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JAS CONNECTIONS

Spring 2012

News and Information for Members and Friends
of the Japan America Society of Southern California



A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Last year was one of the Japan America Society's most successful ever, as well as one of our busiest. It was largely dominated by the March 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake that caused horrific destruction and loss of life that is still difficult to comprehend. The events on this date and the immediate actions JAS took to serve in a leadership role as a trusted information source, helping people locate loved ones, and creating and managing our 2011 Japan Relief Fund required the full focus of our board, our staff and our members and donors. Thanks to your unprecedented and heartfelt outpouring of support, we

have surpassed \$1.4 million in funds raised that both helped with immediate humanitarian relief and will continue to assist with long-term recovery of the devastated areas of Tohoku.

As we approach the first anniversary of Japan's greatest natural disaster, JAS will continue to serve by supporting many memorial events taking place in Southern California. Additionally, now that rebuilding is gathering momentum in the devastated regions of Tohoku, our 2011 Japan Relief Fund committee is carefully examining rebuilding initiatives and reconstruction projects

for consideration to receive additional tranches from the 2011 Japan Relief Fund. We will continue to provide updates on this important process through future issues of JAS Connections.

Turning the focus back to JAS's mission on this side of the Pacific, our board recently held a strategic planning retreat to develop long-term plans to build on JAS strengths and that aim to provide more benefits for our membership. I am pleased to announce one of these benefits is the rollout of our new online



*Douglas G. Erber
President*

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GALA ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

JAS PLANS 103RD ANNIVERSARY DINNER & GALA CELEBRATION

The JAS Anniversary Dinner Committee's co-chairs, Tammie Kanda of Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc., and Deputy Chief Terry Hara of the Los Angeles Police Department, are pleased to announce the 103rd Anniversary Dinner & Gala Celebration will take place on the evening of Friday, June 15, 2012, in the Center Ballroom of the *Disneyland*[®] Hotel.

"We are pleased to honor **The Walt Disney Company** in recognition of more than 80 years of helping

strengthen the relationship between Japan and the United States through animation, film, television, educational programs and the world's most beloved theme parks," said Tammie Kanda.

"The Gala's theme is 'Friends Helping Friends' to honor and pay tribute to the service personnel who participated in **Operation Tomodachi**, one of the greatest collaborations of Japanese and United States forces to provide immediate humanitarian assistance

for thousands of victims of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami," said Terry Hara.

The entire evening will be filled with special opportunities, including a once-in-a-lifetime chance to enjoy *Disneyland*[®] Park exclusive **Club 33**, a private, members-only fine dining club that is filled with Disney magic that can only be experienced in person. Club 33 was created by Walt Disney as a unique, five-star venue for VIP visitors to the theme park, including prime



ministers, presidents, movie stars and royalty. The Club is secretly located within the *Disneyland*[®] Park.

And there is more... Through a very generous donation by Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc., JAS also will present an opportunity drawing for a **2012 LEXUS CT 200h**, the hottest-selling hybrid vehicle in the Lexus product line (Lexus is a division of Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.). The opportunity drawing will take place during the 103rd Anniversary Dinner & Gala. Winner need not be present to

win, and information to enter will be posted on the JAS website.

JAS has developed a reputation for holding its anniversary galas in fun and unique venues, including the playing field of Dodger Stadium, under the wings of Air Force One, at the World Cruise Terminal, inside Club Nokia at LA LIVE, South Coast Plaza and in the courtyard of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. We are pleased this year to be at the *Disneyland*[®] Hotel, which first opened in 1955 as the place to be and be seen. Now

more than 50 years later, the hotel that started it all is back, and re-imagined for a new millennium. Combining mid-century cool with modern luxury, the re-imagined *Disneyland*[®] Hotel sets the standard for sophistication and inspiration.

