

YARIGAI

FINDING VALUE IN ONE'S ACTIONS

やりがい



JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAII

2025 IMPACT REPORT



2024-2025 JCCH TEAM

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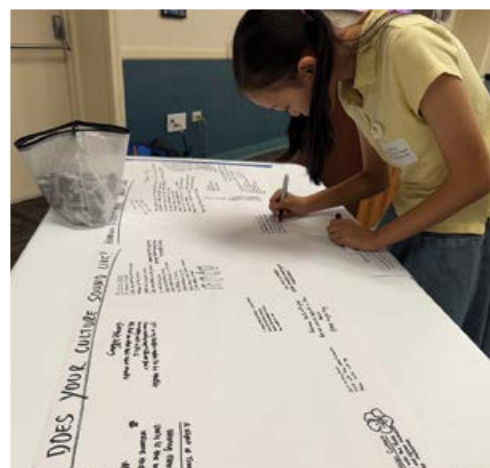
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FEATURES

- 2 A Million Wishes
- 4 Innovation + Collaboration
- 6 Continuing Research on
Hawaii's Incarceration
History
- 8 Hope for Maui
- 10 New School Curriculum
- 12 Sharing Aloha for Our
Volunteers



YEAR IN REVIEW

- 1 Executive Messages
- 7 The Year by Numbers
- 11 Financial Summary
- 13 Acknowledgments



JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAII

Honoring our heritage. Embracing our diversity. Sharing our future.

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EXECUTIVE MESSAGES



President's Message

Aloha Members, Friends, and Supporters,

As we reflect on the past year at the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i (JCCH), I am reminded of the enduring strength and resilience of our community. Over the past twelve months, we have drawn inspiration from the journey of our Japanese American ancestors in Hawai'i—individuals who overcame adversity, built bridges across cultures, and helped shape the vibrant society we cherish today.

Recent events remind us that discrimination—whether subtle or overt—remains a sad reality in our country. In an atmosphere of mounting uncertainty and concern, particularly for those experiencing harm or exclusion, the JCCH stands firm in its commitment to civil justice—rooted in the lessons of the past. In honor of the first Japanese immigrants who arrived more than 150 years ago—seeking opportunity, facing discrimination, and making significant contributions to Hawai'i's growth—we carry forward their legacy by advocating for dignity, compassion, and inclusion for all who call Hawai'i home.

As we move forward, we do so with humility and hope. The JCCH will continue to:

- >> Foster dialogue and education about the Japanese American experience and its continued relevance today.
- >> Support initiatives that promote mutual respect and cross-cultural understanding.
- >> Collaborate with community partners to ensure our programs remain accessible, relevant, and impactful.

We are sincerely grateful for your steadfast support. We hope you will enjoy reading this report and seeing the impact you helped create.

With gratitude and aloha,

Nate Gytoku
PRESIDENT & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAII



Message from the Board Chair

One of the most important lessons I learned from my parents was that family always comes first. As a kid, I may have grumbled, and as a teenager, I argued—but I now feel deeply grateful to come from a family that supports one another through everything. That foundation has shaped my life, helping me build lasting friendships, a close-knit family of my own, and strong relationships throughout my career.

This spirit of supporting others is the heartbeat of our work at the JCCH. As Board Chair, I'm proud to see kids' faces light up as they learn how to write their names in Japanese and discover the excitement of playing taiko for the first time. These moments—whether for keiki or kūpuna—are more than cultural activities. They are opportunities that spark confidence, connect us to our roots, and nurture values that guide a lifetime of growth.

We hope you will enjoy reading this report and feel proud to be a part of an extended 'ohana united by a shared purpose.

With warm regards,

Dirk Yoshizawa
BOARD CHAIR

A Million Wishes

By Shar Hashimoto

When I was young, nearly every Japanese home in Hawai'i had a daruma, a mysterious doll modeled after Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen Buddhism who meditated for long periods of time. Ours was bright red and made of papier mâché, so fragile that you had to be careful not to dent it permanently. Both eyes of a new daruma began as empty white circles on a face framed by fierce eyebrows and a mustache. You made a wish while filling in the black pupil of the left eye, and once the wish was granted, you filled in the right. When tipped to its side, the daruma rocked back upright as a reminder to ganbare—to never give up in the face of adversity. New daruma were traditionally purchased for the household for New Year's, but today this custom seems to have faded, although some seniors assure me it continues. Hopefully, future generations will rediscover this tradition inherited from our immigrant ancestors.

