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A Special Gift



Seen here planting the saplings are (L. to r.) LaGuardia President Gail O. Mellow, Councilmember Jimmy Van Bramer and Ambassador Shigeyuki Hiroki.

When New York's cherry trees bloomed this Spring it marked the 100th anniversary since these trees were given to the U.S. by Japan as well as their first planting of them in New York City. As part of the citywide festivities, LaGuardia Community College on April 24 received a gift of two cherry trees from the Consul General of Japan in New York.

Before members of the college community, Councilmember Jimmy Van Bramer, Ambassador Shigeyuki Hiroki, Consul General of Japan in New York and LaGuardia President Dr. Gail O. Mellow, planted two three-foot saplings in the college's grassy courtyard as a symbol of the strong relationship between the college and the nation of Japan.

"It is an honor to have Ambassador Hiroki join us at LaGuardia and to present us with this most special gift," said Mellow.

"LaGuardia has a deep connection to Japan. Hundreds of our students have their roots in Japan. We offer a broad selection of Japanese language classes and classes in other disciplines—from philosophy to business to the arts—examine the major and lasting contributions Japan has made to our world. Today's event celebrates our powerful and growing relationship with our Japanese community."

The celebration also paid special tribute to the great grandfather of a LaGuardia professor who in 1912 played an instrumental role in the project. Professor Eiko Fukuda's great grandfather, Torajiro Watase was an agronomist and businessman who was an indispensable key to the successful forestation of the 5,000 cherry blossom trees that were planted in Washington D.C. and New York as a symbol of lasting friendship between the two countries.

"It is extremely gratifying that my great grandfather is getting the recognition that he deserves," said Fukuda, who explained that her grandfather's contribution was overshadowed because of a number of prominent figures involved in the project.

"I sincerely appreciate LaGuardia Community College taking part in Japan-U.S. Cherry Blossom Centennial 2012," said Hiroki.

"As a guardian of these baby trees, I am sure that the college will nourish them, and as such, also nourish

the cultural bonds between our two countries. The Consulate General of Japan hopes that the Japan-U.S. Cherry Blossom Centennial Tree Dedication Ceremony at LaGuardia will contribute to further enhancing the friendship between the peoples of Japan and the U.S.”

During the five-week celebration, from March 20 through April 27, centennial cherry blossom festivals were held in New York and Washington, D.C.

LaGuardia had the honor of being one of three New York sites, along with Central Park and the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, selected to receive cherry trees because of the relationship it has developed with the General Consulate.

The college, which has the widest selections of modern language offerings in the City University of New York, was awarded a \$38,441 grant from the Japan Foundation to maintain and expand its Japanese language and culture courses. The first Japanese language courses were launched in 2006, and, after several years of expansion, it now offers basic, intermediate and near-native level language courses that enroll an estimated 100 students each semester. The grant will help the college offer the Japanese courses on a regular basis and collaborate with four-year CUNY schools to develop a curriculum tailored for students who want to major in the Japanese language and cultural studies.

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