For more information about the 103rd Anniversary Dinner & Gala, including attractive sponsorship opportunities and the chance to visit Club 33, please visit www.jas-socal.org or call 213-627-6217, ext. 207. ■



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

[continued from cover]

membership directory. As this issue's article outlines, information about this exciting feature to our website will be distributed to all JAS members, and I invite you to take advantage of the online membership directory to further increase the relationship-building opportunities JAS provides to our active members and supporters.

The article above shares the exciting plans for our 103rd Anniversary Dinner & Gala Celebration, which will be held at the *Disneyland*[®] Hotel on Friday, June 15, 2012. We are pleased to honor The Walt Disney Company in recognition of its 80-plus years of helping strengthen the relationship between the people of Japan and the United States. We also will

recognize and honor the Japanese and American service personnel who participated in Operation Tomodachi, which provided critical and immediate humanitarian relief to thousands of victims of last year's earthquake in Japan. I hope you will join us for this special gala, as well as the many other programs we will present this year.

Finally, JAS is pleased to support the many events celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the gifting of cherry trees from the people of Japan to the United States. The 3,000 cherry trees donated to Washington, D.C., in 1911, have become one of the hallmarks of our nation's capital, as well as a poignant symbol of the strong friendship between Japan

and the United States (you saw them on page 1). You are invited to visit the JAS website to learn more about this historic centennial and the commemorative events taking place in Southern California.

Please enjoy this spring 2012 issue of JAS Connections, and on behalf of the JAS board and staff, I thank you for your ongoing strong support for the Japan America Society of Southern California. ■

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Doug Erber'.

Douglas G. Erber
President

CORPORATE MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

KIRIN BREWERY OF AMERICA, LLC



June Yamamura, product manager, and Takafumi Yamada, VP sales, Kirin Brewery of America with Kirin President Randy Higa.



Since its establishment in 1996, Kirin Brewery of America, LLC (KBA), has been working to expand the presence and sales of Kirin Beer across North America. A wholly owned subsidiary of Kirin Brewery Co., Ltd, Tokyo, KBA is based in Torrance, Calif., and conducts sales and marketing activities for Kirin Ichiban and Kirin Light beer brands across the continent.

KBA has a longstanding partnership with the U.S. beer market leader

Anheuser-Busch InBev (ABI), whereby ABI brews, distributes, and sells Kirin Ichiban and Kirin Light Beers throughout its network in the U.S. Los Angeles is currently the largest metro market for Kirin Beers in the U.S., followed by New York, Honolulu, San Francisco, and Phoenix. Kirin Beers are now available in all 50 U.S. states, as well as Canada and Mexico, and sales continue to expand as interest has grown in Japanese and

Asian culture and cuisine. On that note, Kirin's latest product entry in the U.S. market is Kirin Free, which is a completely alcohol-free beer taste beverage. With its innovative 0.00% alcohol content and rich beertaste, Kirin Free has become a big hit in Japan since introduced there in 2009. KBA just began test marketing Kirin Free in Southern California in Oct. 2011, and hopes to expand sales to other key U.S. markets in 2012. ■

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

DEPUTY CHIEF EMILE MACK

LOS ANGELES FIRE DEPARTMENT



Left: Mack and Hiromoto (JAS chairman) aboard the LAFD fireboat at the Port of Los Angeles.

Top, middle: Emile Mack as a young boy with his father Clarence Mack in Los Angeles.

Top, right: Emile and Jenny Mack with daughter Miya.

Bottom: Emile Mack with former California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and other local officials at the scene of a 2008 brush fire in Sylmar.