Kaelyn Sachiko Okuhata, the artist known professionally as Art by Sachiko, created the new daruma mural titled A Million Wishes for JCCH, located at the Beretania Street entrance. Raised on Maui as a fifth-generation Japanese American, Kaelyn had limited access to cultural activities while growing up. However, when invited to be a contestant in the Cherry Blossom Festival, she eagerly accepted, and through this experience, she developed a stronger connection to her Japanese heritage. The art classes and training offered to the contestants at the JCCH, such as ikebana and tea ceremony were experien-



ces Kaelyn missed as a teenager on Maui. Touring the Okage Sama De gallery for the first time left her with a deeper sense of appreciation.

Kaelyn left the Islands to attend Chapman University as a recipient of the Fukunaga Scholarship, which was awarded with the understanding that recipients return to Hawai'i, bringing back the knowledge and skills they learned while away, much like the returning WWII GIs. Instead of majoring in Fine Arts, she chose Marketing and Business Administration, with a minor in Fine Arts—a decision that turned out to be fortuitous.

Upon returning home, Kaelyn began her first marketing job at Servco in Honolulu while continuing to draw and paint, inspired by local nostalgia. She soon connected with other muralists and artists, eventually leading to her one-woman show at Kaiao Space in 2024. Kaelyn also began selling her artwork through her website, Art by Sachiko. When creating the first daruma design, Kaelyn knew

immediately that she had something special. This led to the first A Million Wishes print, rendered in soft pastel colors, that has become her signature series.

Meanwhile, Ally Kuranishi, the JCCH Gift Shop Manager had been searching for merchandise that incorporated Japanese motifs with Hawai'i influences. That search ultimately led to the idea of hiring Kaelyn to paint the mural. After a few design discussions, Kaelyn delivered an eye-catching and unique concept.

There are red daruma, of course, but have you ever seen a yellow or blue one? Or daruma rocking an aloha print? Kaelyn cleverly incorporated the JCCH's brand colors and hibiscus-themed mon into the mural's design. Look closely and you will spot a white maneki neko in the center, holding a koban (gold coin) stamped with the JCCH's mon in one paw while flashing a shaka with the other. Take your time to admire Kaelyn's steady hand--no templates were used. The daruma are perfectly arranged with vibrant, well-balanced



colors. Kaelyn painted the mural solo, working on weekends and after hours.

Kaelyn is grateful for her collaboration with the JCCH and for the opportunity to meet many supportive individuals. Kaelyn currently serves as the Director of Corporate Relations and Partnerships at the Bishop Museum, a role that allows her to connect with people and organizations across the state.

Prints of A Million Wishes are available for purchase in the JCCH Gift Shop in various color ways, along with an exclusive line of t-shirts for adults and children. Daruma in multiple sizes—perfect for gift-giving—are also available. Kaelyn is currently working on a design inspired by Boys' Day koinobori. We can't wait to see what she creates next.

BROWSE OUR
ONLINE SHOP



“

When I first saw the Okage Sama De gallery, I immediately thought about those who have been part of my journey and paved the way for young Japanese creatives like me to have the chance to express my culture through contemporary art. Today, I aim to be someone who can positively influence others.”



Recording Our Community's History

By Royce Sonnenberg

Volunteers often play a vital role in non-profit programs, and the JCCH's Oral History Program is a prime example of how volunteers contribute to the success of an organization's mission.

WHAT IS THE ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM?

It preserves the experiences of Japanese immigrants and their families through personal interviews, which are transcribed into written form for retention and ac-

cess. As Dr. Violet Harada, MLIS Professor Emeritus from the University of Hawai'i and a leader of the JCCH's Oral History Committee explains, "Oral histories align directly with the JCCH's mission—honoring our heritage, sharing our future."

"Some of the most poignant narratives come from the children of internees—whose fathers were Buddhist ministers, Japanese language teachers, or respected community leaders," she adds. "The oral

accounts capture the raw fear, confusion, and uncertainty their families endured during this time."

