



## **Ashland High School Football – a symbol of Peace**

By Irene Kai, July 29, 2019

On July 22, David Wick and I were invited to the Pacific Rim Bowl XVI Peace Ceremony at the Lithia Park Band Shell held by the Ashland Football Club. A Peace ceremony held by the Ashland Football Club? That was a very interesting idea. We were not engaged in the athletic programs in our community and when we got there, we learned quickly that this ceremony has great significance, in history and in our future. Since 1988, Ashland High School football teams have traveled to Osaka and Kobe to play the Japanese High School team and the Japanese team comes to Ashland to play the Ashland High School team. When the American team travels to Japan, the Ashland High School students take the bullet train to Hiroshima and visit the Peace Memorial Park. The sobering and visceral walk through the atomic bomb museum and standing at “ground zero” provides a lifelong lesson for the Ashland students that no history class can replicate.

At the ceremony in Lithia Park, our local Peace activist, Hideko Tamura, a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, her hometown, spoke about the importance of having a bigger view of the world. This is to focus on what we have in common, cultivate friendships and understand cultural differences when we travel outside of our homes. Let history be our deterrent, never repeat atrocities and build lasting peace.

Dr. Roy Saigo, retired SOU President described his family had only one week to leave their home in California during World War II and were forced to move into an internment camp with hundreds of Japanese American families in Arizona when he was a boy. His family had to burn and wipe out their entire family history of art affects and photos before they left for Arizona to prevent strangers from coming into the abandoned home and rummaging through their personal belongings. He dedicated his life to education, learning from his own experience and from history, he leads with a vision of inclusivity, good will and reconciliation.

Then Miles Inada, art professor at SOU read a poem written by his father, Lawson Inada, poet laureate of the state of Oregon. Lawson is a third generation Japanese American and was sent to the internment camps in Fresno, Arkansas, and Colorado during World War II with his parents and grandparents.

We had three powerful speakers who spoke of history, how we must learn from the experience so at this moment, as we live our lives today with the cautionary tale of the past, we must choose a way forward by being mindful of our action and not to repeat what happened again.

Practicing peace is a deliberate act, the Ashland High School Football Club is led by coaches who believe in building lasting peace. Football is not just a competitive game, it is a practice of cooperation, friendship, and camaraderie. They take the Ashland Football team to Japan so our youth can experience a foreign culture, learn to build friendship, goodwill and open their eyes and their hearts to be a global citizen. They are our future. The most impressive thing I saw was on the hats and shirts of the coaches, the embroideries of the tag line: We love and care for each other. A constant reminder of how we start here, from our hearts. The Ashland Football Club is a symbol of Peace.

We are inundated by national, global and environmental bad news daily. It becomes a big thick blanket of black clouds enveloping us, day in and day out. Symbols are essential, they are skylights for us to see the light that we have choices, bright spots to show us that we can make a difference. The iconic symbol of peace resides in Ashland. The World Peace Flame stands shoulder to shoulder with our educators, parents, clergy, social workers, peace officers, artists, ordinary people, you and me. We are the bright spots and making a difference. By teaching our children to be kind, care for each other and gain understanding of the bigger world, in turn, they teach their children. Together, we build lasting peace.

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