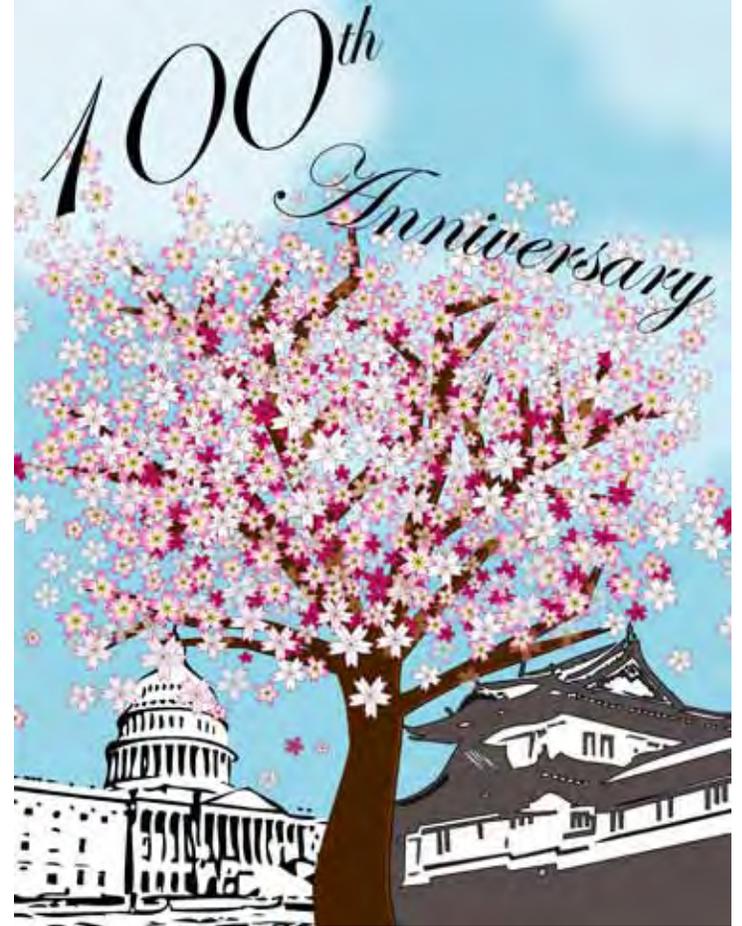
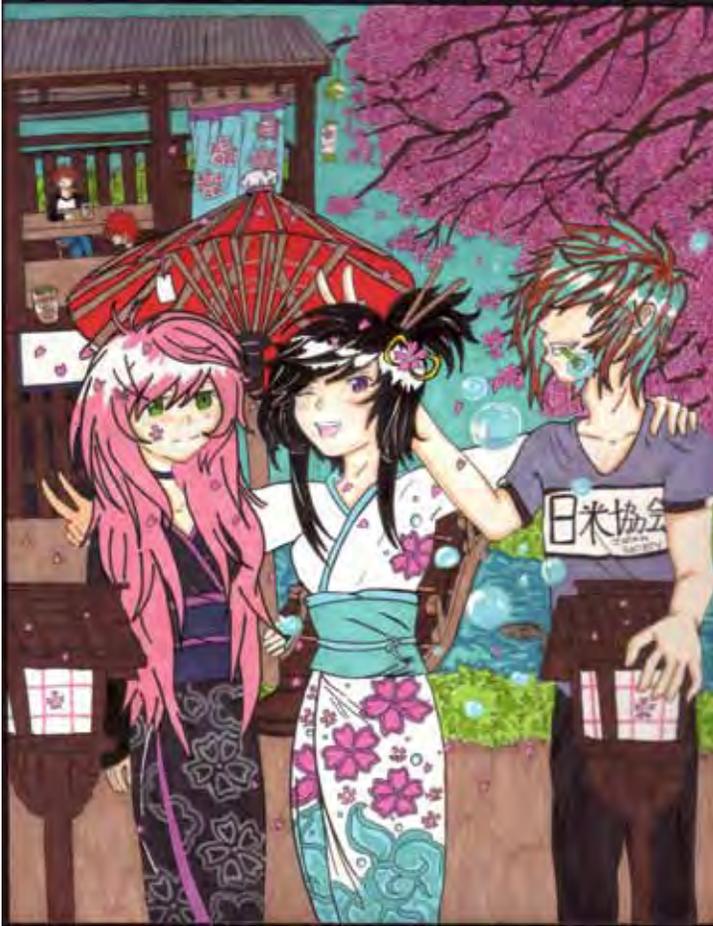
The City of Los Angeles is proud of its firefighters and JAS is proud of its board of directors. Meet board member Deputy Chief Emile Mack of the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD). Not only is the Emile Mack the highest-ranking Asian American firefighter of a major American city, his life story is one that is sure to inspire.

