul.

Although Matsuzawa was trained as an infantryman, he was soon transferred to a military intelligence unit when it was discovered he was proficient in Japanese, Korean, and partially in the Chinese language. This ability aided his unit to interrogate North Korean prisoners. During his service, Matsuzawa was awarded a Bronze Star and received his United States citizenship with his honorable discharge.

An extremely active member of the Nikkei community, Matsuzawa participated with many community organizations. He served as president of the Suburban Optimist Club of Buena Park from 1984-1985 and remained on the board of directors and performed the duties of chaplain for many years thereafter.

He was commander of the Kazuo Masuda Memorial Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3670 in 1992 - 1993. Matsuzawa served on the board of directors and was the active post chaplain for more than 30 years. He was an active board member of the Japanese American Korean War Veterans organization and performed chaplain duties for 23 years.

Among the many organizations he helped, Matsuzawa was proud of being a charter board member of the Astronaut Ellison S. Onizuka Memorial Committee. He also served as athletic commissioner for the South East Youth Organization (SEYO) baseball leagues from 1966 - 1970 and scout master for a Boy Scout troop in Orange County.

Matsuzawa was always an active and faithful member of the Wintersburg Presbyterian Church in Santa Ana, Calif., until his passing on February 2, 2019.

### **Yoshihiro Uchida - Nominated by the Orange County Nikkei Coordinating Council**

Yoshihiro Uchida has given so much for the sport of judo and in the Japanese American community. Uchida was one of two people that had the foresight to change judo, a martial art, into a weight class system with different weight divisions, therefore allowing judo to be practiced by anyone. His efforts helped spread judo nationwide throughout the collegiate circle, and established judo as a sport in the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU).

Uchida started doing judo at the age of 10 because his parents wanted him to learn more about his Japanese culture. In Japanese school at the time, boys could choose one sport: judo, sumo, or kendo. Uchida chose judo, as did his brother George, who also became internationally renowned as a judo coach.

When the Uchida family was incarcerated in the Poston and Tule Lake internment camps, the young Uchida was drafted during World War II and sent to military camps in the Midwest. Upon serving four years and returning to San Jose after the war, he resumed his studies at San Jose State University (SJSU), graduating in 1947 with a degree in biological science. He continued teaching judo and helped to set up a judo program on campus.

The first National AAU championships were hosted by SJSU in 1953, when Uchida was tournament director. He was able to qualify judo as a sport in the Olympics and was the first U.S. Olympic judo coach in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. In 1970, he was appointed to President Nixon's Physical Fitness and Sports Advisory Council. Uchida inducted into the USA Judo Hall of Fame. In 2002, he was an Olympic torch bearer, representing the city of San Jose.

He earned numerous prestigious awards and accomplishments because of judo. He was the Silver Medallion winner of Nisei of the Biennium from the National JACL in 1964-1966. In 1986, he was awarded the Order of the Sacred Treasure, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon, presented by the Emperor of Japan. In 1991, he was appointed representative to Japan by the American Conference of Mayors and Chamber of Commerce President Sendai. Other awards include: Freedom Award from Asian Americans for Community Involvement (AACI) in 1992, and Kodomo no Tame Ni award from the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) in 1993, and Japanese American of the Biennium awarded by National JACL in 1994. In 1997, SJSU honored Uchida by renaming the Spartan Complex to Yoshihiro Uchida Hall and he was inducted into the athletic Hall of Fame in 1999.

In addition, Uchida has been involved in the Japanese American community. In 1996, he founded the Japanese American Chamber of Commerce of Silicon Valley (JACCSV) and currently serves as chairman of the advisory board. He has been the chairman emeritus of the board of trustees of the Japanese American National Museum (JANM), and the chairman of the JACL advisory board. He started the San Jose Nihonmachi Corp, which worked on the Miraido Village project or Road to the Future, focused on the revitalization of the city's Japantown.

Uchida believes judo as a discipline also has a philosophical element, emphasizing the strong cultural values of respect, discipline, and responsibility. The word “ju” pertains to gentle physical development, and “do” means a road; so “judo” is the road to gentle development of character that gives confidence and humbleness to an individual.

The 2019 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 10-18. For a calendar of events, log on to [www.NiseiWeek.org](http://www.NiseiWeek.org), call the Nisei Week Foundation office at 213.687.7193 or email [info@niseiweek.org](mailto: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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