



The real story. Japanese American History told by those who lived it.

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“Welcome Home”

The 68th Nisei Week festival kicked off its annual celebration with exuberant support from the community. Historically, Nisei Week was just an annual event to recognize Japanese culture and its presence in mainstream America. Now, Nisei Week is a showcase of how Americans have truly embraced the Japanese culture. It is wonderful to see the myriad of different ethnicities that not only celebrate Nisei Week, but also participate in its many events.

Every year, the Japanese American Korean War Veterans organization hosts a hospitality suite which allows all veterans to gather and meet each other while relaxing prior to the parade. Our thanks to the JAKWV wives who worked diligently in the hospitality suite to ensure its enjoyment by all visitors. The food in the hospitality suite was catered by the Gardena Bowl Coffee Shop. It was great! Thanks go to Hideki Obayashi and his wonderful crew at the bowling alley!

Leading the parade this year were the members of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Holding the colors was Robert Ichikawa; jeeps provided comfortable transportation for familiar veterans like Sam Fujikawa, Ocean Miyake, James Ogawa, Don Seki, Mike Takamine, John Wakamatsu and Toke Yoshihashi – assisting them were Ken Shigemitsu, Russell Nakanishi and Govan Yee. Following the World War II veterans were the Japanese American Korean War Veterans (JAKWV). The Korean War veterans had representatives of all branches of service – Army, Marines, Air Force and Navy. Special guest veterans from Hawaii included Francis Yasutake, Tom Tanaka and Kazuo Kono.

One of the most glaring injustices of American history is the unheralded and thankless return experienced by our Vietnam veterans. Many Americans projected their disillusionment with the federal government by turning away from our Vietnam veterans. Although we cannot change the events of history, JA Living Legacy strongly feels that we should address issues that have the potential to heal our community ... even by the most humble means. This was the first time our Japanese American Vietnam veterans organized a group to participate in the parade. No, they didn't have matching outfits or even a banner to identify who they were; but it was an indication of pride and fortitude that they joined the World War II and Korean War veterans in this procession. Yes, it was heartwarming to see them march alongside the familiar older veterans. This group of Vietnam veterans was organized by Ken Hayashi and Chris Segawa. In 2001, five veterans from the Vietnam War participated in Nisei Week but this was the first time it was an organized effort – and hopefully not the last time.

On Los Angeles Street, Japanese American Living Legacy celebrated this year's parade with a two-sided banner that read on one side "Thank you for your service" and on the other side "Welcome Home." When JA Living Legacy learned about the Vietnam veterans organized participation, we knew it was a special occasion. It was time to truly "Welcome Home" our Vietnam veterans. David Miyoshi, a Vietnam Marine, is a board member and legal counsel for JA Living Legacy. It was important that we show our support for one of our own too. We cannot erase the injustices and pain that history had put in these veterans' lives, but we are proud of each of them and we are thankful for their service to our country. Plan to see our banner again next year! Come join us and cheer the veterans on!

Japanese American Living Legacy is a non-profit 501c(3) organization based out of California State University, Fullerton. All of the board of directors, staff and advisors are volunteers. For more information on Japanese American Living Legacy, please visit their website at www.jalivinglegacy.org or call them at (714) 278-4483.

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