Emile Mack grew up in a unique household. After being abandoned at a South Korean police station as a baby, he was adopted at age three by an African-American couple, Clarence and Undine Mack. With his new family, Emile lived and grew up in the Crenshaw area of Los Angeles. As Emile grew a little older, he sensed that his Korean background made him stand out in his family. Yet, the difference between Emile and his parents or his siblings never bothered him, and Emile thrived happily in the love and care of his family and friends amidst his African-American culture.

After serving on the LAFD for more than 30 years and overseeing 4,000 firefighters, Emile Mack is now one of the most highly respected officials in the city. Among his many accomplishments, Emile created the LAFD 20-year strategic master plan, and led numerous city, county, and regional government agencies to work with non-profit organizations in its preparation for Katrina evacuees. He directed LAFD's emergency medical services during the health care crisis and is a governor appointee of the California State Board of Fire Services. Emile's characteristics of leadership, determination, kindness, and fairness have garnered great loyalty and dedication among his fellow firefighters. His upbringing in a multi-national environment has surely benefited his insight in the racially diverse city of Los Angeles. "There is also no doubt that Emile's enriching experience growing up and his positive

outlook on life has touched all those who know him," said Nancy Woo Hiromoto, chairman, JAS.

Recently, Emile and his Japanese-American wife, Jenny, adopted a baby girl, Miya, from South Korea. "When I was younger, I always said, I'm going to adopt," said Mack. "As I got older, I started understanding what my life could have been like had I not been adopted, and appreciating what my parents gave me; it went from wanting to adopt just because I had been adopted, to wanting to do what my parents had done for me for a child in Korea." It is a dream come true for Emile Mack. JAS is proud to have this outstanding citizen and extraordinary role model to help guide the organization. "Like my life of connections and bonds between so many diverse aspects of the world we live in," said Mack, "JAS works tirelessly to build the bridges for the Japanese community with our greater world." ■



SAKURA MANGA POSTER CONTEST MARKS CENTENNIAL

MORE THAN 60 SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA STUDENTS SUBMIT COLORFUL ENTRIES

The year 2012 marks the 100th anniversary of the gift of cherry trees (Sakura) from the people of Japan to the people of the United States. Planted in Washington, D.C., these cherry trees have become a symbol of both Washington, D.C., and the warm and important bi-lateral relationship between Japan and the United States.

On the occasion of this centennial, the Japan America Society of Southern California reached out to high school students to increase the understanding and appreciation of Japan and Japanese culture, and to deepen the bonds of friendship between Japanese and Americans through a SAKURA manga poster contest. The students submitted “Sakura” themed, manga (cartoon) style posters, computer generated or free hand. The contest also helped

increase students’ awareness of the history and importance of the relationship between Japan and the United States.

“Cherry Blossoms are a symbol of warmth and care, and we have the pleasure to enjoy them every year and to remind ourselves of an important friend, Japan,” says Michelle Huang, a senior at Arcadia High School, winner of the computer generated category. She added, “This beautiful relationship will bloom even more as time goes on. I am glad my work presented the essence of the two combined cultures.”

Tiana Wright, a junior at Patrick Henry High School in San Diego, winner of the free hand category said, “I feel that the cherry blossom trees represent the greatest symbolism of friendship between Japan and the United States. I’m

honored to be able to achieve being a part of such an important event.”

Judges include Douglas Erber, president, JAS; Nancy Woo Hiromoto, chairman, JAS; the Honorable Jun Niimi, consul general, Consulate-General of Japan in Los Angeles; Hideo Sakata, artist, Terakoya Gallery; Ted Tokio Tanaka, principal, Ted Tokio Tanaka Architects; and Dave Tuites, executive director, Japan Society of San Diego and Tijuana.