Committee member John Okutani shares a similar sentiment: "The oral histories that are part of the JCCH inventory are invaluable from a historical and educational perspective, detailing the Japanese immigration and Americanization experience in Hawai'i. These would forever be lost if not for the JCCH and other like organizations to originate, keep, and maintain such material."



The Oral History Committee is chaired by Nate Gytoku, President & Executive Director of the JCCH, with support from Archives Manager Devynn Kochi. A team of volunteers—many retirees from fields such as business, education, law, and medicine—demonstrate the JCCH's effective community engagement and the committee serves as a model for staff-volunteer collaboration.

ORAL HISTORIES PRESERVE OUR STORIES

Melvin Inamasu, who began volunteering in 2014, conducted an astounding 150+ interviews over six years. Mel's drive epitomizes the committee members' commitment to capture the voices and personal recollections that would otherwise be absent from official records.

Kathy Inkinen, who was involved with the JCCH when it was founded, returned to volunteer after a 20-year break due to work and family commitments. Alongside Kyle Sakumoto, she leads the coordination of video interviews. Her focus is on third-generation Japanese Americans "who've contributed to the success of Hawai'i today." She believes that their stories can motivate

future generations to "make this community a part of their lives that they can be proud of."

The program has also inspired personal discoveries. Volunteer Joyce Kamemoto, moved by the resilience of Japanese Americans, began interviewing her own family during the pandemic.

"Their resolve to accept their fate as Japanese Americans encouraged me to interview my family members during this same time in history. I subscribed to Zoom in 2020 and have successfully recorded our own family interviews for future generations. A few relatives have passed on, but their remembrances have not."

THE FUTURE

Manual transcription from tapes, CDs, etc. is time-consuming, often leading to a backlog. Enter Jesse Elam, an American living in Japan and an Associate Professor at Meiji Gakuin University in Yokohama. He holds a doctorate in Education and Intercultural Technology. He is currently working on a project to utilize Artificial Intelligence to produce transcriptions of JCCH oral interviews in a fraction of the time.

While existing technology can handle basic transcription, Jesse's project focuses on improving accuracy for non-native English speakers and nuanced speech. His innovative multi-platform system can distinguish between interviewer and interviewee—something most standard platforms cannot do.

While searching for a large collection of oral histories to test his system, Jesse connected with the JCCH. The strategic alignment is ideal: the JCCH has a substantial backlog, and Jesse is on sabbatical (funded by Meiji Gakuin University) through February 2026. He began working with the JCCH in April to advance his work.

With Jesse's cutting-edge transcription tools and the ongoing dedication of the Oral History Committee, the JCCH is making great strides in preserving Hawai'i's Japanese American history. To get involved, contact the Oral History Committee at: info@jcchawaii.org.

JCCH's Oral History Program is supported by a gift from Weylin and Rose Eng and a grant from the JA Community Foundation.



Continuing Research on Hawai'i's Incarceration History

By Sheila Chun

On a cool morning in late September 2023, I passed through the glass doors and security checkpoints of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland. I had come in search of federal case files and reports documenting the World War II incarceration of Hawai'i residents at Honouliuli Internment Camp and other confinement sites. Joining me was Mary Campa, the former manager of the Tokio-ka Heritage Resource Center, who had traveled from her new home in Ithaca, New York.

Sent by the JCCH through a federal Japanese American Confinement Sites grant, we would spend the next five days in the NARA Research Room, carefully sifting through thin sheets of typewritten lists, fading cablegrams, and pages of transcribed interviews that record the thousands of lives interrupted and thrown into turmoil some eighty years ago.

“

One effort in particular, the Hawai'i Internee Directory, seeks to answer a fundamental question: “Who were the Hawai'i internees, and where were they confined?”

For more than 25 years, the JCCH has worked to raise awareness of Hawai'i's internment history by producing books and educational resources and advocating for the preservation of the Honouliuli site. One effort in particular, the Hawai'i Internee Directory, seeks to answer a fundamental question: “Who were the Hawai'i internees, and where were they confined?”

