

# SAKURA

## CLARK COLLEGE HONORS CHERRY BLOSSOM TIME



STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

Yukiko Vossen of Portland plays the koto, a traditional Japanese zitherlike stringed instrument, before the start Thursday of the annual Sakura and Arbor Day Ceremony at Clark College. Shared love of trees has helped strengthen Vancouver's relationship with Japan, symbolized by the 100 Shirofugen cherry trees planted at Clark in 1990, trigger for the popular campus cherry blossom, or sakura, celebration.

## Gratitude, bond with Japan are themes

By HOWARD BUCK  
Columbian staff writer

For centuries, the Japanese have treasured and revered the cherry blossom: quite simply "the" flower, or sakura, in their culture.

The petals' magnificent but ever-so-brief climax and the whimsy of their scattering illustrate the beauty, poignancy and brevity of life.

So it was that Thursday's annual Sakura and Arbor Day Ceremony at Clark College merged so completely with current events.

Last month's epic earthquake and tsunami in Japan, and the country's ongoing nuclear and housing crisis, lent a special solemnity and bearing to the gathering of Clark students and staff, youngsters, and several civic and business dignitaries.

"The Japanese people really love nature"

and readily accept that "minor disaster is just a part of life," said Takamichi Okabe, consul general of Japan in Portland. With more than 13,000 persons confirmed dead, another 15,000 still missing and half a million believed homeless, this incident is obviously much more grave, he noted.

"Many people are suffering. But they are determined to live on, with dignity and calm and the spirit of determinedness," Okabe said. He thanked the American people for spiritual, monetary and technical support given following the March 11 cataclysm.

Gratitude for the U.S. help and recognition of Vancouver's deepening bonds with Japan were twin themes Thursday.

Festivities were forced inside Gaiser Hall due to rain showers and another cold, damp Pacific Northwest spring that meant no blossoms adorned the 100 Shirofugen cherry



The Associated Press

Cherry blossoms are out in Tokyo, Japan, but the trees on the Clark College campus are not yet in bloom.



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# Sakura:

From Page A1

trees on Clark's main campus, a 1990 gift from a Japanese business leader posted in Vancouver.

Now in his eighties, John Kageyama, past president of American Kotobuki and that donor (inspired by Washington state's centennial a year earlier), said the grove offers a great lift.

"I feel at peace here, like in my old home. Especially when the cherry blossoms are in bloom," Kageyama said.

Children's art and decorated bookmarks were for sale in Gaiser Hall, with proceeds going to Japan relief work. Handwritten notes of condolence and carefully folded origami cranes were crafted and collected to lend further moral support.

An emotional peak came when Tatsuo Ito, executive vice president of SEH America, Inc., a large Vancouver employer, steeled himself and told the audience, "Thank you very much. We (will) rebuild the country; we stay strong, don't worry about it."

That drew loud applause.

There was much positive to anticipate, in mutual sharing of "the joy of trees," as Japanese guests put it.

Next year, hopefully outdoors again, in better weather, Sakura celebrants will gather at the Royce Pollard Japanese Friendship Garden. The privately funded garden is slated to be constructed this summer and autumn next to Clark's music building, near the now-towering Shirofugen cherries.

Vancouver Mayor Tim Leavitt noted the groundwork laid by his predecessors,



STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

**Clark College students and other volunteers and guests made origami cranes, intended to provide moral support for survivors of Japan's recent massive earthquake and tsunami.**

Bruce Hagensen and Pollard, to cement lasting business and civic bonds with Japan, including Joyo, its official sister city. The Clark alum said "Penguin Nation" provides the perfect focal point of the warm pan-Pacific relationship.

"There's no better place than Clark, this place of higher learning where we broaden our horizons, and our learning of other cultures," Leavitt said.

Clark President Bob Knight couldn't turn a shovelful or two of earth indoors, but he announced the college will plant a new tree, as customary, to commemorate both Sakura and America's Arbor Day, which lands in April: this time, a Yoshino cherry with stately, horizontal branches and good resistance to common Northwest blights, he said.

## Tree-friendly folk

For such good deeds, Clark College has earned its first-ever Trees Campus USA Award, one of many tree-friendly honors acknowledged at the joint ceremony. Knight said the school's new banner will proudly fly near his office.

Clark joins Clark Public Utilities, which collected a 13th consecutive Tree Line USA Award; and Vancouver itself, which nabbed its 22nd straight Tree City USA Award (plus extra "Growth" honors for not resting on its laurels — nor its oaks).

That's quite a trifecta — in fact, a first for Washington and replicated in only five other U.S. cities, said Aaron Everett, who as Washington state for-ester doled out the plaques.

Special thanks also went to

volunteers named 2011 winners of the annual Gordon & Sylvia MacWilliams Evergreen Award, dubbed "Mac" awards by Jim Wasden, Vancouver Urban Forestry Commission chairman.

They are Becky Archibald, a Fircrest Neighborhood leader and rabid parks and tree supporter; Alexander Chabert, a high-schooler who has won grants and spearheaded tree-planting efforts in the Fisher's Landing neighborhood; the Vancouver Greenway-Sensitive Lands Team, or "Eco-Team"; and Lee Coulthard, past president of the Vancouver Downtown Association who has led the drive to add new trees in the city center.

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