The SAKURA Manga Poster Contest is part of the Japan - U.S. Cherry Blossom Centennial, co-sponsored by the Japan America Society of Southern California and the Consulate-General of Japan in Los Angeles, and supported by the Japan Foundation - Los Angeles and the Japan Society of San Diego and Tijuana. ■



CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION
OF THE GIFT OF TREES

TRAVELING EXHIBIT SCHEDULE

The artwork will be on display for the public to enjoy and learn about the bi-lateral relationship through cherry blossoms. For detailed exhibit schedule, visit www.jas-socal.org

- ✿ Sun., Feb. 12 to Sun., Feb. 26, in Little Tokyo at Terakoya Gallery
- ✿ Sat., March 3 to Sun., March 11, in Irvine at Irvine Yamaha Music Center
- ✿ Fri., March 16 to Sun., March 18, in San Diego at Anime Conji San Diego Anime Convention
- ✿ Tue., March 27 to Sat., April 7, in Torrance at Sushi Chef Institute
- ✿ Fri., April 20 to Mon., April 30, in Downtown LA at Japan Information and Cultural Center at the Consulate-General of Japan in Los Angeles
- ✿ West LA – Location and Schedule will be announced soon

View detailed exhibit schedule at www.jas-socal.org or call 213-627-6217, ext. 207.



GETTING TO KNOW

CONSUL GENERAL JUN NIIMI



Q: You arrived in Los Angeles nearly one-half year ago. What have been your first impressions of Southern California and its people?

A: I would describe my first impression of Southern California and its people as “light,” “open,” and “vibrant.” I think this is due to the Southern Californian climate (the sunlight and the blue sky) and also the great sense of ethnic diversity throughout the area.

Q: As we approach the one-year anniversary of Japan’s worst natural disaster, what are your reflections and what does the future hold for Tohoku?

A: When the earthquake occurred, I was working in my office at the ministry. The entire executive staff had met in the minister’s office and was consulting over certain measures. When the situation regarding the tsunami was shown on the television, everyone in the room was speechless. When I think of the people who lost their lives, I cannot help but grieve. Even in the face of a natural disaster, the people of Japan have done their best at every turn and have made a strong recovery. The reconstruction in Tokyo after the Great Kanto Earthquake is a good example of this. I do not doubt that the Tohoku area as well will thrive after this and become a region well prepared for natural disasters.

Q: Since 1978, the annual foreign relations poll issued by Japan’s cabinet office has revealed that a majority of Japanese have feelings of friendship toward the United States. Last December, this majority hit a record level of

84%. To what do you attribute this positive increase?

A: I think there are two main reasons for the positive increase. One is the tremendous and warm support extended to Japan from the U.S. after the earthquake and tsunami. Additionally, we received support and relief efforts from the U.S. government on a very big scale. For example, U.S. military forces joined Japanese Ground Self Defense Forces to conduct “Operation Tomodachi” to provide immediate help to Japanese affected by the disaster. We are very grateful to the assistance and support from the United States.

The second reason is the unstable situation in Northeast Asia, particularly the threats from North Korea and China’s military expansion. The Japanese people are encouraged by President Obama and Secretary Clinton’s reassurances of the U.S. commitment to support Asia and the Far East.

Q: You have served the Foreign Ministry in important posts around the world. Can you share one of the most challenging issues you have faced? Additionally, can you share one of your most memorable experiences?

A: Perhaps the most challenging issue was the implementation of overseas voting for Japanese nationals in 2000. That year, for the first time in Japan’s history,

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Employers Group is proud to be working with the JASSC to provide its members an opportunity to relieve significant challenges and burdens of today's regulatory-filled environment. It brings more than a century of experience and knowledge in protecting and supporting companies year round. Workforce dynamics and the role of a human resources professional have shifted drastically over the past 30 years. Gone are the days of personnel departments being simply overhead expenses. Human resources are now charged with playing a strategic role in protecting the organization from industry and regulatory compliance issues that permeate every aspect of operations today in addition to managing perpetual change from an economic rollercoaster to never-ending investment for performance improvement and protecting workforce vitality and retention.



