

Trans-Pacific Solidarity: Heartfelt Thoughts & Deeds for Japan from California

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In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami disaster which affected the northeastern part of Japan in March 2011, the Japan Society of Northern California (JSNC) stepped up to fulfill the need for a non-profit organization through which members of the concerned and generous community of Northern California could direct their monetary support to those in need in Japan. This was possible through the JSNC's established network and communications channels available to the Society's individual and corporate members, as well as to the local general public at large. In collaboration with Give2Asia, a partner organization, the JSNC has collected nearly \$290,000 in funds for relief and recovery of the Tohoku region of Japan.

About the Japan Society of Northern California

Founded in 1905, the Japan Society of Northern California is the second-oldest Japan-America society in North America and has been an active member of the Bay Area international policy community for more than 100 years. Through all the twists and turns in ties between the two countries, the JSNC has been a meeting place for all in Northern California who are passionate about Japan in its many facets.

There are currently more than 30 Japan-America societies in the United States. The National Association of Japan-America Societies (NAJAS) in Washington, D.C. provides a professional network of these societies, and holds an annual conference during the summer. However, these societies are both financially and programmatically independent of each other and operate under their own non-profit organization status.

The JSNC is an educational non-profit organization and the West Coast's leading forum on Japan and US-Japan relations. Its mission is to strengthen cooperation and understanding between the peoples of the United States and Japan in a changing world by providing programs that help to expand knowledge, increase personal interaction and facilitate discussion of important issues. Throughout its history, the JSNC has brought together top experts on Japan in diplomacy, business, culture and the Japanese-American community to advise, guide, and support the organization in its mission to keep the US-Japan relationship vibrant and strong. Today that role is more important than ever as the JSNC works to support disaster relief efforts in the wake of last year's deadly earthquake in northeastern Japan.

The JSNC fosters engagement and communication between leaders and thinkers in Japan and its members, among its peers and colleagues, and among the lively and diverse Japan community of Northern California. Events such as the Annual Japan-US Innovation Awards Conference and the Annual Award of Honor Gala highlight such efforts (*Photo 1*). In addition, the JSNC is committed to building the next generation of leaders and communicators who will link Japan, the US and Northern California, while assisting JSNC members and others to maintain and polish their own language skills and knowledge

Photo 1: Japan Society



Photo 2: Japan Society



of Japan. The JSNC achieves this by offering language classes for adults and professionals, language and business culture workshops for corporate members, and a pilot project for supporting Japanese language and culture programs in public schools (*Photo 2*).

The Establishment of the JSNC Japan Earthquake & Tsunami Relief Fund at Give2Asia

At the JSNC, a decision to open a donor-advised fund at its partner organization, Give2Asia, was made within one day of the earthquake.

This fund was named the “JSNC Japan Earthquake and Tsunami Relief Fund,” and requests for support for the fund were immediately dispatched through the JSNC’s website, e-newsletter, Facebook page, and other communication channels. Although supporting relief and recovery from the earthquake and tsunami fits with the JSNC’s mission and dedication to fostering US-Japan relations, the JSNC does not have the internal infrastructure nor staffing in place for providing relief funds to foreign charitable organizations with the proper due diligence required. Therefore, this partnership with Give2Asia provided the perfect solution for moving forward with the collection of funds and subsequent release of those funds to non-profit organizations in Japan.

Within the first six months of establishing the JSNC Japan Earthquake and Tsunami Relief Fund, the JSNC raised nearly \$267,000 through the generosity of donors. From these funds, grants have been sent to Japan to benefit the following organizations:

- Association for Aid and Relief Japan (AAR Japan), an NGO providing emergency assistance to the elderly and the disabled;
- Second Harvest Japan, an NGO providing food resources to those in need;
- Rescue Stock Yard, an NGO providing meals for people living in evacuation centers and damaged homes;
- NICCO, an NGO promoting community building and revitalizing the local economy;
- PARCIC, an NGO promoting self-reliance in the form of economic sustainability;
- Free the Children Japan, an NGO which aims to free children from poverty and exploitation and empower young people;
- Miyagi Mental Health Welfare Association, an organization providing mental health care and training;
- Eat & Energize the East, an organization promoting the re-establishment of Eastern Japan’s agricultural capabilities.

All are continuously engaged on the ground in the devastated Tohoku region. While government and international agency efforts at relief and recovery cover a significant amount of the total need, many NGOs both local and international also feature as key partners in the process. Although it will undoubtedly take many years for full recovery, these contributions are making a difference in changing the precarious situations faced by many families and communities in the areas affected by this calamity. The JSNC will be directing more grants toward Japanese NGOs on the ground in the months ahead through Give2Asia.

Give2Asia’s strategy is to fund local Japanese non-profit organizations, NGOs, professional associations (e.g. chambers of commerce; associations of lawyers, nurses, and other professionals), social enterprises and entrepreneurs addressing long-term recovery needs. Through Give2Asia, the JSNC is funding projects that meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Innovative ideas that require seed funding in order to demonstrate proof of concept, scale to serve more survivors, or graduate to public or corporate funding;
- Projects that effectively empower and enable survivors to rebuild their lives and livelihoods;
- Information sharing and networking initiatives that have the potential to strengthen and amplify recovery efforts;

- Creative solutions that overcome problems of coordination and information gaps to enable more efficient and effective recovery and rebuilding;
- Services that meet a specific need not currently being addressed by other major benefactors due to the scope of the disaster and allocation of resources for other needs.

