

Festival Japan celebrates culture and community

By Maileen Hamto
The Asian Reporter

Saké tasting, martial arts demonstrations, traditional Japanese music and dances, a sushi chef competition, and tofu eating contests headlined the seventh annual Festival Japan, which drew more than 10,000 people to Uwajimaya's Beaverton store.

Held September 15 and 16, the event featured food and vendor booths, a beer garden sponsored by Sapporo beer, and lots of activities for Japanese Americans and others fascinated with Japanese culture.

Hosted by the Japan-America Society of Oregon (JASO), the celebration is one of several events throughout the year that celebrates the society's 100th year, said Lynn Longfellow, assistant director. The festival has grown bigger each year, and included 60 vendors.

"We're very proud that the event stays true with our mission statement: to share Japanese culture with the community," said Longfellow, who has been a JASO volunteer for 20 years. "For the local Japanese community, it's an opportunity



LOOKING EAST. More than 10,000 people attended this year's Festival Japan event held at Beaverton Uwajimaya. In the top left photo, Joel Iwanaga (left), KOIN TV newscaster and Master of Ceremonies for this year's Festival Japan, interviews Luis, the event's tofu-eating champ. At right, Mitsuki Dazai performs for festival-goers. (AR Photos/Maileen Hamto)

to share and celebrate our heritage. Still, many people who come to the festival have never been to Japan, and are intrigued by aspects of the culture."

Kenny Wu, 18, emigrated from Taiwan six years ago. He is one of several

teenagers who volunteered to help at the children's games area. "Japanese culture was a big part of my childhood back in Taiwan. I've always been fascinated by Japan," said Wu, who has volunteered at Festival Japan for the past three years.

Preserving heritage

The Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center tables drew people interested in replacing a badly damaged stone at the Japanese American Historical Plaza. George Kata-

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giri, 81, one of founders of the center, is leading the charge to raise funds to replace the stone. Bicyclists and skateboarders who ride on the stone have chipped away its lettering, and replacing the stone will cost about \$35,000, Katagiri said.

"People come to the table to look at the books and learn about the Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center," he said. Katagiri, a survivor of the Japanese internment camps during World War II, is among the most dedicated champions of the Nisei (Americans of Japanese ancestry) legacy in the Northwest.

He pointed to the display showing the stone that needs to be replaced, then to the sheet with a list of names and donations. "People have been giving whatever they can to replace the stone. We'll get it done," he smiled

confidently.

The performance stage featured some of Japan's prized artistic traditions, such as the music of the *koto*, performed by Mitsuki Dazai. The *koto* is a 13-string plucked zither, similar to the Chinese *gu-zheng*. Dazai performed a number of classical Japanese pieces, and talked about how she became interested in mastering the *koto*.

Growing up in post-war Japan, Dazai was exposed to the strong influence of Western arts. She entered college with an interest in studying Western classical music, but soon became interested in ethnomusicology. She became drawn to the nonwestern traditions of Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and her native Japan.

"I felt that we were losing our heritage and our identity as Japanese. It became important to me to become acquainted with



FUN WITH SOY CURD. With their hands on their backs, contestants ravaged the loaves of raw tofu at this year's Festival Japan. The event featured saké tasting, martial arts demonstrations, traditional Japanese music and dances, and more. (AR Photo/Maileen Hamto)

traditional Japanese music," she said.

Since moving to the Portland area, Dazai relishes the opportunity to perform the *koto* for audiences drawn to classical Asian music. "It is a joy to introduce the instrument to American audiences. Americans are very open to diversity and trying out new things."

Food and good times

Food is central to any cultural celebration, and Festival Japan was no different. One of the most popular events was "Sashimi Samurai" — think "Iron Chef" for sushi enthusiasts.

Event organizers brought pounds of fresh seafood and gathered some of the best sushi chefs in town, who had 20 minutes to put together some of the most creative sushi creations. The winner received a special prize, and the creations were auctioned off.

The other gastronomic draw of the festival did not require Iron Chef skills,

just an iron stomach. Contestants who signed up for the tofu eating contest took on the task of consuming a bowl of raw tofu. With their hands on their backs, contestants ravaged the tofu loaves with much enthusiasm as the crowd cheered them on.

Festival Japan welcomed a delegation of 17 dignitaries from Beaverton's sister city of Gotemba, Japan, which included Gotemba's Deputy Mayor Hidekazu Suzuki, members of the city council, and business people.

In 1987, Gotemba became Beaverton's first sister-city relationship. The city of Gotemba is located 60 miles southwest of Tokyo and is known as the eastern entrance to Mount Fuji.

The Gotemba delegation joined Beaverton's Celebration Parade early on Saturday, said Tatsuya Takiguchi, vice chairperson of Gotemba City Council. And he said they were excited to catch the Seattle Mariners game on Sunday.

found that I liked to sew, then got into anime. That's how the business came about."

JASO director Dixie McKeel was inspired by the turnout for the two-day festival. Proceeds will help fund Japan on the Road, a cultural program that brings the experience of Japanese culture to third- and fifth-grade classrooms throughout the region, McKeel said. The program began in 1997, and has reached more than 20,000 students in Oregon and southwest Washington.

"We've reached kids that have never been exposed to Japanese culture in all parts of the state, from Bend to John Day, to the coastal cities, and south to Medford," said McKeel, who has volunteered with JASO for 25 years.

The next JASO event, "Tea House Jazz," features John Kaizan Neptune, a virtuoso of the *shakuhachi*, the traditional Japanese bamboo flute. The global jazz performance, scheduled for 8:00pm on October 18 at the Glenn & Viola Walters Cultural Arts Center in Hillsboro, brings together elements of East and West.

For more information on the performance and other upcoming JASO events, visit <www.jaso.org>.

Jackie Chan says new movie with Jet Li 'not great'

By Min Lee

AP Entertainment Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Jackie Chan says the new Hollywood action movie he shot with Jet Li "isn't great," a news report said, while Li said in his blog that fans should not have overly high expectations for the film.

The Forbidden Kingdom, which finished shooting in China last month, has been eagerly anticipated because it marks the first on-screen collaboration between Chan and Li — kung fu cinema's two biggest stars.

But the two actors have been playing down the film's potential appeal to Chinese viewers, saying it is targeted at a U.S. audience.

A news report carried on the website of China's state-run Xinhua News Agency quoted Chan as saying, "The movie I just shot with Jet Li, *The Forbidden Kingdom*, actually isn't that great."

Chan was speaking at a news conference in the northeastern Chinese city of Changchun, Xinhua said.

The Forbidden Kingdom is a movie made for Americans," the report quoted Chan as saying. "Chinese

"We want to see Ichiro!"

Celebrating culture

The diversity of vendor booths was testament to the growing influence of Japanese culture on young Americans — particularly Japanese manga and animation. Deanna Johnson, 23, specializes in creating anime costumes through Custom Cosplay, and explained how she was first introduced to the richness of Japanese culture.

"My dad served in the military, and always told us about the wonderful things he saw and experienced while stationed in Japan," she said. "When I was growing up, I





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