In 2003, volunteer Tatsumi Hayashi began compiling a list of internees using Japanese and English language sources from the JCCH archives. Drawing from memoirs, wartime documents, and fragmentary lists from the National Archives, he created the first comprehensive database of about 2,000 Hawai'i internees and their internment sequences. In 2018, supported by a National Park Service grant, the Directory was launched online. Since then, volunteers have continued to expand it with photographs and oral history transcripts from the Resource Center's archive, along with biographical details from public records. Today, the Directory includes more than 2,400 names—and continues to grow.

Still, gaps remain.

The names of some internees are unverified, confinement sequences incomplete, and certain sites—like Haiku Camp on Maui, Kalaheo Stockade on Kaua'i, and the

If you are interested in supporting these efforts, please consider donating to the Tokioka Heritage Resource Center Legacy for Our Future fund.



“internment hotels” in North Carolina—remain obscure. At NARA, our goal was to locate government documents that would confirm identities and fill in missing details.

Our five days in NARA’s Research Room flew by. We arrived each morning before the doors opened and left when they closed. By the final day, we had scanned more than 2,000 pages: cablegrams from Fort Shafter, internee status reports from Honouliuli and other lesser-known Hawaiian sites, transfer lists, and case files for a limited but important list of individuals. These documents help us verify names, clarify dates, and fill in gaps in internment timelines that can be added to the Directory. We left satisfied—but also certain that there was still much more to uncover.

Questions persist—not only about those held at Honouliuli, but also at Waimea Jail (Kaua’i), Lana’i City Jail, Kaunakakai Jail (Moloka’i), Maui County Jail (Wailuku), Leupp Isolation Center (Arizona), Grove Park Inn (North Carolina), Crystal City Family Camp (Texas), and those deported on repatriation ships from New York. We are certain the answers lie in the brittle, yellowing carbon-copied letters and thick manila files at NARA.

Sheila Chun has volunteered at the Resource Center since 2005. In 2016, she became involved in research for the Hawai’i Internee Directory and assisted in transitioning it to an online resource. Volunteering weekly, she continues to use the records she gathered at NARA to augment the Hawai’i Internee Directory.



YEAR BY NUMBERS

47 Education & Outreach Programs hosted by the JCCH

Participation in Community Partner Events 19



JCCH Visitors & Program Participants 21,307



Docent-led Tours of Okage Sama De 42



New Social Media Followers (19.84% increase) 2,738

102,318 Number of Viewers of Education Content on Social Media



694 New YouTube Subscribers (46.80% increase)

Hope For Maui

By Jeff Baucom

From March 15-22, 2025, ten high school students from Maui traveled to Japan's Tōhoku region, sharing the story of Lahaina—a town still recovering from the 2023 Maui fires—with officials from Japan's Tōhoku region, the site of the devastating 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Among this group, representing the third cohort of the TOMODACHI Kibou for Maui program, was Alexander Romo, a Lahainaluna High School student who was displaced by the fires. He had come to Japan with a mission: to speak for a community he felt the world was beginning to forget.

"I kind of feel like us, as Lahaina, we're being forgotten about," he said. "I really went on this trip not only to learn what I could bring back to Lahaina, but also to get our stories out there. Especially worldwide, in Japan—I believe that people over there have had similar experiences and could help us with our problems."

Born and raised in Lahaina, Alexander grew up with his grandparents living next door in a house that had been in the family for nearly a century. His school, his relatives, and his closest friends were all part of the tight-knit West Maui community. Now displaced and living in Makawao, Alexander has made a deliberate effort to stay connected to his roots in West Maui, continuing to attend Lahainaluna High School and joining this program through the JCCH.

While it took some time to adjust to Japan's food, customs, and language, Alexander rarely struggled to communicate. With the help of translators—as well as relying on



the universal language of gestures and facial expressions—it wasn't difficult for him to connect with the stories shared by locals and fellow program members.

One story that stayed with Alexander came from Yasu, a fisherman who lost his livelihood in the 2011 tsunami. Though Alexander fished only for fun back home in Lahaina, Yasu's experience echoed his own—a life disrupted, a beloved rhythm interrupted. Seeing Yasu back on the water years later gave Alexander a glimpse of what personal recovery can look like.

Alexander was also impressed by the innovative methods communities in Tōhoku used to rebuild their infrastructure and prepare for future disasters. But he recognized that recovery doesn't mean going back exactly to how things were.

