
PRESS RELEASE

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ORGANIZATION

Cherry Blossom Festival Southern CA
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**2008 CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SEEKING NOMINATIONS FOR
GEORGE KIRIYAMA EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARD**

www.cherryblossomfestivalsocal.org

WHAT: 7th Cherry Blossom Festival So CA – George Kiriyaama Educational Excellence Award

WHEN: Saturday, April 5th, 2008 – Main Stage at 12:30 p.m.

COSTS: Event Admission is free to the public

WHERE: San Pedro St. between 1st & 3rd St.

DEADLINE: March 1, 2008. Download application www.cherryblossomfestivalsocal.org or call 626.683.8243

The Cherry Blossom Festival Southern California is seeking nominations for the 3rd Annual “George Kiriyaama Educational Excellence Award” with the deadline being Saturday, March 1st. The winner will be recognized in a special ceremony on Saturday, April 5th on the main stage of the Cherry Blossom Festival by Iku Kiriyaama.

“During George Kiriyaama's career as an educator and school board member, he was instrumental in developing LAUSD's first multicultural curriculum, "America's Intercultural Heritage;" developing materials and conducting in-services in multi-culture and Asian American issues and the Japanese American experience for teachers and administrators; and mentoring Asian Americans for leadership positions. We are seeking nominations of a school administrator, board member, or person in higher education, who best exemplifies the commitment, accomplishments, and spirit achieved by George, including why the candidate is deserving of the award and specific information on leadership skills, educational program development, innovative programs, staff development, multicultural education, and other areas which demonstrate commitment and dedication to the improvement of education for all students. In addition, share the candidate’s involvement in educational organizations, community groups, and other associations, which support better education, The ideal candidate should have experience in the following areas: Community involvement; K-12 to Higher Ed. Administrator; Champion of change agent; Respected and known in the Asian American community and supporter of Asian American issues; Mentor Asian Americans for leadership positions; Curriculum development or teacher training in multicultural diversity and the Japanese American experience.

The 2007 recipient, Alan Nishio was selected for “community involvement, educator, advocate of Asian American issues and the Japanese American experience, and respected and known in the community.” Until his retirement in 2006, Nishio served as Associate Vice President for Student Services at California State University, Long Beach responsible for student service programs at CSULB and associate faculty member in the Department of Asian and Asian American Studies. The 1st Annual award was presented to Esther Taira.

George Kiriyaama was a lifelong educator and community advocate and volunteer. Prior to his passing of advanced liver cancer on August 16, 2005, George was instrumental in the development of curriculum and trainings which promoted multicultural diversity and mutual respect during his tenure as an educator with the Los Angeles Unified School District. In 1968, he pioneered and wrote the course outline for “*America’s Intercultural Heritage*,” the first multicultural course

to be taught in the LAUSD. As the assistant principal (9 yrs) and principal (5 yrs) of the Gardena Community Adult School, he was very involved in servicing the city of Gardena, in particular its senior citizens, through its many classes and programs held in various venues of the city. As the LAUSD school board member in District 7 from 1995 to 1999, he supported the arts, music, literacy and character education programs as well as fiscal responsibility as he kept his focus on what was best for the students in his district.

According to long time friend and educator, Francis Nakano, Ph.D., Retired LAUSD (at retirement Deputy Superintendent to the Superintendent of Schools), *“This award is symbolic of the commitment, vision and leadership that George had pursuant to multicultural education, trainings for teachers and administrators, and mentoring Asian Americans for leadership positions.”*

Born and raised in West Los Angeles, George was a product of the Los Angeles Unified School District and California schools as a student at Nora Sterry Grammar School, Emerson Junior High School, and University High School. He received his B.A. in history from UCLA, his teaching credential at USC, and his Master’s degree in School Administration from Pepperdine University. George served in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War.

Kiyo Fukumoto, Retired LAUSD (at retirement Principal, Anatola Elementary School) who felt George was in a class by himself says: *“This award honors George who dedicated his life to improving education for all students. He would have been proud to know educators are being recognized for making a difference in the field of education.”*

Much of his community involvement were extensions of his educational philosophy and desire to mentor and help promote a positive quality of life for everyone. He was principal founder and many-time president of the Japanese American Historical Society of Southern California; and Chairperson of the advisory group for the L.A. County facility, Coastal Asian Pacific Mental Health Center, for twenty years from its inception in 1984. George was a board member and Student Speaker Contest chair for the El Camino Lions. He served on the boards of the Gardena Valley JACL; Wattstar Theatre & Education Center; East West Players; Little Tokyo Towers, a senior housing project; and Senshin Buddhist Temple. He was a life member of the VFW Post 1961; a consultant and early teacher trainer for the Go For Broke Educational Foundation; and memberships in Friends of Little Tokyo Branch Library, Gardena Democratic Club, Torrance Sister City Association, Nikkei for Civil Rights & Redress, Japanese American National Museum, Japanese American Korean War Veterans and the Gardena Pioneer Project.

According to Wendy Fujihara Anderson Co-Founder and President of the Cherry Blossom Festival: *“The creation of this award celebrates the visionary leadership that George Kiriya gave to us all in his passion and dedication to education.. Not only was George a dedicated educator with a vision, he was a sterling member of society who held the respect of so many friends and colleagues.”*

Iku Kiriya, wife of George, Chairs this Award Committee along with Nakano and Fukumoto. Prior to retirement from LAUSD, she was a Title I adviser for Local District 8 in Gardena. Today, she continues to promote the work and dedication that both she and George have given to the world of education. According to Iku *“It is a wonderful tribute to George to recognize educators who believe in the same things he did.”*

The Cherry Blossom Festival’s goals are to produce a festival that grows more spectacular yearly – raise funds to expand future festivals and carve a stronger cultural perception to an already historic *“Little Tokyo”* district of Los Angeles for more visibility, publicity and tourism; and to bridge generations and expose the mainstream population to the diverse Japanese and Japanese American cultural arts and history. It is produced by a Volunteer Team.