

Celebrating Spring and Friendship

As he introduced the opening ceremonies of this year's Sakura Festival, Clark College President Bob Knight called the 100 shirofugen trees whose blossoming the festival celebrates "a gift rich with symbolism." As dignitaries from both Japan and Vancouver rose to speak, it became clear how rich that symbolism is.

Vancouver Mayor and Clark College alumnus Tim Leavitt said that here, as in Japan, the annual blossoming of the cherry trees has come to mark the beginning of spring, as well as of the historic bonds between Vancouver and Japan. "The City of Vancouver has long had an affinity with Japan," he said. "We've hosted cultural exchanges, art exhibits, and have business relationships with firms headquartered here, including Kyocera and SEH America. We've also enjoyed our

formal sister city relationship with Joyo for 18 years. For me, the annual Sakura Festival serves as a poignant reminder of our longstanding friendship and the meaningful opportunities that it provides.”

Guests from Japan—including America Kotobuki President John Kageyama, Joyo Mayor Toshiharu Okuda, Portland Consul General for Japan Hiroshi Furusawa, and SEH America Inc. Executive Vice President Tatsuo Ito—spoke movingly about the role that *sakura* (cherry blossoms) play in Japanese culture. The blossoms’ ephemeral beauty, often lasting just a week or two, symbolizes rebirth, transformation, and the importance of appreciating each moment of life. Additionally, as Consul General Furusawa pointed out, cherry trees have been planted in many prominent locations in the U.S. to symbolize friendship between this country and Japan.

“These magnificent cherry blossoms symbolize the close friendship between the cities of Joyo and Vancouver, as well as between the U.S. and Japan,” he said. “May they continue to grow and thrive.”

Also present at the event were members of the Rotary Clubs of both Vancouver and Joyo; Clark College trustees Sherry Parker and Jack Burkman; former Vancouver mayor Bruce Hagensen; Vancouver City Councilmembers Bart Hansen, Larry Smith, and Alishia Topper; and Vancouver City Manager Eric Holmes.

The opening ceremony included performances by Yukiko Vossen on the *koto*, a traditional Japanese stringed instrument, as well as by the Clark College Women’s Ensemble. Afterward, entertainment included a traditional dance performance by the Clark College Japanese Club, a drum performance by Portland Taiko, and a kimono fashion show with beautiful kimono modeled by Clark students and staff, as well as by children from Clark’s Child & Family Studies program.

Begun in 2006, Clark College’s Sakura Festival celebrates John

Kageyama's donation of 100 shirofugen cherry trees to the City of Vancouver. The trees were planted on Clark's main campus in 1990; each year, their beautiful pink blossoms transform the campus and prompt a flurry of picnics and picture-taking. Due to rain, this year's festival was held indoors in Gaiser Student Center.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley