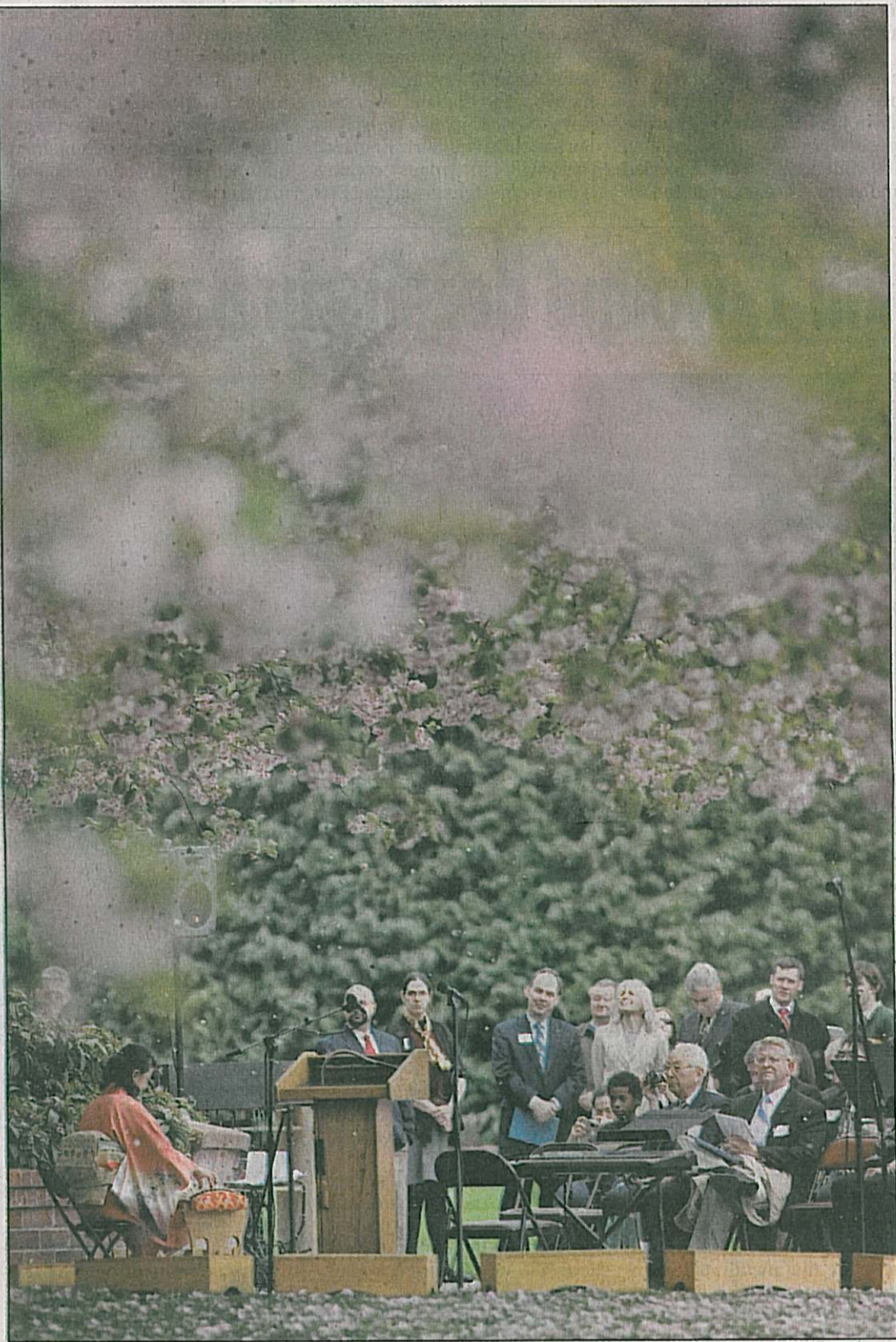


Sakura Festival honors gift, closer ties to Japan



ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

Yukiko Vossen, left, of Battle Ground plays traditional Japanese music on a koto Thursday at Clark College's Sakura Festival. The flowering cherry trees on the college grounds were donated to Vancouver 20 years ago by a Japanese business executive.

By **BOB ALBRECHT**
Columbian staff writer

Like snow, flower petals momentarily hung in the air Thursday as about 100 people, including Mayor Tim Leavitt and his two most recent predecessors, reverently watched the playing of a koto, a Japanese stringed instrument.

For local dignitaries, it was a day of bridging cultures and marking milestones such as the 20th anniversary of 100 cherry trees donated to Vancouver and planted at Clark College; the 15th anniversary of a sister-city relationship with Jojo, Japan; and the fifth celebration of the Sakura Festival.

An annual rite of spring in Japan and now in Vancouver, sakura, or cherry blossoms, signal a fresh start to a new season.

"The Japanese love the way the petals

flow," said Takamichi Okabe, the Portland-based Japanese consul.

And on Thursday, flow they did.

"You couldn't ask for a more perfect fairytale picture," Leavitt said as Yukiko Vossen of Battle Ground, dressed in a pink kimono, strummed the koto.

The cherry trees were planted in April 1990, a gift from John Kageyama, the former president of America Kotobuki Electronics Industries, which at that time operated a factory in Clark County. Thursday was meant as a signal both to Vancouver's appreciation for the trees and a pivot toward the city's growing relationship with Japan, symbolized by a groundbreaking on a new Japanese garden.

The garden, dubbed the Royce Pollard Japanese Friendship Garden, is a gift from



ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

The Clark College Women's Choral Ensemble serenades a crowd at the Sakura Festival in the cherry tree grove on campus. A Japanese garden will be added nearby in 2011.

Cherry trees:

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Chihiro Kanagawa, the president and chief executive officer of Shin-Etsu Chemical Co., Ltd., of Tokyo, the parent company of SEH America Inc. It will feature meandering paths, a gathering area, a bamboo grove and other features unique to Zen-inspired Japanese gardens. Construction is scheduled to begin in the summer of 2011 with a

dedication ceremony expected later that year.

Clark College President Bob Knight said the garden will "enhance our college, the city and our region for future generations."

The gift of cherry trees spawned from former Mayor Bruce Hagensen's relationship with Kageyama; the garden a product of former Mayor Polard's relationship with SEH.

Now, the relationship with Joyo is under Mayor Leavitt's direction. The new mayor read a proclamation calling Kageyama a "significant citizen of

the city" and gave a plaque to Shunji Kurisu, the deputy mayor of Joyo.

The festival included traditional Japanese dance, songs by the Clark Women's Choral Ensemble and a melding of cultures: "Hamburgers and sushi," Knight said jokingly.

"Who knows what will happen in 10 years," said Leavitt, who was a student at Clark when the cherry trees went into the ground. "Who knows what we'll be celebrating. I know that the trees will be 10 years older and 10 years more beautiful."