"I know that Lahaina is never going to return to what it used to be. If I can just get a fraction of what it used to be, I'll be happy," he said. "I know it's easier said than done, but ultimately I hope that we can rebuild together and just have a sense of normalcy."

Beyond the presentations and site visits, the program also forged deep bonds within the cohort members. Alexander returned home with new friendships and a clearer vision for how to support his community. He plans to attend the reconvening meeting on July 26, 2025, looking forward to reuniting with his fellow cohort as well as meeting members of previous cohorts. He is excited

to discuss ways they can contribute to Lahaina's recovery by drawing upon everything they experienced in Japan.

Communication and confidence are two areas where Alexander grew the most from this program. He challenged himself by delivering the conclusion for his cohort's presentation in Sendai, and through this experience has learned how to express his thoughts more confidently, connect more deeply with others, and rethink what it means to help his community.

"Communication was a big skill that I built off of from this trip," Alexander shared during our Zoom call. "I really got confident, especially through meeting new people, and giving the final presentation in Sendai. I feel like my communication has gotten a lot better. I can just convey my ideas way more easily. I didn't really know how to help before. From this experience, I realized helping can mean spreading awareness and sharing stories. I used to think it was only about reconstruction, but there are many ways to help."

Alexander's story shows how programs like this can help young people develop the skills and perspective to support their communities in times of crisis. By investing in mentorship and training, the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i hopes to nurture a new generation of leaders who are prepared not only to aid Lahaina's recovery, but to strengthen communities facing challenges wherever they are.

“

By investing in mentorship
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Cultural Center of Hawai'i
hopes to nurture a new
generation of leaders...”



Bento Bako

The JCCH's new curriculum

In June, the JCCH introduced a new standards-based curriculum called Bento Bako, inspired by Japanese bento (boxed lunch). Designed to keep food separated in compartments, traditional bento are not only functional—they are often carefully arranged with attention given to creating a delicious, nutritious, and harmonious meal.

Drawing from this tradition, each Bento Bako includes curated lesson plans (including assessments, activities, handouts, and rubrics), along with replica artifacts, books, and additional resources for classroom use. Educators across the state can borrow a Bento Bako and incorporate it into their lessons, promoting hands-on, object-based learning along with tactile and kinesthetic activities. These educational tools help teachers and students learn from cultural objects, develop critical thinking, understand through observation, and foster creativity.

How Bento Bako can be used in the classroom

- Learn about the history of Japanese immigration and internment/incarceration
- Learn about migration to Hawai'i
- Observing objects and making conclusions
- Discuss the reasons why people relocate
- Use storytelling as a tool to learn about diversity and inclusion
- Promote tactile and kinesthetic learning
- Use as additional and supplementary lesson plans



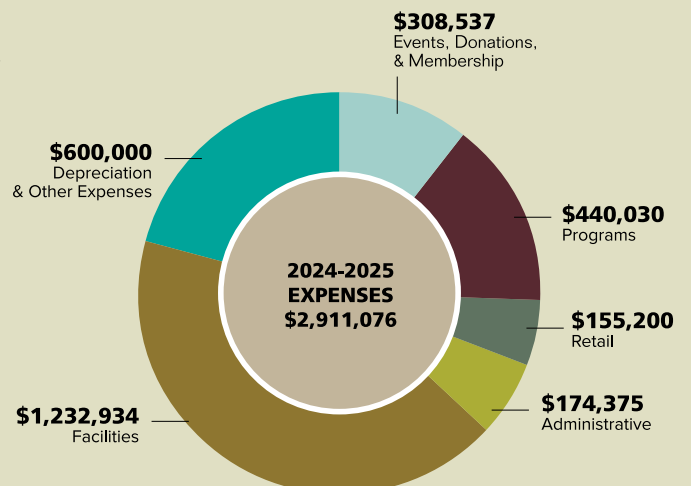
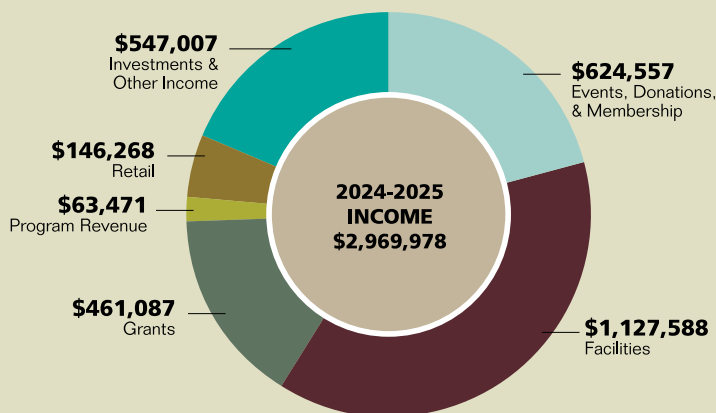
Bento Bako for elementary and high school students (two standards each) are available via our Curricula webpage—use the QR code below. It is also available via the website Teacherspayteachers.com for free download.

