Sakura Matsuri 2012: Centennial Celebration of the Gift of Trees

**Date** April – May, 2012

**Participants** Greater Cincinnati residents and JASGC members

**Description** In 1912, First Lady Helen Taft and Viscountess Chinda, wife of the Japanese Ambassador, planted the first cherry blossom trees in Potomac Park in Washington D.C. These trees have become a living symbol of friendship between the people of Japan and the United States. Since Helen Taft was originally from Cincinnati, Sakura Matsuri in 2012 was full of JASGC's biggest events ever before.

**Events**

**April 5th Cincinnati Reds Opening Day Parade (Downtown Cincinnati)**

JASGC made a float commemorating the centennial celebration of the cherry blossom tree gift. Kimono volunteers waved from the float, and other family members walked behind it. More than 10,000 people on the street were fascinated by the beauty of the Kimonos.

**April 7th Ohanami Picnic (Ault Park)**

Cooperating with Young Professional group, an Ohanami picnic was held in Ault Park, where JASGC planted more than 100 Sakura trees two years ago. It was a family friendly event. People brought their own picnics, and enjoyed Easter egg hunting, chatting with each other, playing with Japanese traditional toys, and experiencing Koto.

**April 14th, 15th Asian Culture Fest -Kodomo-no-hi workshop (Museum Center)**

The Annual Asian Culture Fest was held at Cincinnati's Museum Center. JASGC organized workshops with the Gifu-Cincinnati Sister City Committee and the Japanese American Citizens’ League. Attendees (80% children, 20% adults) enjoyed calligraphy, Japanese toys, coloring Koi-nobori, hand printing on a big kite, and making newspaper Kabuto helmet. We also promoted the Visit Japan Campaign using booklets, handouts and posters from the Japan Tourism Agency and the Gifu City Convention Bureau. Volunteers from the University of Cincinnati enjoyed introducing Japan to visitors.
April 17th – 24th Sumo! School Visit and Sumo! (Greater Cincinnati area, Kentucky)

Two Sumo wrestlers (Rikishi) came from Japan; one is a retired professional Rikishi, and the other is an amateur champion in Tokyo. They visited eight schools (2 elementary, 1 intermediate, 2 middle, 2 high schools, 1 college) and introduced Sumo to more than 2,200 students. They explained techniques in slow motion, the ceremony, the daily workout and demonstrated sumo. At the NKU event ($5/person, $10/family), they demonstrated Sumo in a more authentic and formal way with Taiko drummers. They demonstrated a “real match” with a Gyoji referee in traditional costume. Other Japanese martial arts, Aikido and Kendo, were also demonstrated. The audience of more than 1600 was excited by their performance. The Rikishi were also introduced at a Cincinnati Reds game and JASGC had an opportunity to share the centennial celebration with 19,000 people at the stadium.

April 28th, 29th Japan Day at International Butterfly Show (Krohn Conservatory)

The Butterfly Show is the most popular event at Krohn Conservatory, which attracts many people every year. Since the World Choir Games were held in Cincinnati for the first time in the USA, the show featured International connections, especially the countries which have a sister city relationship to Cincinnati. Gifu is one of them. JASGC introduced Japanese culture to the visitors. Student volunteers and volunteers in Yukata introduced Japanese traditional toys like Kendama, Daruma-otoshi, Fuku-warai. Food samples were also provided.

May 3rd Sakura Matsuri Dinner (Metropolitan Club)

Annual dinner for JASGC members featuring Bob Taft, who spoke about his great-grand parents, President and Mrs. Taft, and their part in the gift of the trees.

May 20th Takamine; the movie about the gift of trees (University of Cincinnati)

JASGC showed Takamine at University of Cincinnati. It is the movie about the gift of trees. Family members enjoyed it.

**Coordinator**

Sakura Matsuri was a great opportunity to introduce JASGC to both American and Japanese people. Sumo was a very educational and fun event. We visited as many schools as we could. In each school, students were fascinated by the traditional Japanese sport and learned its history. It was a great pleasure to see children enjoy Japanese culture.

**Supervisor**

Sakura Matsuri events helped us to bring more Japanese history and culture to our largest audience ever. We were able to share the history of the cherry trees and several historical connections between Cincinnati and Japan. Kids not only saw a sumo demonstration but some were given the opportunity to learn first hand! One highlight- former Governor Bob Taft compared his great grandfather's size with that of our sumo!
Teacher comments:
Your presentation was educational, engaging, and fun. The kids had a delightful time learning new words, learning about Japanese culture, and playing new games. The origami cups were a hit as well. In fact one parent let me know that her kids were making origami cups the following morning.

Coordinator
Visiting schools was truly a grassroots activity to introduce Japanese culture in the local community. Many schools taught about Japan after the earthquake, and students often have some knowledge about it. Therefore, I tried to connect my presentations to their background knowledge and increase their interests. I also asked volunteers to come with me. Seeing American people speaking Japanese encouraged students to learn foreign languages.

School Visits

Date All year around
Participants K-College students
Activities
- Learning Japanese and Practicing Calligraphy
- Origami / Paper Craft
- Japanese Food and Chopsticks Challenge
- Introducing Japanese School Life
- Tea Ceremony and tasting Japanese sweets
- Story Telling

Supervisor
Asami has been the key coordinator of our increasing "school/library" programming. -- increasing as a direct result of Sakura Matsuri. These programs are tailored to the audience age and interests but always trying to bring in language and a craft they can keep.
**Coordinator**

There are many Japanese companies in Greater Cincinnati area. JASGC provides opportunities for networking. I helped organize events: making fliers, sending emails, contacting volunteers. I also keep in touch with Japanese members and their family. It helped me to learn what Japanese members expect from us and how to plan a new event.

**Supervisor**

JASGC issues a weekly e-news report listing member events. It primarily advertises coming events but also offers a summary of key past event. Net it used as a vehicle to share culture for our "readers only". This combined with Asami’s ties into the community have helped to bring more of our Japanese membership out as volunteers for cultural programming.

**JASGC Membership Programs**

**Date** All year around

**Participants** Japan America Society members

**Description** The Japan America Society of Greater Cincinnati hosts a variety of programs and projects ranging from topics in business and education, to cultural and social events, as well as our signature events, throughout the year.

**Events**

- Major Events (Annual Gala, Sakura Matsuri Dinner, Golf Outing)
- Bonenkai (Family-friendly event)
- One-Day Tours (Downtown Tour, Historical Tour)
- Seminars

For more about the events, programs and photos see the links:

- [www.JASGC.org](http://www.JASGC.org)
- [www.facebook.com/JASGC](http://www.facebook.com/JASGC)