



Dr. Masako Miura (left) and Nancy Iwami cut a cake to celebrate their 100th birthdays during the Watsonville-Santa Cruz JACL's 80th anniversary event Saturday. Erik Chalhoub/Register-Pajaronian

JACL celebrates 80 years

Clubs and Associations - 2000

Four centenarians honored at ceremony

By ERIK CHALHOUB
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WATSONVILLE — For 80 years, the Watsonville-Santa Cruz Japanese American Citizens League has championed civil rights for all people.

This milestone was celebrated through tales of struggle and success Saturday as more than 90 people filled the JACL Tokushige Kizuka Hall in Watsonville.

"Our chapter today, thanks to its members and board of directors, is one of the largest in the entire JACL and one of the most proactive," said Mas Hashimoto, a former president of the chapter who serves on the board of directors.

Saturday's ceremony featured a screening of "Issei: The First Generation," a recently rediscovered film that documents the life of early Japanese immigrants in California. Watsonville is featured in one segment of the film.

Director Toshi Washizu was available for a question-and-answer period following the screening.



Erik Chalhoub/Register-Pajaronian

JACL board member Mas Hashimoto talks about the organization's history.

The Watsonville Citizens League was formed in 1934 after encouragement by the New American Citizens League, an organization of people of Japanese American ancestry. The WCL was originally a social club, frequently participating in the Fourth of July parade.

But after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, 1,301

Japanese and Japanese Americans of Santa Cruz County were sent to a concentration camp in Poston, Ariz., causing the WCL to become inactive.

"We relied heavily on the National JACL's leadership," Hashimoto said.

After returning to the Watsonville area in the spring of 1947, a committee invited Watsonville's

Nisei to form a "non-religious citizens organization." The Issei organization, the Japan Society, deeded over the property on Union Street to the WCL, and in June 1948, the group formally re-organized the Watsonville Citizens League.

The WCL provided information about the Nikkei (Japanese and Japanese Americans) community to the general public. It also assisted Nikkei in filing evacuation claims for losses suffered during the war, while also providing health insurance for its members and re-registering its members so they could vote.

In 1977, the WCL, which earlier renamed itself the Watsonville Japanese American Citizens League, purchased the Assembly of God Church at 150 Blackburn St. in Watsonville. The building is now called the JACL Tokushige Kizuka Hall.

Today, the organization has been renamed the Watsonville-Santa Cruz JACL, and provides a Senior Center, membership, scholarships, long term health care, cultural activities and more.

Saturday's ceremony also honored a group of JACL centenarians, who all recently celebrated their



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Among the many historical photos on display during the JACL's 80th anniversary celebration was an Oct. 21, 1973 photo of the JACL Issei Center's second anniversary.

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birthdays: Nancy Iwami, Dr. Masako Miura and Enji Shikuma. Hiroko Shikuma, who died on July 22 after turning 100 on July 9, was also honored.

Nancy Jean Mattson, Iwami's daughter, said her mother still lives independently, even doing her own yard-work.

"My mother is thriving because so many people love her and care for her," Mattson said.

For her birthday, Iwami's family took her to a San Francisco Giants game, but, as Mattson noted, she quickly turned out to be the center of attention for those sitting nearby.

"She made colorful comments about each batter," Mattson said.

Hans Goto said his mother, Miura, retired when she was 68 after 30 years in the medical field.

Despite suffering from a broken arm after falling on Friday, it didn't stop her from attending the JACL's 80th anniversary celebration the next day.

"She's full of spirit," Goto said. Mark Shikuma spoke about

his father Enji Shikuma, who was unable to attend the ceremony.

"He is a very cantankerous, stubborn and honorable man," Mark Shikuma said.

Esther Shikuma Abe said her mother Hiroko Shikuma, despite suffering from physical ailments, didn't let that slow her down.

"She didn't succumb to physical challenges," she said.

Watsonville-Santa Cruz JACL president Marcia Hashimoto congratulated the centenarians.

"They are the heart of their families and the foundation of the JACL," she said.