



National Association of Japanese Canadians

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By: David R. Mitsui

Welcome NAJC delegates to Winnipeg and the 2018 NAJC AGM, Conference, and Gala Dinner!

On behalf of the members of the National Executive Board and the NAJC staff, I wish to thank our conference hosts, the Japanese Canadian Association of Manitoba, and congratulate the Conference planners, Art Miki and Ken Teramura, and their many volunteers, for their collective effort in welcoming us to Winnipeg!

30th Anniversary of Redress

2018 is the 30th anniversary of redress. This part of Japanese Canadian history is important because the uprooting, incarceration, dispossession of property and forced dispersal of 22,000 Japanese Canadians is still not widely known in Canada. We know from our past that if we remain silent about human rights violations, the violations will continue or deemed to as never have happened. Of significance with the redress settlement was the creation of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation whose aim is to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination in Canada.

The redress settlement also included the creation of the Endowment Fund and Community Development Fund. This year the Endowment Fund Committee received 17 applications (15 for Culture Development; 2 for SEAD) for \$68,000 but only had \$35,000 to award. EF funds were awarded to 9 out of 17 applications. The Community Development Committee received 9 applications for \$25,500 but only 5 of the 9 applicants received a share of the \$10,500 awarded.

The redress funds also made it possible for the creation of the Community Renewal Fund. Instituted in 2015 by National Council, the purpose of this 5-year one time fund is to assist member organizations enhance its programs and services, attract new members, and assist with facility renovations. To date, the NAJC has disbursed about half of the approximately \$320,000 available to full and supporting member organizations.

There are a number of initiatives that have taken place this past year. The NAJC Heritage Committee's Signage Project identified a Japanese Canadian roadcamp from WWII, and resulted in the unveiling of NAJC-designed signage near Mount Robson. I also wish to acknowledge the efforts to Laura Saimoto and her Legacy Committee in British Columbia who have been spearheading the erection and unveiling of signage to



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identify internment camps and roadcamps, where Japanese Canadians were sent during 1942.

Of significance as well is the research being undertaken by the 7-year Landscapes of Injustice project (LoI), under the leadership of Dr. Jordan Stanger-Ross, University of Victoria, which focuses on the dispossession of property owned by Japanese Canadians in BC, during WWII. With the completion of the research phase, this year marks the beginning of the Knowledge Mobilization phase, where the results of the data will be translated into museum exhibits and teaching lesson plans, for example. As well, the NAJC provided financial support for the creation of lesson and media plans for grades 5/6 and 10-12 and a workshop for teachers regarding the Hasting Park Internment site. This past year, the LoI Executive Committee is commended for requesting that NAJC identify a representative to serve as Vice-Chair on the LoI Steering Committee. It has been an honour to serve in this capacity and work more closely with the LoI research project as it commences the Knowledge Mobilization Phase.

The NAJC and the LoI have jointly funded the annual \$10,000 NAJC/LoI Hide Hyodo-Shimizu Research Scholarship. The 2018 recipient is Kara Isozaki, a fourth-generation Japanese Canadian. Born and raised in Toronto, she completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Toronto in East Asian Studies and archaeology and graduated in 2018 from the Master of Museum Studies program and the Master of Information program in the archives and records management concentration from the University of Toronto.

The BC Redress Committee, under the leadership of NAJC Vice-President, Lorene Oikawa, has been working steadily with the newly created BC Redress Advisory Panel and the NEB to engage the BC government in discussions as a follow-up to the 2015 public apology by the then Liberal government. The BC Redress Committee representatives (Tsugio Kurushima – Victoria; Rick Ogasawara – Vernon; Lorene Oikawa – Vancouver; Eiko Eby – Nanaimo; George Uyeda – Kamloops) met with BC government officials (BC Premier John Horgan; Parliamentary Secretary for Sport and Multiculturalism Ravi Kahlon; Sasha Hobbs – Executive Director of Multiculturalism) in May 2018 and in August Lorene Oikawa and myself met with Minister Lisa Beare, Minister of Tourism, Arts & Culture, to request the commencement of formal discussion for government funding to support community consultations with several Japanese Canadian communities throughout BC. The purpose of these consultations is to engage and listen to the personal stories of those impacted by the uprooting, incarceration, dispossession of property and forced dispersal. The BC Redress Committee anticipate follow-up meetings with BC government officials in fall 2018.



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New NAJC Executive Director

This past year NAJC Executive Director, Ken Noma, submitted his resignation effective December 31, 2017. We thank Ken for his 3 years of service to the NAJC as the inaugural Executive Director of NAJC. Following a lengthy recruitment period, the NEB announced the appointment of Kevin Okabe, as of May 1, 2018, to be the new Executive Director of the NAJC. Kevin's involvement in the Japanese Canadian community spans 30+ years. A Past-President of the Calgary Japanese Canadian Association and a 5-term member of the National Executive Board as Director, Secretary, and Treasurer, Kevin is a very knowledgeable and experienced individual and therefore superbly qualified for this role. Kevin has already proven to be a capable and skilled leader, manager and facilitator. Please welcome Kevin in his new role as our Executive Director!