Just as the Japan America Society aims to serve the needs of individuals and businesses with Japanese heritage (stateside and abroad), Employers Group has established programs to support its members in the challenges human resources faces today. We have first-hand experience partnering with hundreds of Japan-based businesses for more than 100 years, helping them navigate through the legal, regulatory, operational and cultural barriers of doing business in California and across the United States.

We provide a significant discount for membership in Employers Group to JASSC members. A membership with Employers Group gives companies the peace of mind and security knowing they have a trusted advisor on their team to help them plan and execute a strategic approach to workforce management. Employers Group's experience was cultivated in California – one of the most litigious environments

for employment law. With our 115 years of company-focused expertise, we have taken our knowledge and know-how beyond the borders of the golden state to partner with organizations with offices located across the United States and around the world.

In addition to our core membership benefits, Employers Group also works side-by-side with businesses to intelligently design and successfully implement workforce training initiatives, compensation and benefit budgeting, and a variety of on-demand human resources services (such as leaves of absence administration, interim staffing, HR audits, etc.). Seasoned helpline consultants are on call to answer any troubling workplace issues, so companies can mitigate risk and reduce costly fees due to non-compliance.

For more information on Employers Group and how its team can best serve the needs of your business – here in the United States or abroad – **please visit www.employersgroup.com or call 800-748-8484.** ■

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we conducted overseas voting on the occasion of the election of House of Councilors, or Upper House. I was then serving as the director of the consular and immigration office, the division in charge of overseas voting. We were very concerned about the successful implementation of overseas voting; fortunately, we had no serious issues or difficulties and we were very pleased with the process.

Most memorable experience: I have many fond and unforgettable memories, but one thing I would

like to share is an experience while serving in Iran. At the time, there were qualifying matches for the World Cup Soccer. To qualify, the Iranian and Japanese teams had to play against each other, and Japan managed to win and qualify. Soon after, Iran had to play Australia to win the last spot to join the World Cup, and Iran managed to win and qualify.

What I would like to stress is that when Japan beat Iran, our embassy was worried about possible harassment or violence against Japanese nationals

residing in Iran. However, nothing happened. In fact, I was congratulated by all my Iranian friends and I really appreciated the good sportsmanship exhibited by the Iranian people. Additionally, when Iran beat Australia and qualified for the World Cup, the Iranian people entered the streets and started to dance and cheer. It was overwhelming to see the joy of the Iranian people, a sight I could not have imagined beforehand.

Q: Over the past few years, we have seen a decline in the number of

U.S. students studying Japanese and the number of Japanese students studying English. What can we do to help encourage more interest among our students to study each others' languages?

A: Historically, I think there have been two strong reasons for Americans to study Japanese. The first is to seek a career working with Japanese or in a Japanese company. Another reason has been a strong interest in Japanese culture, especially "Cool Japan" aspects such as *anime*, *manga*, and *J-Pop* music. I think one way to encourage young people to study Japanese is to develop expanded support for Japanese language schools and related facilities. It is not easy because of Japan's slowed economy, but it is my hope the Japanese government might be able to extend greater support for Japanese language schools in the U.S. Also, it feels like Japanese businesses carrying out their appointments of the

American executive staff more actively at the local corporate and branch level is very important.

As for the study of English language by Japanese students, I don't think the number has declined very much. English is a compulsory subject in Japanese schools, beginning at the elementary school level though high school. Recently, at job interviews, a candidate's Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) score has become an important element for hiring considerations.

But there absolutely has been a decline of Japanese students studying English in the U.S., which is due to several reasons. For example, securing a job in Japan is becoming increasingly difficult, so college students have been concentrating their job search at an early stage. So, to study abroad for a period of time may be a disadvantage nowadays.

