

Marking the path of friendship



Children from the college's Child & Family Studies program celebrate Sakura and the newly named Kageyama Path.

It was if the trees knew how special this day was. For the past week, the 100 shirofugen cherry trees that grace Clark College's campus had held their blossoms tightly closed against the gray, chilly weather. But the morning of the college's annual Sakura Festival, the newly emerged sun seemed to wake them up, and by that afternoon they had created the perfect, pale pink backdrop for the day's opening ceremony near the Royce E. Pollard Japanese Friendship Garden.

"Look at the beauty of these trees," said Clark College President Bob Knight during his opening remarks. "Three days ago, it was not like this."

Knight added that the trees were full of symbolism. “Each year as these trees blossom, they signal new hopes, new beginnings, and the joyful arrival of a new spring,” he said.



Japanese Consul General Takashi Teraoka holds a parasol for John Kageyama.

This year, the trees also signaled a fond farewell, as John Kageyama—the man who, more than a quarter-century ago, had donated these trees to the City of Vancouver—announced that this would be the last time he made the trip from his home in Japan to Vancouver.

“We’re just very grateful that Mr. Kageyama decided to donate those trees back in 1990,” said Knight. “We know he will be here forever in spirit, and these trees will remind us of him.”



Vancouver mayor Anne McEnery-Ogle enjoys Yukiko Vossen's *koto* performance with some of the Sakura Festival's youngest guests.

Vancouver Mayor Anne McEnery-Ogle noted in her own remarks that the trees were also symbolic of international friendship, including Vancouver's sister-city relationship with Joyo, Japan. "John, it is my hope that the friendship between our countries lasts for many, many more centuries," she said to Kageyama from the podium.

The 92-year-old Kageyama also addressed the guests, recalling what prompted him to make the generous donation to the city. At the time, he was serving as president of America Kotobuki Electronics, a subsidiary of Panasonic that was headquartered in Vancouver.



John Kageyama, *third from right*, and Japanese

instructor Yoko Sato, *far right*, with students in Clark's Japanese language program.

"The people in Vancouver were really friendly, hard-working," he said. "I was trying to decide how to pay back these friendly, kind people. Then the newspaper said that the State of Washington will be celebrating its centennial, and that was my inspiration. Cherry trees in Japan mean everything—happiness, everything."

In honor of Washington's 100 years of statehood, Kageyama donated 100 cherry trees to the city, who decided to plant them on Clark's main campus. Today, they are a signature element of the campus, a popular destination for family photos and picnics. Recently, the college was graced with a donation from SEH America of 200 cherry trees, some of which have been planted on the opposite side of the walkway from the original trees. Others will be planted at Clark College at Columbia Tech Center and at the future site of Clark College at Boschma Farms in Ridgefield.



International student Suzuka Hitomi, *in kimono*, with friends she's met while studying at Clark through a scholarship.

Other speakers at the event included Takashi Teraoka, Consul General of Japan, and Suzuka Hitomi, a Japanese student studying at Clark College through a special scholarship program. Guests were also treated to performances by the Clark College Women's Ensemble and by Yukiko Vossen on the *koto*, the national instrument of Japan.

After the official remarks, the festival continued with cultural displays and performances in Gaiser Student Center. But before guests made their way up the hill, there was one last announcement: The walkway that runs alongside the shirofugen trees through the southwest corner of the campus had been renamed the Kageyama Path. A stone marker that will be placed at the beginning of the path was unveiled.



“I hope this will help us to remember the path to peace, as demonstrated by Mr. Kageyama,” said Knight. “In the spirit of Sakura, Mr. Kageyama, this will always be in your name.”

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley. For more photos from the event, visit our Flickr album.