Future Directions Team

Since the creation of the Future Directions Team and its initial session at the 2016 Calgary AGM and Conference, the FDT members have been working steadily on receiving feedback and reporting back to the membership on its progress. This has been a lengthy process as making structural changes requires input and consultation and careful analysis. The 2 main areas for change being proposed are the reduction in the number of elected members on the National Executive Board and their subsequent positions and roles and the face to face AGM and Conference happening every 2 to 3 years, rather than annually. During non face to face AGM's and conferences it is being proposed that regional meetings be held and the AGM's be held using video-conferencing technology. Also on this agenda is input regarding re-structuring of Standing Committees, and the role of Special Advisors. The FDT will be asking for your final input during this year's AGM before any final recommendations are forwarded to the NEB and National Council for consideration. I wish to acknowledge and thank Past President Bev Ohashi who served as Co-Chair of the FDT this past year, for the ongoing leadership she continues to provide to this initiative.

NAJC Website and e-News

The NEB felt that it needed to enhance our communication with our membership. You may have noticed the increase in the number of e-News notifications and certainly if you went to the NAJC website, you would have seen the changes. The NEB has been receiving numerous compliments about the e-News announcements and also the new website design and content. All NEB members have made significant contributions to the new website, and most notably are Susanne Tabata and Lisa Uyeda who were involved with the hiring of John Greenaway to be our webmaster.



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Nanjing Massacre Memorial Day

There has been an insurgence of lobbying, at both the provincial and federal levels of government, and advocacy at the community level, to create a Nanjing Massacre Memorial Day. Led by government of China-supported ALPHA group and most recently federal MP Jenny Kwan in BC, this has created a division within the Japanese Canadian community, polarizing supporters of this initiative with those who are strongly opposed to it. The NAJC sent a letter to then Premier Kathleen Wynne opposing Bill 79 in the Ontario legislature in 2016 to create this memorial day. For the past year, the National Executive Board has been looking to understand both sides of the issue and is regrettably disappointed that any position taken will not satisfy everyone. The NAJC is also represented on the Japanese Canadian Coalition for Racial Harmony, under the leadership of Gordon Kadota in Vancouver, whose purpose is to oppose the creation of a Nanjing Massacre Memorial Day. The NEB met with members of National Council and individual members of NAJC to receive feedback on a draft position paper. I will report that there was no agreement amongst the members attending the meeting and it is anticipated that a revised draft position paper will be circulated in the near future.

I do want to state unequivocally that the NAJC neither denies history nor does it wish to demonize China, the people of China, or Chinese Canadians in our opposition to creating this memorial day. We need to build bridges of understanding between cultures and countries and focus on the promotion of peace education.

Japan-Canada Diplomatic Relations

I would like to recognize the 90th anniversary of Japan-Canada Diplomatic Relations. NAJC welcomes Ambassador Kimihiro Ishakane to Canada and we look forward to continuing to strengthen our relationship and developing further opportunities to enhance the bonds between Japan and Canada. Our local member organizations will continue to have ongoing discourse with regional Consul Generals.

Gordon Hirabayashi Human Rights Award

The 2018 Gordon Hirabayashi Human Rights Award was presented to Kay Kiyoshi Kato Shimizu of Oakville, Ontario. Kay, a social worker, an activist, Chairperson of the Ottawa Redress Committee and member of the Vancouver Redress Committee, is a very deserving recipient!

Thank you!

As this is my final AGM and Conference as President, I wish to thank the members of NAJC, the National Executive Board and our National Office Staff for their support.



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Of special consideration, I would like to publicly recognize and thank NAJC National Office Administrator, Karina Uehara, for her commitment and dedication to our association. Karina's work is always exceptional, in spite of her extraordinary workload. However she went above and beyond the call of duty, especially this past January to April when the NEB was recruiting a new Executive Director. Karina ensured that the office continued to operate smoothly and participated in the challenging and tedious transition of our financial records to quickbooks.

The NAJC is blessed with the talent and skill and commitment, and above all, the passion, of its elected board members. All of the members of the NEB are up for election this year and I am confident that the newly elected board members will provide the leadership required for NAJC's continued success. Departing the NEB are 3 formidable leaders, not running again, who will be missed around the NEB table. Lisa Uyeda has served for 4 years on the NEB and chaired the Heritage Committee. The work of her committee is profound and her leadership on the many projects will be forever remembered. Also departing after 2 years is Treasurer, Noreen Kuroyama. Noreen became Treasurer at a time when the NAJC needed to have a more effective and efficient financial reporting system. She spear-headed NAJC's transition to the use of quickbooks during her term to ensure that financial reports were easy to read and understand and accurately reported expenditures. Lastly, 4 year Director, Susan Matsumoto chaired the Constitution and Resolutions Committee up until the time she had to resign in April due to work commitments. I thank these 3 individuals for their exceptional years of service to the NAJC.

I also wish to acknowledge and thank the rest of the National Executive Board members, all of whom have put forward their names for re-election this year: Vice-President and Chair of the Human Rights Committee, Lorene Oikawa; Secretary, Michiko Yano-Shuttleworth; Director and Chair of the Membership Committee, Eiko Eby; Director and Chair of the Arts, Culture and Education Committee, Susanne Tabata; and Director and Chair of the Young Leaders Committee, Bryan Tomlinson. I thank them for serving with me on the NEB and wish them much success in the elections and offering to continue their service to the NAJC.

Throughout my time as President, I was reminded that open debate, discussion and enlightened discourse is the foundation upon which a healthy community and organization can grow and prosper. However, respect for each other is the mortar that will test the strength of our foundation and determine how we embrace and support each other during challenging times. With the complexity of issues being addressed and the passion and emotion attached to them, they have the potential to polarize our positions, and even divide us. Regardless, we must remember that in deference to our disparate viewpoints, we all have the best interests of the Japanese Canadian community at heart, and if we are able to accept those differences, we are a much stronger community.



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Respectfully submitted,

David R. Mitsui
President, NAJC