To help reverse this trend,

the Japanese government should consider scholarships for Japanese youth willing to study abroad. Also, Japanese universities should consider accepting class credits earned at U.S. universities so students can still graduate after studying three years in a Japanese university and one year in a U.S. university. In the business sector, Japanese companies should consider hiring more Japanese graduates who have studied abroad.

Q: What business and cultural outreach programs and activities will the Consulate General of Japan be supporting in the months ahead?

A: The Consulate is constantly promoting and co-presenting many cultural and related events with other organizations, including the Japan America Society. As a strong example, this year marks the centennial anniversary of the gift of cherry blossom trees from Japan to the United States; these

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JAS INTRODUCES NEW ONLINE MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY

We are pleased to announce the new JAS Online Membership Directory -- one of the most requested benefits of membership -- is now available on the JAS website. JAS members, whose annual memberships are up-to-date, are invited to access this new membership-exclusive website feature to begin enjoying its many features and benefits.

Specifically, the online membership directory allows you to easily and conveniently contact other JAS members and build your business and social networking relationships. You also will be able to update your personal profile and select the contact information you would like to share with other

JAS members, similar to other social networking services.

"One of the nicest features is that JAS members can select what contact information they would like to share, and even opt out of being included in the directory altogether," says JAS programs director Kay Amano. Amano added, "The online membership directory offers comprehensive privacy and security controls that are easy to use."

JAS has a strict privacy policy and does not share members' contact information with third parties without the prior consent from each JAS member. So, your contact information will remain private unless, and until, each member

visits his/her personal record on the online directory and chooses to make his/her contact information available to other JAS members or to all visitors to the JAS website.

Kay Amano cited, "A convenient 'Search' option will allow you to find other JAS members who have opted to share their information." An "Advanced Search" feature will allow you to precisely select and filter records by specifying one or more criteria such as regions or industries.

If you would like more information on how to obtain your login information or receive additional support, please call Kay Amano, programs director, at (213) 627-6217, ext. 207, or email at amano@jas-socal.org. ■

TOM PLATE, LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR, PROVIDES COMMENTARY

Loyola Marymount University (LMU) was the host of JAS' U.S. – Japan Green Conference last May. At this conference, attendees discovered many new things about LMU, including LMU's remarkable environmental program and its students' recent success in placing in a high-profile nationwide green competition. JAS was pleased to learn that LMU also has begun to formally engage in Asian studies led by Professor Tom Plate.

Japan has been on the cutting edge in so many ways – and this is not always appreciated. Take the issue of educational innovation.

In 1999 – the famous NHK, Japan's national public broadcasting corporation, offered to finance a major experiment at UCLA. Employing advanced TV-cable technology, including a state-of-the-art voice-activated TV camera, a virtual classroom was created in a physics building there. UCLA's educational partner in Japan was Kyoto University, one of Asia's best. The course I had created at UCLA – “An Introduction to the Media and Politics of Asia” – was one of three selected for the experiment. The selection committee was chaired by Wyatt R. Hume, then UCLA's executive vice chancellor.

The social-science course was a rousing success. Sixty students at UCLA (where I taught until 2008) and forty in Kyoto met for two hours once a week and ranged through topics from China's media system to the role of cultural Confucianism in South Korea's media. The students not only learned together as a group in real time but in some cases formed bonds of friendship that led to giddy exchanges of visits and more.

The experiment was not continued only because leasing the underground cable was expensive and NHK went through severe budget cuts. But the

idea of ambitiously expansive cross-cultural learning did not die, and next month an internet videoconferencing version of that NHK/Kyoto/UCLA experiment will re-surface – again thanks to Hume.

The former UC number two is now the Provost at the state university of the United Arab Emirates in Al Ain, UAE, and I am now teaching my Asia media courses not at UCLA but at Loyola Marymount University here

quality journalism. Students in both that rapidly developing UAE Gulf state and here at LMU near Marina Del Rey will be reading articles from *The Khaleej Times*, the excellent daily paper in Dubai, to The Japan Times of Tokyo.

