

San Jose JACL Community Recognition Dinner
Saturday November 02, 2013
San Jose Airport Hotel – Mediterranean Center
San Jose CA

Midori Kai Acceptance Speech
by
Joyce Iwasaki

First of all ~ I'd like to thank former Assemblymember ~ Sally Lieber ~ for being here tonight. As you recall ~ it was Sally's legislation of the Nisei High School Diploma Project that allowed Nisei to receive their high school diplomas from the schools they would have graduated from during internment period. That legislation passed in 2004 and subsequently ~ throughout California ~ Nisei were invited to their high schools to participate in commencement ceremonies to receive their diplomas. I was privileged to witness a good many of these ceremonies as a member of her staff.

Sally also authored the bill that named Highway 85 The Norman Y. Mineta Highway in honor of Norm's accomplishments as the Mayor of San Jose, a Congressional Representative, Secretary of Commerce, and Secretary of Transportation.

Thank you ~ Sally ~ for being our friend and advocate.

Like many successful projects and organizations, businesses included, the spark that starts the ball rolling is usually an idea ~ a thought ~ a dream. That's how Midori Kai started. At the time when our organization was just a thought ~ two of us were independently thinking how exciting it would be to start a Japanese American professional women's group where women can share experiences and individual successes and utilize those strengths to impact others around us. Two of us were thinking of this idea totally separately.

Great concept ~ but the challenge @ that time was to carry this idea to the next step. How do we find these ladies? Ladies who would not

likely come together in the first place? Here's where my late husband, Ed Iwasaki, came into the picture. Virtually ~ almost @ the same time when I shared this thought with him -- a friend, Connie Saito, separately shared her dream with him as well. Eddie then encouraged both of us to develop this idea together.

And that we did ~ our concepts were identical but needed refinement. Together ~ we were able to create a vision. And that was to form a group of Japanese American professional women who are highly successful in our professional fields, who are ready to embrace culture and heritage, and who want to extend our knowledge and expertise to others.

After identifying these core values, Connie and I began making a list of women to invite to this group. Over the last 17 years ~ our past and present directors are presidents and CEO's of medium sized companies, partners in law firms, CFO of an international company, directors in HR departments of major corporations, authors, an architect, an art gallery owner, an import business owner and other small business owners, executive director or program director of major nonprofit agencies, an educator, an executive staff member of a major Bay Area city, banking and finance executive. And the list goes on and on.

Our Midori Kai directors are accomplished in their fields, are involved in nurturing our families, and have enriched and expanded Midori Kai's impact to other individuals and organizations.

At the beginning ~ we sought additional mentorship from leaders such as Yosh Uchida, Ko Nishimura, and Sam Araki who encouraged us to pursue and develop this group of exceptional women. They convinced us to move forward. We then needed a group name. For that, we sought advise from Reverend Bunyu Fujimura, Reverend Ejitsu Hojo and Reverend Junjo Tsumura, retired ministers, for possible names for this newly formed organization. Midori Kai was suggested. In Japanese, the word - Midori – can be translated to “evergreen or everlasting” and Kai means organization.

So ~ here we are ~ Midori Kai ~ an organization that brings powerful women together, that sponsors an annual boutique that gives

independent vendors a venue to sell their creations, that donates all boutique profits to partnering nonprofit organizations, that gives directors an opportunity to work and have fun together.

Our other activities involve inviting authors and speakers to our group, field trips, learning cultural skills, collecting and making donations to worthy causes.

We understand that the ties that bind us together go beyond us as individuals who happen to be part of this extraordinary group. The true ties that bind are our similar experiences of our parents, grandparents, and the many generations before us whose shoulders we stand on that allow us the luxury of being accomplished and successful in our professional, civic and personal lives.

Thank you, San Jose JACL, for this recognition.

Accepting the recognition on behalf of Midori Kai is our current President, Christine Noma.