(from Give2Asia Japan Disaster Response Update)

JSNC’s Contributions to the Fund through Its Events & Programs

In addition to the generous contributions made to the fund by our partners, members, and supporters in the Bay Area community, the JSNC made concrete efforts to raise funds for earthquake relief in a number of different ways. In the month of April, half of the membership fee contributions made by individuals were forwarded to Give2Asia as a donation for the fund. The JSNC also solicited funds from Japanese corporate sponsors in order to contribute to the fundraising efforts of local community members at the annual Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival. Net proceeds from events such as the 24th Annual Tennis Tournament and an artist’s talk with Ken Matsumoto were also donated to the fund. Net proceeds from charity golf tournaments were also given to the fund through connections established by the JSNC’s board members. From the JSNC’s annual Gala, 25% of all live auction proceeds made their way to the earthquake fund as well. Furthermore, the JSNC co-sponsored events such as the benefit concert given by renowned pianist Fujiko Hemming, and the 2nd Annual Silicon Valley Tanabata 2011-Festival of Hope which donated funds from registration fees towards earthquake relief.

In addition to such monetary contributions, the JSNC also sponsored opportunities for the local community to participate in information-sharing and discussions regarding the relief and recovery efforts. One such example was Consul General Hiroshi Inomata’s presentation at the Annual General Meeting held in April, 2011. There were also co-sponsored events such as a benefit concert featuring virtuoso violinist Anne Akiko Meyers, an eyewitness account forum with structural engineer Kit Miyamoto, and a panel discussion, as well as a luncheon hosted by the World Affairs Council.

One Year Later: Remembering the Earthquake

A year later, the Northern California community commemorates the earthquake by hosting various events and programs throughout the Bay Area. The JSNC is no exception, as it co-sponsors a major event with the Keizai Society featuring key speakers such as Consul General Inomata, Stu Levy, and representatives from “Operation Tomodachi,” Kurion, Twitter, and Google, who are all leaders in the earthquake recovery efforts. A community memorial event took place at Peace Plaza in Japantown with the support of a multitude of social, cultural, and religious organizations. A memorial concert and photo exhibit were also held to benefit a project aimed at supporting mental health services for those affected by the disaster. The 50th Anniversary Gala of the Oakland-Fukuoka Sister City Association also raised funds towards continued recovery. Educational organizations, such as the Center for Japanese Studies at the University of California, Berkeley and the Center for East Asian Studies at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, have put forward

Photo 3: Japan Society



memorial programs and discussions highlighting the current situation on the ground. Various community organizations, such as local churches and choir groups, have also helped to give voice to what is happening to those affected communities one year later.

JSNC Going Forward: Two New Initiatives

As the JSNC continues to foster the relationship between the United States and Japan, two key initiatives are underway which underline the importance of the JSNC's mission. One is the Japan-US Innovation Awards which honors outstanding innovations in Japan-US technology and business each year. The 2nd Annual Japan-US Innovation Day Conference is set for June 29 this year. There are three core Japan-US Innovation Awards, each of which can have one Japanese and one US winner. The three award categories are "World Changers," "Intrapreneurship," and "Emerging Leadership." Among the winners last year were big names such as DeNA, Twitter, Tesla Motors, Sanbio, and Mitsubishi Aircraft Corporation. The Innovation Awards process is governed by a global Innovation Advisory Council (IAC) comprising leading business, academics and non-profit organization representatives (Photo 3).

The second initiative which deserves mention is the "Japan in the Schools" program. Its objective is to lend financial and intellectual support and resources for the continuation of Japanese language and cultural studies programs in public schools (Photos 4 & 5). These programs continue to be at risk of elimination or downsizing, due to budget cuts and the emergence of Chinese as a language alternative. Through targeted support, the goal is to promote knowledge and interest in Japan and Japanese language studies among students that could in time lead to a lifetime interest in Japan. Examples of such targeted support include the following:

- Monetary support through small grants;
- Resource materials as needed (books, materials, supplies);
- Educational and cultural enrichment resources (invite individuals within the JSNC's circle connected to Japanese arts, business, politics and culture to the schools as sources of inspiration for students to develop an interest in Japan);
- Invitations for students to attend relevant JSNC events and lectures;
- Encouraging public awareness of the need to support Japanese language programs;

Photo 4: Japan Society



A Japanese flower arrangement class

Photo 5: Japan Society



An origami class folding a big crane

- Exploring the possibility of extending summer language classes to interested students to continue their Japanese language studies throughout the year;
- Developing a volunteer network committee to lend support to the Japan in the Schools Program;
- Scholarships for students pursuing Japanese Studies.

Conclusion

As we move to revitalize and envision a new age in the 21st century, the JSNC pledges to uphold its great tradition – a legacy for future generations who will shape and manage this special US-Japan relationship in the years ahead. To this end, the support garnered through the fundraising efforts for the JSNC's Japan Earthquake and Tsunami Relief Fund highlights the possibility for future US-Japan relations in fostering a relationship of friendship and empathy to those in need. It is the hope of the JSNC that the world community will continue to follow the work that is being done in Japan through such efforts as the JSNC's Japan Earthquake and Tsunami Relief Fund and realize that its concern for and generosity toward the people of Japan is much appreciated by the local communities involved.

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