This project is supported by the Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts (SFCA), through appropriations from the Legislature of the State of Hawai'i or grants from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

Financial Summary

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

ASSETS	June 30, 2025		June 30, 2024
Cash and cash equivalents	680,613		839,729
Cash and cash equivalents - restricted use	484,856		539,110
Investments in marketable securities	3,616,215		3,243,579
Investments in marketable securities - restricted use	1,326,158		1,163,080
Accounts and grants receivable - net	22,315		71,499
Property and equipment - net	8,267,757		8,498,316
Prepaid expenses and other assets	84,914		124,299
Total Assets	14,482,828		14,479,612
LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS			
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	127,341		129,481
Deferred revenue	56,629		75,803
Note payable - bank loan	484,856		539,110
Note payable - SBA EID loan	136,814		144,506
Rental deposits	53,887		26,356
Total Liabilities	859,527		915,256
Total Net Assets	13,623,301		13,564,356
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	14,482,828		14,479,612
*These are preliminary results and are subject to change.			



Kansha

感謝

In 2025, more than 300 volunteers gave over 2,400 hours of their time to help us deliver vital programs, strengthen our operations, and create meaningful experiences that help individuals stay connected to their cultural roots. Whether greeting customers with a smile in the Gift Shop or helping to digitize historical photographs, our volunteers' contributions not only expand our capacity to serve but also foster yarigai, a true sense of community and shared purpose.

In May, the JCCH proudly hosted a luncheon to recognize and celebrate the contributions of our dedicated volunteers. 65 volunteers attended, with special tribute paid to three remarkable honorees: Betsy Fujii Young, Dr. Melvin Inamasu, and Yoko Waki.

Betsy was recognized for her invaluable work in work in incarceration research and her leadership in developing educational programs that broaden public understanding

of Japanese American incarceration. Dr. Mel was honored for his tireless efforts to preserve Japanese American history through the recording of 150 oral history interviews. Yoko was celebrated for her incredible dedication, having assisted hundreds of individuals with translation and genealogy research.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to these three individuals for their extraordinary generosity and decades of service to our community.

Special thanks to Kristin Alm and Miyanagi Shinkichi of Miyanagi Kai for their hula and dance performances. Mahalo to Tyler Tokio-kai, Kokoro-Tei, and McDonald's Hawaii for their generous in-kind support.



To all our volunteers:
*thank you for bringing
hope, connection, and
opportunity to those
we serve.*



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



We extend our deepest thanks to all our donors for their support. Every gift plays a vital role in building the foundation for individuals to find strength and stability through cultural identity and belonging.

The initiatives shared in this report exemplify the meaningful change we achieve together. We are honored to have you as partners in this work and truly grateful for your continued support.

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“

When my mom moved to Hawai'i from Japan last year, one of the best things I did was encourage her to get involved with the JCCH. It's been truly rewarding to see her make friends and connect with the broader community through Japanese culture. As a Japanese-speaking docent at the (Okage Same De) museum, I believe her experience has been transformative. Not only has she learned about the history of Japanese people in Hawai'i, but she's also been able to share this story with fellow Japanese who might never have known about it otherwise. It's given her a renewed sense of purpose and belonging.”

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- **October 11:** JCCH Craft & Collectibles Fair
- **November 8:** JCCH Craft & Collectibles Fair
- **December 13:** Holiday JCCH Craft & Collectibles Fair
- **January 11, 2026:** New Year's 'Ohana Festival
- **April 3, 2026:** Irasshai: Eat, Drink, Kanpai! Fundraiser