I mention that latter one because my columns on Asia and America have been running in The Japan Times ever since I started my Asia column in 1996 in the Los Angeles



Columnist, professor and author Tom Plate with LMU student staffers of LMU's Asia Media. From the left are Jeremiah Fajardo, Winston Esposito, Patricia Martin and Cori Lai.

in Los Angeles. This month about 25 students at UAEU – at about 8 am in the morning over there! – and 25 or so here (at 8pm our time, Tuesday nights) – will form a virtual classroom, and here we go again!

This one is especially exciting due in part to the novelty of a nominally Catholic university hooking up with a nominally Arab/Muslim university. And now, thankfully, it is also much less expensive to do: internet technology versus under-the-ocean cable, so maybe it will be continued.

Like the one at Kyoto more than a dozen years ago, this one will be based on contemporary issues. To that end, this instructor – me! – often relies on current high-

Times. Even after ownership changes pushed out a lot of good stuff at the Times, quality papers like JT asked me to continue my work.

It has proven a fruitful partnership, as recently evidenced by that paper's enthusiastic agreement to publish a 3,000 word excerpt from my latest 'Giants of Asia' book: CONVERSATIONS WITH THAKSIN. The editors splashed it over a full page on their new FOCUS section. The notion that the elite of Japan (the paper's core audience) will be exposed to a selection from my new book is extremely satisfying, of course.

Japan has huge business and investment interests in Thailand,

where Thaksin Shinawatra was prime minister (2001-2006), and where his sister is the current PM. And so the vaunted provincialism of Japan is much over-stated, I believe. A quick look at just the opinion section of *The Japan Times* internet edition will confirm that by the cosmopolitan selection of articles.

The biggest story out of Asia over the last 10 years has been China, of course. And, in general,

the Japanese would agree with that news judgment: in fact, all of Japan is trying to reassess its own sometimes-tortured relationship with that giant to its west. But at the same time, the American news media could do a better job of reminding the American public that Japan still exists. It remains the number-three economy in the world – and one of the greatest product innovators on the planet...including in education.

To be it crudely on purpose: Japan is anything but dead yet. ■

Columnist Prof. Tom Plate is the Distinguished Scholar of Asian and Pacific Studies at Loyola Marymount University -- and a Visiting Professor at United Arab Emirates University for Spring Semester 2012. His 'Giants of Asia' book series includes portraits of Lee Kuan Yew, Mahathir Mohamad and Thaksin Shinawatra. Please see: www.lmu.edu/asiamedia

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trees are planted in Washington D.C. All over the U.S. many events are planned to celebrate this historic centennial. As part of this celebration, the Consulate was pleased to promote and work with the Japan America Society of Southern California to conduct a high school cherry blossom 100th anniversary *manga* poster contest. Throughout this year, we look forward to promoting additional events commemorating the 100th anniversary of

the cherry blossoms.

Q: Finally, is there any special message you would like to share with members, supporters and friends of the Japan America Society?

A: We are so grateful for the strong and warm support and assistance extended to Japan immediately after the 3.11 earthquake and tsunami. I would like to express my wholehearted gratitude to the people of Southern California

and to our friends of the Japan America Society who took immediate action to help those affected by the disasters.

Additionally, 2012 is the Year of the Dragon and the dragon is a symbol of strength and prosperity. I wish all our friends and supporters of the Japan America Society of Southern California happiness, strength and prosperity throughout this year. ■

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FOOD & CULTURE

Japan is a Cultural Powerhouse

- There are approximately 9,000 Japanese restaurants in the U.S., and this number is increasing by 8.5% per year.
- Southern California is home to 1,800 Japanese restaurants, more than double the number located in Manhattan.
- The Anime Expo®, held in Anaheim, Calif., is the nation's largest anime convention with more than 43,000 unique attendees.
- Renowned Japanese artist Takashi Murakami's exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Arts set record-breaking attendance for MOCA with 15,705 attendees within its first week.
- Popular Japanese street wear brand, BAPE, opened its second United States branch in Los Angeles in April 2008.